



Repast

Quarterly Newsletter of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

BLENDED CUISINE IN ANCIENT ROME

by Charles Feldman

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They [fundamental elements] prevail in turn as the cycle moves round, and decrease into each other and increase in appointed succession. For these are the only real things, and as they run through one another they become men and the kinds of other animals, at one time coming into one order through love, at another again being borne away from each other by strife's hate, until they come together into the whole and are subdued. (Emp. Fr. 26 Diels-Kranz)¹

In the above quote, Empedocles, a Greek philosopher-scientist of the 5th Century B.C., describes the genesis of the universe. In many cultures one can find a set of close and extensive relationships between food and cosmological beliefs such as those of Empedocles.² The spiritual conception of cuisine that prevailed among many elite Romans was most likely based on their interpretation of such Greek philosophical thoughts about creation.

The early Greek perspective on genesis focused on how primordial opposites came together in a "brew," the original blending of elements that created the universe. Empedocles and his contemporaries saw life beginning as a blend of opposing elements: hot, cold, wet and dry. These fundamental elements commingle to produce the universe.

Ancient "blends," culinary or otherwise, were thus entwined with cosmological viewpoints and, as we shall see, with issues of spirituality, tradition, and social structure. The blending of elements that transformed ancient food into complex dishes, such as the stews and sauces in our only surviving Roman cookery book, *De re coquinaria*, bore a metaphorical significance.

Food
in the
Ancient
Mediterranean



Part Two:
The
Roman
Empire

To Each Ingredient Its Proper Place

The ancient concept of blended ingredients was a contentious topic. Blends could symbolize natural and sensual harmony on the one hand, or unwholesomeness on the other. In the context of a complex Roman cuisine, ingredients were combined to create either an enlightened meal or, as Seneca facetiously informs us, a profusion of culinary muck:

Dainties and various courses should be combined and confounded... Let us have at one time, drenched in the same sauce, the dishes that are usually served separately. Let there be no difference. Let oysters, sea urchins, shellfish and mullets be mixed together in the same dish. No vomited food could be jumbled up more helter-skelter. (Ep. XCV.27-8)³

So in investigating the Roman culinary milieu, one must be wary that the notion of blending was approached in various ways by ancient aristocrats—those who had the means to be concerned with the subtleties of these sorts of things.⁴

There were some Romans who upheld the Greek perspective and were generally willing to accept the idea that the universe emanated from a harmonious blend. Varro, a Roman living during the Republic, spoke of the original blend in terms of *inuctis*, a union, and *miscet*, a mingling or blending of elements (Remains of Old Latin, Epicharmus II; cf. Ling.V.60).

Pliny, on the other hand, exemplifies the Imperial Roman purist who had a more pragmatic, structured view of life. In describing the original creation, he did not see the elements blending. For Pliny, the elements remained *constricta*, confined, and *nexum*, obligated, to stay in their proper place (HN II.IV.10-12). In this pragmatic Roman

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BLENDED ROMAN CUISINE *continued from page 1*

view of the universe things were best kept in order, not blended, through a chain of command that ensured the proper station to all things.

Pliny provides us a few examples. Blended medicines are, for him, one among many instances of mixing of elements that are by nature best kept separate. He refers, as a case in point, to the 2nd-Century B.C. homespun natural cures that purportedly helped Cato achieve old age. Cato's preferred treatment was cabbage: "it has all the natural virtues of the so-called Seven Blessings Mixture" (an exotic brew that embodied the qualities of hot, cold, moist, dry, sweet, bitter, and sour), yet it is simple and integral (HN XXIX 14-15; cf. Cato Rust CLVII). Nero's interest in magical potions also offends Pliny (HN XXV.25), as does an ancient mixture of 54 ingredients, Mithridate's *theriace*. Pliny's list of unsavory blends goes on: mixtures of wine are injurious (XXIII.45), and compounded perfumes also stir up his ire, particularly a Persian Royal Perfume that combines over two-dozen ingredients.⁵ By extension, and a bit of supporting evidence,⁶ we could imagine that Pliny, and fellow Roman purists, not only disparaged the mixing of medicinal potions and unguents, but the mixing of classes, the mixing of cultures, and the mixing of exotic foods as well.

Social and culinary protocols worked hand-in-hand in structuring an efficient ancient economy. Cookery first brought people together. They ate, sharing food and conversation. After people consented to live together, our ancient sources tell us, cities became civilized and all this was done through the art of cooking (Ath Diep XIV.661c). Through cookery practice, groups of people learned the civility or decorum necessary to function in an ordered society. They came to understandings over what was appropriate to eat and who was entitled to eat the better portions. The issue of culinary civility, one could say control, was extended to dining relations.

Plutarch, for one, provides an example of how unconstrained social mixing while dining might be offensive to elite Romans. He demonstrates this idea during a conversation between family members about an informal event hosted by his brother Timon. Preferential seating arrangements had not been prescribed, a situation that resulted in a guest of honor's embarrassment. This debacle would have been avoided, according to Plutarch's father, if Timon had followed simple life-guiding principles: Good armies win wars, he instructs, because of good organization. Similarly, fine dinners are neither generous nor pleasant without order (Quaest. conv. 615f -616a).

So, then, what kinds of food would have afforded the traditional Roman aristocrat an aura of order and decorum? In Cato we find a few honest farmer's recipes, devoid of exotic ingredients or extensive preparation: a simple porridge (Rust. LXXXV-VI), a recipe for olives and vinegar (CXIX), a simple *placenta*, or honey cake made out of cheese and groats (LXXVI). Similar recipes turn up later on: in the 1st Century B.C., Cicero describes fruit-porridge and omelets (Fam. IX.XX), and in the 1st Century A.D., Pliny refers to *alicae*, a gruel made of pounded emmer (HN III.6).

There are also a few dishes that harken back to agrarian simplicity in *De re coquinaria*, a 4th-Century A.D. compilation of recipes, some of which have been ascribed to a gourmet named Apicius. For instance, the collection includes a simple wheaten porridge (*Pultes tractogalata* – V.I.3). Also, if we can indulge the authenticity of the following titles, we may be surprised to find that a recipe entitled Bean Dish of Emperor Commodus (*Conchila Commodiana* – De re coq. V.IV.4) is a simple preparation, peas, eggs, and spices, served from a common pot (*cumanam*); and another austere purée entitled Beans or Peas of Emperor Vittelius (*Pisam Vittelianam Sive Faban* – De re coq. V.III.5) requires combining the legumes with just a few other straightforward ingredients.

Where, then, are the markings of flamboyance and opulence that we have come to expect based on the reputation ascribed to Roman food? I suggest the aforementioned recipes were offered in instances when it was important to convey a message of local agrarian unity rather than of elite debauchery— times, perhaps, when an aristocrat might have been busy heading off popular thoughts of insurrection.

A Craving for Symbols of Opulence

The opulent blended edible was more suitable for allowing the worldly Roman— the *bon vivant*, the upstart, the conspicuous consumer— a chance to draw attention. Moving in this direction is the following recipe that astonishes by the bizarre juxtaposition (at least to modern sensibility) of the notorious fish sauce *liquamen* and pepper with fragrant flowers and brains:

Take roses and strip off the petals, moisten the white part with *liquamen*... add four brains without skin and stringy parts, 8 scruples of pounded pepper, wine and raisin wine and a little oil. Cook with finely ground pepper. (*Patinam de rosis* – De re coq. IV.II.9)⁷

But an aristocrat had to know just how far to go in making such a culinary statement. Serving these sorts of brews immoderately could be taken as the sign of a social upstart unable to recognize

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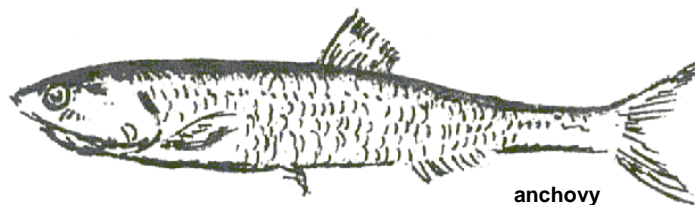
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LIQUAMEN AND OTHER FISH SAUCES

text and drawings by Philip M. Zaret

Phil and his wife Barbara are CHAA members. Phil was raised in the New York City area and graduated from the University of Michigan, where he studied Classics. Over the years, he has prepared a number of meals for friends based on his understanding of ancient Roman cuisine. He founded and owns the local copy shop Accu-Copy. As a volunteer at UM, Phil binds and repairs books for the library system, and he is building a database of culinary references found in the manuscripts at the Clements Library.



Liquamen (lih-KWAH-men), a sauce derived from the fermentation of salted fish, might have been the most commonly used commercial product in ancient Rome. By combining *liquamen* with a great variety of spices, the Roman cook could create some highly flavored sauces to mask natural flavors, a characteristic of Roman cooking.

Known also in Latin as *garum*, or as *garon* in Greek, this sauce had been used in ancient Greece as far back as 600-700 B.C. It is quite likely that it was introduced to Rome by Greek chefs.

Liquamen was made mainly in factories, and many towns around the Mediterranean produced it, such as Pompeii, Leptis Magna (on the coast of what is now Libya), and Antipolis (the site of modern Antibes, on the French Riviera). We even possess a *liquamen* jar found in archaeological excavations at Pompeii. It bears the inscription: BEST STRAINED LIQUAMEN— FROM THE FACTORY OF UMBRICUS AGATHOPUS.

The basic preparation of *liquamen* involved the fermenting of small fish, entrails and all, in brine (salted water) for 2-3 months, with the liquid strained off and bottled. (If the sauce was made with larger fish, fermentation might stretch to as much as eighteen months.) Apart from leaving in the entrails and valuing the liquid more than the fish, this process is remarkably like the present-day method of curing anchovies.

A Fixture in Roman Cuisine

Although slightly fishy-tasting, the main purpose of *liquamen* in ancient Roman times was to supply salt flavor to food. Like salt today, *liquamen* found its way into all varieties of Roman food— from sauces to stews to casseroles to desserts. As proof of its popularity, we find that in the only surviving Roman cookbook, Apicius's *De Re Coquinaria*, most of the nearly 500 recipes call for *liquamen*, its frequency as an ingredient second only to that of pepper. By contrast, salt is mentioned in only 3 recipes.

Besides its use in cooking, *liquamen* was also served as a condiment at the table, where it was either sprinkled on foods or placed in a dish for dipping. It was even drunk in diluted form.

This product completely captivated the Roman palate. Ancient sources tell us that *liquamen* went well with all sauces,

whether simple or compound. It was equally suited to the seasoning of fish, meat and fowl. The finest quality *liquamen* was expensive, and those who made a present of it did not hesitate to remind the recipient of its value. The famous poet Martial (Marcus Valerius Martialis) wrote: "Of scomber's precious blood I send a *garum* bottle to my friend; costly and thick, the last that dripped from bleeding gills and entrails ripped." (Scomber is the Latin-derived name for mackerel.)

But some form of fish sauce, even if of lesser quality, was consumed by virtually all classes in Rome including soldiers and slaves. Such sauces are very protein-rich and nutritious: a few spoonfuls a day, augmented by vitamins from some other source, are said to satisfy almost the complete daily nutritional requirement.

Liquamen has been called the "soy sauce" of Rome, although it was much more costly than today's soy sauce. Soy sauce is an acceptable substitute for *liquamen* in many respects: it is a fermented and salty liquid that partners well in cooking or as a condiment. However, soy sauce is dark in color, while *liquamen* was a clear, slightly yellowish or amber color. Furthermore, soy sauce does not have a fish taste.

But even the Romans altered the flavor of *liquamen*, either by adding other sea food (such as oysters) during fermentation, or by combining with wine, honey, vinegar, oil, spices or herbs after manufacture. A number of varieties became so common that they were given their own special names. *Liquamen* mixed with water was called *hydrogarum*, mixed with wine it was *oenogarum*, with oil *oleogarum*, with vinegar *oxygarum*, etc. (note the use of Greek terms).

How Fish Sauces Were Made

The scene at the great *liquamen* factories of the ancient world might have been similar to that in Asian ports today, where a line of men passes baskets of fish up from the boats to other workers who lay the fish in huge wooden vats. The fish are alternated with layers of salt until the vat is filled to the brim. Because of the exposure to air, the fish begin to decompose and after a few days, the resulting liquid is drained from below and poured back over the fish; this process is repeated a number of times. After a week or so of this, a wicker lid is placed atop the heap and weighed down, and the fish are left to ferment for several more months.

There were several recipes for *liquamen*, but that used at Bithynia on the coast of the Black Sea appears to have been the most widely followed:

It is best to take large or small sprats, or, failing that, take anchovies (the whole fishes), or horse-mackerel, or mackerel; make a mixture of all and put this into a baking-trough. Take two pints of salt to the peck of fish and mix well, to have the

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fish impregnated with salt. Leave it for one night, then put it in an earthenware vessel, which you place in the sun for two to three months, stirring with a stick at intervals; then take it, cover it with a lid and store it away. Some people add old wine, two pints to the pint of fish.

If the fish had not been salted before fermentation, the end product would have had a different flavor. Salt inhibits bacterial action, slowing the onset of the cheese-like taste that certain foods acquire when they ferment. In *liquamen*, the use of salt maintained a balance between fishiness and cheesiness.

When the sauce was made from especially fine fish, or from shellfish such as shrimp, the result was a refined, gourmet product. But, whatever the ingredients or fermentation time, the results were similar: a clear, golden fluid that kept well in a bottle or jar, and added a distinctively salty, fishy and cheesy flavor to any dish.

Because of the length of time involved and the facilities required in making *liquamen*, only a well-equipped country household could expect to produce a product rivaling the factory-made *liquamen*. Fortunately, we also have a recipe for a quick-brew *liquamen*:

Take brine and test its strength by throwing an egg into it to try if it floats; if the egg sinks, the brine does not contain enough salt. Put the fish into the brine in a new earthenware pot, add oregano, and put it on a good fire till it boils, that is, till it begins to reduce. Some people also add defrutum (boiled down wine). Seal and store away.

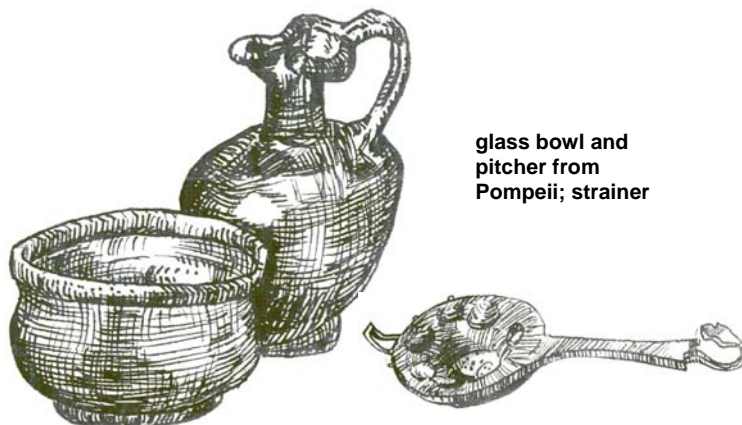
This must have been a very feeble substitute for the real thing, even if it were left to mature afterward.

In Pompeii, vast quantities of *liquamen* were produced, as well as a sauce called *muria*. *Muria* was an inferior *liquamen*, often highly spiced. This term was also applied to the brine in which olives or vegetables were put for preserving.

Perhaps the best *liquamen* came from the Spanish towns of New Carthage (Cartagena) and Carteia. The Spanish *liquamen* was made from mackerel and was undoubtedly quite expensive. It was exported in pots, sealed and marked by type: Garum of the Allies, Mackerel Garum, and Prime Mackerel Garum. Garum of the Allies was considered the best, its name referring to the close alliance between Spain and Rome.

Garum of the Allies was the one imitated at Pompeii, where it was prepared from Campanian scombers or mackerel and other fish. Then, as the demand increased, a large number of manufacturers produced their own varieties, each claiming to have the original recipe. Many of these manufacturers, in order to improve flavor and lend variety to their product, used different methods of preparation. Some of them let the contents of the vats go through a drying process in the sun. Then, they covered the vat and turned and stirred it daily for weeks, and, as the mass fermented, they added various ingredients such as wine and herbs.

Another very costly sauce, actually a kind of *liquamen*, was called *haimateon*, meaning “blood sauce.” To make it, the entrails of tuna, as well as the blood, gills and juice, were mixed



glass bowl and pitcher from Pompeii; strainer

with salt. This was all packed in a vessel and left for two months at most. At the end of that time the vessel was pierced and the *haimateon* flowed out.

Allec, a word also rendered as *alix*, *hallex*, and *hallec*, was a sauce similar to anchovy paste. It seems that it was originally just the dregs of the *liquamen* mash after the best liquid had been strained off. Then it began to be made independently of the *liquamen* production process, but still from various small fishes that were not otherwise valuable, such as sardines. Over time, what was originally a waste product evolved into a luxury item. Eventually it was made with anchovies, and still later with oysters, liver of red mullet, shrimp, sea urchins and other rich ingredients.

When *allec* began to be made for its own sake, it was never left to completely decompose, as were the fish in the making of *liquamen*, and thus it retained much of its fishy taste and texture. It was often placed on the table as a seasoning like salt and pepper. It was considered very nourishing— often given to slaves as a staple of their diet—and indeed it probably had a large amount of vitamin A, the growth vitamin. While the use of the liquid, *liquamen*, has nearly died out in Italy, a paste made of anchovies, which is so essential to Italian cooking, continues in widespread use.

Fish Sauces Today

The use of anchovies in western cooking today, including anchovy pastes and sauces, most likely dates back to the Roman use of *liquamen*. It is not surprising that Italians still use the liquid from anchovies, or even salted herrings, as a flavoring. These days at Cetara, a village on the Amalfi coast, anchovies brought ashore by fishermen are often quickly beheaded, gutted, and packed in sea salt. For six weeks, their blood is drained from a hole in the curing tub. The fish, salt, and any remaining liquid are left to cure another 5-6 months, producing a sauce called *colatura*. Some say that *colatura* is a direct descendant of *liquamen*. In fact, Delfino-brand *garum* imported from Cetara sells at Zingerman’s Deli here in Ann Arbor (\$14 for a 100-milliliter bottle), with instructions for its use in pasta sauces and salad dressings.

Food writer David Downie reports that in modern Rome, at an antiquity-themed restaurant called Magna Roma, you can find a home-made version of *liquamen*. The restaurant owner developed his recipe based on ancient descriptions from Gargilius Martialis, Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella, and

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ALL ROADS LED TO ROME



ROMAN FOOD PRODUCTION IN NORTH AFRICA

text and photos by Randy K. Schwartz

On pain of death or deportation, the captains of ships carrying food from North Africa to ancient Rome were required to take the shortest route possible to the Italian coast, and they were barred from calling at any other port along the way. Each captain was held liable for his precious cargo, paying out of his own purse for any loss of cereal or other foodstuffs in his hold. By state mandate and subsidy, every line of work involved in transforming this grain into Roman bread—the sea captains and sailors, the barge drivers, the longshoremen, the grain weighers, the millers, the bakers and loaf distributors—was strictly organized into its own hereditary guild to ensure a steady supply of skilled tradesmen.¹

The stakes were high. Feeding the people of Rome required hundreds of square miles of tillable land, far exceeding what was accessible on such a narrow, rugged peninsula. In 146 B.C., the Roman legions sacked Carthage and took over its wheat fields. Less than 25 years later, Rome was able to begin issuing grain to its citizens at subsidized prices, and later free of charge.²

To make this possible, there had to be food ships leaving for Italy every day, weather permitting. They sailed the sea in large convoys. The crossing from Alexandria, Egypt took 13 days, and from Carthage four days or less. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian and general in the 1st Century A.D., wrote that the grain needs of urban Rome were supplied by the province of Egypt for four months, and by the province of Africa for eight months of every year.³

Seizing food from across the sea was an expedient for Rome's economic survival and growth. It was also an expression of its military and political domination. As the Roman legions conquered North Africa in the Punic Wars and other great conflicts, each subdued district was required to pay a very heavy annual tribute in the form of a fixed quantity of grain, oil, wine, etc. Some of this went to Italy, and the rest went to feed Roman troops deployed in distant regions.⁴ With the constitution of 368 A.D., it became illegal to sell *garum*, oil or wine to anyone outside the empire—a decree we might nickname the “All Foods Lead to Rome” clause. Controlling where food went was a way to control where power went.

The supply of foods from North Africa had an effect on every social class, and it ended up changing the course of history. To see why, we need to look at (1) the diet of the Romans, and (2) the way these foods were produced and distributed.

Eating from the African Bowl

On any given day, the average Roman ate several staple items imported from Africa. Those provinces, where wheat and



Ruins of ancient fish-salting vats at Lixus, Morocco.

barley could be harvested three times a year, supplied Rome with most of its public grain along with massive amounts of legumes, olives, olive oil, salt-preserved fish, and *garum*, the fermented fish sauce.

The bulk of the Roman plebeians, or basic citizens, would eat wheat or barley every day in the form of a gruel called *puls* or as a coarse home-baked flatbread. For additional protein, they might have cheese or occasionally fish or meat, but most often *pulmentarium*, a porridge of fava beans or lentils (Egypt was especially famous for its favas and red lentils). The most important flavoring agents in the diet included olive oil, *garum*, salt, pepper and other spices, herbs, vinegar, wine, and honey.

Plebeians who could afford to do so would take their cereal to a local bakery to have it made into loaves of leavened bread, which was ideal for dipping into olive oil, milk, wine, or the sauces from cooked dishes. These raised loaves became the privilege of all citizens beginning in the 3rd Century A.D., when rations were upgraded to include baked bread, along with olive oil, wine, and pork. Soldiers' rations in Rome were also based on bread, wine, and olive oil, with some meat. Slaves were often fed bread or gruel, scraps of meat, and *hallec* fish-paste, a by-product of *garum* production.⁵

The foodstuffs of Africa weren't just for the lower classes, as wealthy Romans went to the ends of the earth in their search for delicacies. Athenæus tells the story of a Roman gastronome named Apicius (possibly the one who left us the famous cookery book) who chose to spend his summers 75 miles further south, near Minturno, because its waters had the biggest prawns around. One day at his summer home, Apicius heard that prawns off the coast of Libya were gargantuan. Defying a great storm blowing in, he immediately hired a ship. As he approached the Libyan coast, he was greeted by native fishermen in their little boats, offering him their best prawns. Alas, these were no bigger than those of Minturno, and Apicius ordered that the ship be turned around forthwith—without so much as a brief landfall!⁶

While that story might be apocryphal, in fact several products of North Africa were hauled to Roman tables to satisfy patrician cravings. The pomegranate, in its Latin name *Punica granatum*, reflects an introduction from Punicus, ancient Carthage. Other imported African fruits included gourds and melons, lemons, figs, dates, and *fumé* grapes. Cyrene, on the

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NORTH AFRICA

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Libyan coast, provided cumin, silphium (now extinct), and other spices. Prized birds, such as the ostrich and the African chicken (guinea fowl), were taken from the fringes of the desert. The Egyptian port of Alexandria was famous for its lobsters, while the African snail (*Afra coclea*) was praised by the poet Horace as suited to the delicate digestion of epicures. Pliny provided a recipe for the African snails: “Simmer, whole, in water, then, without flavoring, roast on hot coals. Take with wine and fish sauce.”⁷ Apicius provided a recipe for stuffed gourds “Alexandria style,” with a filling of ground pine-nuts, date wine, honey, vinegar, cumin, coriander seed, and other ingredients (3, IV, 3). He also had three fish recipes “Alexandria style,” using ingredients like raisins, vinegar, and *garum* (10, I, 6-8).

Olive-Oil Technology

The remains of 58 different olive presses can still be seen today among the Roman ruins of Volubilis, a single town in hilly northern Morocco. Visiting these ruins gave me a sense of the technical ingenuity of Roman food production. Volubilis, originally a native town, was Romanized with an influx of war veterans and other colonists. It was made a regional capital of the province of Mauretania, which was annexed to the empire in 42 A.D.

Thanks to archaeological studies, we have a detailed and fascinating picture of oil-making days in Volubilis.⁸ First, basketfuls of olives are dumped one by one between a pair of large circular millstones, carved to fit snugly together (see photo, above right). The upper, ring-shaped stone, equipped with wooden handles, is turned against the tapered, stationary base, crushing the olives. Fragments of pulp and pit fall to the paved floor, where they are shoveled into porous sacks made of woven grass or reed.

The sacks of crushed olives are taken to a nearby room containing a press (see diagram below). Several sacks at a time are piled up, and a heavy cross-beam made of a squared tree-trunk about 25 feet long is tightened against the olives like the arm of a giant nutcracker, bringing nearly 40,000 pounds of force down upon them.⁹ An oil-rich liquid oozes from the sacks; the pieces of olive pit play a key role in assuring proper drainage. The liquid flows down a gutter in the floor and collects in a drainage tank, where the oil gradually rises and is ladled off.

Before each subsequent pressing, the spent sacks of olives are emptied out into another crushing-mill. In this “edge-runner” type of mill, a cylindrical stone set on an axle is wheeled around



Ruins of a two-stone olive mill in Volubilis, Morocco. The tapered stone base is intact, surrounded by fragments of what was once the ring-shaped stone that would have been ground against it.

a circular stone trough, and the olive fragments get “kneaded” between the two. The fragments are then bagged again and take another turn under the beam, yielding an oil of lower quality than the previous batches. The solids remaining after the final pressing will be burnt as fuel or fed to livestock. Today, in the hillsides of this region, Moroccans use edge-runner millstones to do as many as six pressings a day from the same olives.

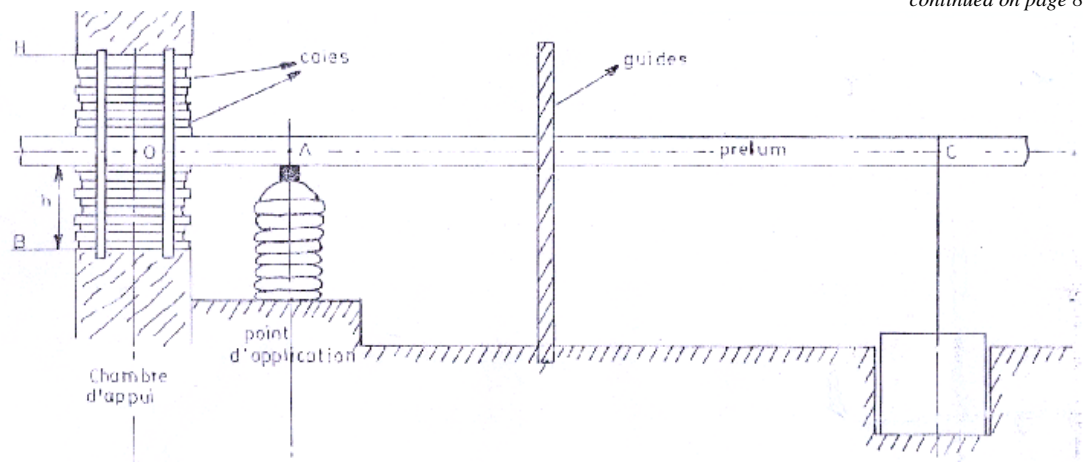
The process just described wasn’t done in one central place for the whole town of Volubilis. Rather, each of more than 50 individual households owned this full set of equipment! Oil was produced by individual families, and most of it was consumed locally. But elsewhere in North Africa, one can find the ruins of industrial-scale Roman oil factories; they used largely the same techniques but were built in rural areas instead of towns. The number of such commercial presses grew markedly under emperor Septimius Severus (193-211 A.D.), a Libyan native who took steps to increase African oil and wheat exports to Rome.

Fish-Salting Factories

Elsewhere in northern Morocco, at the ruins of Lixus, it’s clear that the Roman food industry advanced well beyond the stage of artisanal production to that of mass production. The lower reaches of this site are honeycombed with dozens of large stone vats for making salted fish and *garum*. During Roman times, hundreds of such salting factories lined the coasts of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Black Sea, but Lixus was probably the largest single site.¹⁰

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Schematic diagram of a typical olive press in ancient Roman Volubilis (from the article by Abderrazak Alami Sounni). Several sacks of crushed olives are stacked beneath a large cross-beam, or *prelum*. The beam is tightened against the olives with the help of a counterweight (shown on the right) and a hand-operated winch (not shown).



BLENDED ROMAN CUISINE *continued from page 2*

excess. Crassness, for instance, is branded upon Trimalchio, Petronius' fictive freed-slave who did not know the subtleties of elegant cuisine. Or, worse yet, culinary immoderation could be a mark of effeminacy (cf. Persius Sat VI.40-41; Columella Rust. I. Pref. 15-16).

An ancient meal did not have to be completely stark on the one hand or exotic on the other. Apparently many Romans mixed these two attributes in degrees that suited a particular occasion. A recipe entitled Porridge of Julian (*Pultes Iulianae* – De re coq. V.I), for instance, tilts in both directions. It is both a traditional porridge made out of simple hulled spelt, and also an exotic brew that calls for the addition of brains, meat, spices, and liquamen (called garum in this recipe)— something best served, perhaps, in mixed company. The point is that aristocratic Roman food needed to express the “proper” message.

The culinary blend was useful in this regard, for it was a broad venue for symbolism. A meal could be made to suit any occasion. By subtle degrees, a simple staple item was transformed through the addition of other substances. One could choose, for example, to express a bit of culinary savvy by adding a drop of the pungent fish sauce garum to a victual, or go to a farther extreme by incorporating exotica like flamingo tongues or lamprey roe. If one did not have access to unusual ingredients, a novel culinary technique might do the trick.

Meat, a Roman rarity, was the primary ingredient of culinary opulence. The signification of power and prestige through meat consumption had arisen quite early. At least three ancient Greek illustrations from the 6th and 7th Centuries B.C. depict men reclining at their dining tables while feasting upon large strips or joints of meat.⁸ Later on, Roman examples of fattened fowl, or of large lobsters or fish, had similar instantly-recognized values of prestige (cf. Cato De Rust LXXXIX, XC; Macrob. Sat. III.XIII.12, III.XVI.1; Cic. Fat. IV; Pliny HN IX.XXVII.60; Mart. Ep. XIII.91; Juvenal Sat V). Initially, the line of demarcation was simple: some had the ability to offer large portions of meats, large enough to be seen from a distance. The culinary display of a boar, for example, traditionally reinforced a noble's sense of power and set him or her apart from the peasantry. A large fish like a sturgeon could also convey an image of royalty. The actual dispensation of such fare was also based on a system of unequal privilege. One needed only to look at the size of another's portion to recognize their social standing.⁹

Certain forms of meat and fish consumption, however, were at best problematic as markers of status. Local staple items like meat and certain fish had a clear, symbolic association with agrarian simplicity.¹⁰ In addition, as contemporary classicist Peter Garnsey rightly notes, meat was the primary staple product of northern barbaric tribes, hence, somewhat offensive to refined Roman sensibility. Turning to Roman sacrificial meat, this was most often offered to all participants, a note of communal bonding that made it unsuitable as a symbol of difference.¹¹ Fish also afforded conflicting messages: it was scavenged by the poor, often as a last resort when crops failed or land was unavailable.¹²

Most basically, a hunk of flesh could not by itself communicate subtle levels of social relations. A large portion of meat or fish has only the potential to be what it is; the cooked

outcome is more or less controlled and predictable. Symbols of this sort were becoming quaint, unexpressive, and monochromatic in cosmopolitan Rome. Anyone with means could roast a pig or fish; the idea was to find different ways of doing so.

As If Eating from a Common Pot

On the other extreme, when Roman staple products were chopped so finely that they lost all of their natural form, this too was socially problematic. In such a blend, the symbolic effect of grand size was completely lost as a marker of status. Recognized values were further obfuscated as these ingredients were mixed or “blended” with other substances. In addition, the requirements for the Roman culinary blend were not highly structured, making them basically impromptu creative renditions.¹³ The outcome was never entirely assured: contingent on the availability of ingredients, a chef's supple hand, and a consumer's willingness to embrace the unusual. Turning to the ancient culinary treatise, a tagline to one recipe forewarns that “at the table, no one will know what he is eating” (*ad mensam nemo agnoscet quid manducet* – De re coq. IV.II.12). Clearly a food's status value would have been suspect if no one knew what he was eating.

In fact, across time and culture the culinary blend has been used to express sharing and unity. It is most often dispensed from a common pot, a practice more redolent of sharing than of difference. I follow Jon Donahue, whose recent work on Roman dining makes note of a time-honored practice of Cantonese festal sharing, the eating of a stew from a common pot called *sikh puhn*. Keeping in mind the hazards of cross-cultural comparison, it is useful, nonetheless, to note the Cantonese concept of the common pot as a great equalizer. Sharing from the *sikh puhn* allows diners to set aside, at least for the moment, any differences that separate them. Its contents belong to all, with everyone taking some while making sure that others partake and have even more.¹⁴

The same feeling of unity can be engendered whenever food is served from a common pot. Consider an example of elite Roman food-sharing depicted in a 4th-Century A.D. mosaic from Carthage. In this setting, ostensibly an *oecus* (a large open dining area), there is no prime focal point of the diners' attention, and their conversation, or view, is not directed to a centrally focused dignitary. The seating arrangement appears designed to be more or less egalitarian. All seem to be conversing convivially with each other, while to the side a chef cooks food from a common pot.¹⁵

Granted, most Roman aristocratic culinary blends were probably dispensed into dishes before service to the dining area. Such plate service, at least symbolically, does not convey the same feeling of camaraderie as does passing a common pot. Nevertheless, it would have been quite difficult, I believe, for the Roman elite to ascribe differential values to meals served initially from a common pot even when dispensed into separate plates. If not the portion size, the melding of smells and flavors shared by all diners potentially symbolized unity, not difference.

Indeed, the most remarkable criticism of both contemporary and antiquarian scholars regarding the Roman recipe corpus is that many of the vast number of complex sauces taste alike (Sen. Ep. XCV.27; cf. Ath. Deip. IV. 137).¹⁶ When reading or recreat-

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LIQUAMEN

continued from page 4

others. He throws fresh mackerel into a large clay pot with layers of unbleached Sicilian sea salt and 14 dry herbs. This is weighed down with bricks and left to macerate near heat for 20 days. Then the pot spends 40 days in a cool room, where it is stirred for half an hour every day. Finally the mash is filtered through muslin cloth, the final product— a grayish liquid— dripping into another vessel over the course of five days.

In Egypt and the Sudan, a powerful sauce called *faseekh* is still made by fermenting small fish with salt in old oil drums.

In contrast to the local production of fish sauces in Italy and North Africa, in Asia there is large-scale commercial production of *nuoc mam*. Most common in Vietnam, *nuoc mam* is made from macerated fish, just as was *liquamen*. Like the Roman product, *nuoc mam* varies considerably in flavor and quality. The best, made from fish filets, is called *phu quoc* after the island where it originates.

It is said that there is no Vietnamese meal without *nuoc mam*. It may be poured over rice or served in a small dish beside each plate, into which are dipped the morsels of fish or meat. The sauce is usually adjusted with lemon juice, sugar, garlic and red pepper. The flavor is quite fishy, but it is full of amino acids, nutritious and wholesome. In Vietnam, a few drops of *nuoc mam* are put into babies’ feeding bottles. Ten million gallons a year are said to have been consumed in former French Indochina in the 1950’s, the last period for which statistics are available.

Fish sauce is available in most Asian markets in the U.S. and is much less costly than the Italian import. For instance, “Lucky” Fish Sauce sells for around \$1.50 for a 23-ounce bottle.

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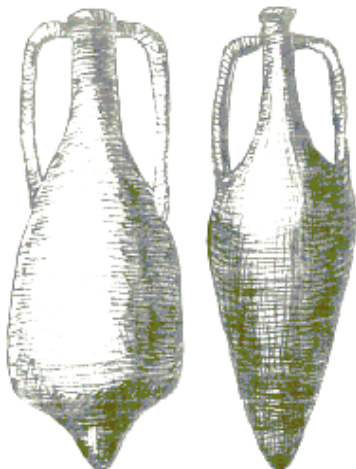
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Terra cotta storage jars (amphorae)

NORTH AFRICA

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Lixus was ideally situated beside the salt marshes of a coastal estuary, where the river Loukos empties into the Atlantic. When I visited these ruins, just outside present-day Larache, I stopped to watch some workers harvesting salt from the same tidal pools as their forebears had two millennia earlier. Nearby, the ocean teems with sardines, tuna, mackerel and other species. These fish are caught in nets, just as in Roman times.

The first saltworks at Lixus were founded in the waning decades of the 1st Century B.C., but after Roman annexation (42 A.D.) the factories were improved and became far more numerous. Most of the factories had a central court surrounded on three sides by large, sunken, rectangular vats, or basins. These were configured from great mortar slabs made of crushed limestone and broken tiles. As much as 7½ feet deep, they were dug partway into the ground for added strength and to make filling and unfilling easier. A kind of cement was used to plaster the inside surfaces, making them smooth and watertight.¹¹

Fish arriving at the saltworks were scaled, gutted, trimmed, and placed inside the basins with layers of salt, where they were kept for three weeks. Many of the scraps were brined in shallower basins to make *garum*. The preserved fish and *garum* were sealed in clay *amphorae* for transport, as were the local olive oil and wine. In this way, these products of North Africa could be shipped all over the Mediterranean.

The factory workers at sites like Lixus were poor— mostly slaves or former slaves— while the merchant owners and shippers undoubtedly grew rich from the vast enterprise. These wealthy men might have constituted a *societas*, a Roman form of corporation, acting either privately or on contract with the imperial government. By the early 200s A.D., Mauretania surpassed even Spain in the export of salted fish and *garum* to Italy.¹² Only in the 5th Century, as the Roman empire crumbled and fell, were the factories at Lixus finally abandoned.

Leaving a Mark on the World

Ironically, Rome’s extraction of the food resources of North Africa, a key ingredient in its rise as an empire, also helped lead to its downfall. The grain taxes on the African provinces were so harsh that they sparked popular uprisings. One of these tax revolts broke out in 238 A.D. in a town called Thysdrus (modern El Djem, Tunisia) and quickly engulfed the province of Africa and then the whole Roman empire, leading to the overthrow of Emperor Maximinus. That brought Rome’s “golden age” to a close, and it prefigured the ultimate demise of the empire.¹³

But the mass production of olive oil, preserved fish, grains, and other products for Rome left an indelible mark on history. First, in pastoral North Africa it spurred the growth of a settled, agricultural way of life and the rise of towns and cities. Second, it helped make long-range shipment of goods a regular feature of the world economy through the establishment of shipping lanes, the construction of special containers, boats, docks, lighthouses, and roads, and the development of techniques and occupations associated with these. Third, it led to the invention of new food-processing technologies and the founding of some of the world’s first industrial factories. Thus, Rome’s food production in North Africa changed not only food history, but human history as well.

Endnotes on next page

BLENDED ROMAN CUISINE *continued from page 7*

ing these recipes, one is impressed by how so many different ingredients, smells and flavors collide and defeat each other, yet leave an overall collage of distinctive Roman culinary consciousness. Just as we can detect a basic unity or sameness within contemporary Italian, Indian, or Chinese fare,¹⁷ Roman blends also spoke of cultural commonality. The overriding message is clear, “we are Romans, we are unified, and we eat Roman food.”

In sum, a Roman noble’s culinary ideology was not static. It could be, at times, either closed and parochial, or worldly. A culinary blend afforded an aristocrat an opportunity to express subtle dimensions of social relations. A traditional Roman meal was characterized by its simplicity, local origin, and small size. A worldly blend offered more exotic elements. An over-emphasis on exotica could be the sign of a social upstart, but there were other aristocrats who would balance culinary attributes. To highlight Roman social difference, intact portions of meat or fish worked best. A more thoroughly blended concoction suggested eating from a common pot, symbolic of unity to the ancient Romans, not difference. It seems that such a culinary blend was able to overcome the strictures of Roman social differentiation. Athenæus, a 2nd-Century expert on dining, seems to understand this concept. The culinary art, he tells us, takes no limits and no authority; it is its own master (Diep IX 405b). ■

Endnotes

1. Translation from Wright, p. 181.
2. This is particularly true for the sacrificial ritual. See Darby, p. 517; Heusch, pp. 23-4; Valeri, p. 41.
3. Translation from Gummere.
4. One should assume that most Romans were concerned with subsistence survival, and their “need” to eat superseded mundane concerns over blending and cuisine.
5. Wallace-Handrill, p. 83. See also Beagon, p.108.
6. Domitian’s banquets, for instance, were notorious for differential class seating and food arrangements. See D’Arms, pp. 308-320.
7. The quoted recipe has been translated and abridged by the present author for clarity.
8. Boardman, pp. 129-130, Fig. 15, plate 10a and B; Schmitt-Pantel, Plate 4b.
9. See note 6 above.
10. For instance, Juvenal recalls a time when dried pork from a sacrificial victim was served to relatives at a holiday festival (Sat XI. 77-85; cf. Varro Rust. II.IV.10).
11. Garnsey, pp. 122-25.
12. Purcell, pp. 132-49.
13. Most of the recipes in the *De re coquinaria* do not specify ingredient amounts or precise technical instructions.
14. See Donahue, pp. 75-6; Visser, p. 119; Watson, pp. 389-401.
15. See Dunbabin, plate 116.
16. See Bober, p. 156; Pickstone, p. 168. For a comparison to medieval flavors, see Henisch, p. 101.
17. For an overview on how flavor principles identify cultural groups see Rozin.

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2. Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), pp. 71-73.
3. R. C. C. Law, “North Africa in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, 323 BC to AD 305,” Chapter 3 in J. D. Fage, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), p. 203.
4. Law, pp. 174, 195-197, 203; Tengström, pp. 15-27.
5. Mireille Corbier, “The Broad Bean and the Moray: Social Hierarchies and Food in Rome,” Chapter 11 in Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History*, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 129-134.
6. Phyllis Pray Bober, *Art, Culture, and Cuisine: Ancient and Medieval Gastronomy* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1999), p. 151.
7. Andrew Dalby, *Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and Indulgence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 108-109; Corbier, p. 129.
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11. Michel Ponsich and Miguel Tarradell, *Garum et Industries Antiques de Salaison dans la Méditerranée Occidentale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), pp. 11-12, 106.
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13. Law, p. 205.

SOME RECENT BOOKS ON ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN FOOD

This past August, **Francine Segan** was interviewed by Steve Roberts on NPR in conjunction with the Athens Olympics and the publication of her latest cookbook, *The Philosopher's Kitchen: Recipes from Ancient Greece and Rome for the Modern Cook* (New York: Random House, 2004; 272 pp., \$35.00 cloth). Segan drew information for the book both from archaeological findings and from classical literary sources. Her appetizers include a minted garlic spread from Apicius; an herbed olive purée described by Cato; a chickpea dip served with grilled pita; and dried figs simmered in white wine, stuffed with pistachios, *prosciutto*, or other fillings. Hippocrates, Segan notes, approved of wine not only for its role in religious rites but as an aid to conviviality, digestion, and sore muscles. Ancient pasta was boiled in wine or stock, then baked or fried; she offers adaptations like cherry lasagna, and spaghetti with caramelized onions, vinegar, herbs, breadcrumbs, and pinenuts. Seafood includes red snapper baked in parchment (instead of fig leaves), and sea bass with feta (from the oldest surviving Greek cookbook, *The Art of Cookery* by Mithaecus, c. 500 BCE). Segan, originally from Tuscany, was mentioned in our last issue's "Morsels & Tidbits" column for her book *Shakespeare's Kitchen*.

Mark Grant is known for his translations of Latin medical and dietary texts for Prospect Books and E. J. Brill. In his *Roman Cookery: Ancient Recipes for Modern Kitchens* (London: Serif Publishing, 1999; 191 pp., \$14.95 paper), Grant brings us some accessible recipes—not, for the most part, associated with Apicius or other culinary élites—and describes the social and cultural context for the eating practices behind these foods. A few dishes from his four sections are: Breakfast (Carthaginian porridge), Lunch (honey with curds; fried savory pasta; turnips with mustard), Dinner at the Bar (herb-pinenut purée; eggs poached in wine; grape leaves stuffed with goat cheese and rice; honeyed quinces), and Dinner in the Dining Room (smoked fish in grape leaves; ham in a red wine and fennel sauce; fig-walnut cakes).

British food historian **Andrew Dalby** teamed up with chef **Sally Grainger** to produce the recently re-issued *The Classical Cookbook* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1996, 2002; 144 pp., \$27.50 cloth). The recipes are drawn both from common and banquet settings: chicken stuffed with olives; honey-glazed shrimp; sweet wine scones. Translations of the originals are paired with adaptations for the modern cook. In addition to recipes, much of the book is devoted to historical summaries and descriptions of daily life among various social strata. Chapter titles: The Homecoming of Odysseus; The Banquet of Philoxenus; The Markets of the Mediterranean; A Wedding Feast in Macedon; Cato's Farm; The Wealth of Empire; On Hadrian's Wall; and Supper at the Baths.

Patrick C. P. Faas, a renowned Dutch food historian and chef with a regular column in *Der Volkskrant*, now has an English translation of his *Around the Roman Table* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003; 371 pp., \$29.25 cloth, forthcoming in paper). The book has two parts: a detailed discussion of Roman culinary history and manners, and a collection of 150 recipes. Each of the latter has the original Latin, an English translation, and a modern adaptation. Faas doesn't weed out any unusual dishes: roast moray eel; dolphin balls; wild boar roasted with cumin, pepper, and wine; boiled sow's udder; parrot tongue. One of the virtues of such a book is that it helps clarify how wide a chasm separates ancient from modern Roman cuisine.

Other daring dishes, from stuffed dormice to hard-boiled eggs with *garum* sauce, can be found in **Ilaria Gozzini Giacosa's** *A Taste of Ancient Rome* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1992, 1994; 239 pp., \$22.50 paper). Translated from Italian, the book features over 200 recipes, given in English and the original Latin, mostly drawn from Cato, Columella, Apicius, Petronius, Martial, and Juvenal.

Scholarly Works

Peter Garnsey's *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999; 190 pp., \$23.99 paper) focuses on peoples of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, including both "pagan," Christian, and Jewish populations. He explores both the nutritional and cultural aspects of food, tapping both scientific and literary sources of insight to understand the material and social factors that influenced what people ate. Topics include food taboos, diet, malnutrition, famine, feasting, food and the family, food and sexuality, and class differences. In this and several previous books by the same author, a major goal is coming to terms with the extent of malnutrition in ancient times and the power wielded over the food supply by élite groups.

As the title reflects, **Andrew Dalby's** *Empire of Pleasures: Luxury and Indulgence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2000; 309 pp., \$35 cloth) is not just about food or feasting, although these have their prominent place in the book. More ambitious than that, he has searched the entire corpus of classical literature in order to learn how Romans viewed luxury and the relation between pleasure and empire. In Dalby's phrase, Rome was "the city to which all the luxuries of the Empire and the world were drawn and where they were all consumed." Accordingly, his study includes a survey of the material comforts that Rome derived from all of its provinces, and beyond.

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, a Classics professor at McMaster University, has written *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003; 280 pp., \$75.00 cloth). This detailed study of feasting and formal dining focuses on the evidence provided by Roman house architecture, murals, mosaics, statues, and tomb paintings. Topics include a comparison of Greek and Roman dining habits, the significance and evolution of reclining and other dining fashions, and the relation between representations of dining and death. ■

PICNIC AT BASE LINE LAKE



A MEAL THAT HAD PRESIDENTIAL STATURE

We Americans have always been fascinated by the food habits of our political leaders, especially the presidents and their spouses. In England, Holland, France, and Spain—the main colonial powers that settled what would become the United States—food traditions had been shaped in major ways by palace cuisine. But in America we have never had any royal palaces, and so we have never had any royal kitchens to peek into!

Still, you can learn a lot about the evolution of American culture and cuisine by exploring the foods of its presidents, the fare served in the White House and at various presidential homes and functions throughout U.S. history. That was the premise—or perhaps just the pretext!—for a very enjoyable summer picnic that we had this past July 31. Under wonderful skies, some 40 members and guests of the Culinary Historians congregated at the home of members Octavian Prundeanu and Jan Arps, on the shore of Base Line Lake in Dexter, MI. Everyone toted dishes they'd prepared for the "Food of the Presidents" theme. We will mention most of these in the report that follows.

Aristocratic Dining: "I Found No Inconvenience In It"

A highlight of this picnic was the Virginia country ham provided by Jan and Dan Longone. Directions for preparing and serving this famous delicacy have come down to us from both Mount Vernon and Monticello, the Virginia estates of **George Washington** and **Thomas Jefferson**, respectively. They also appear in *The Virginia Housewife: or, Methodical Cook* (1824) by Mary Randolph, sister-in-law of Jefferson's daughter Martha. At Virginia plantations such as these, slave servants butchered the hogs and placed their hams in a tub of salt- and saltpeter-brine for a month. Then they hung the pork in a smokehouse to be smoked for several days and air-cured for several months. In serving such a smoked ham, they boiled it thoroughly, then skinned it and coated it with such toppings as cloves, brown sugar and cornbread crumbs for its "toasting" over the heat. The result, sliced wafer-thin like Italian *prosciutto*, is a salty but very fine product, dense, nutty, and smoky.

In Jefferson's day, a country ham was often accompanied by a baked casserole of sweet potatoes, tart apples, brown sugar and mace, a dish prepared for us by Rich Kato. By this time the sweet potato, indigenous to South America, had become a celebrated product of Tidewater Virginia where the first recorded North American cultivation had occurred (1648). The instructions that Rich used are from Judith E. Kosik's *Monroe Family Recipes* (first published in 1988), a collection from the Ash Lawn estate of President **James Monroe** and his wife Elizabeth, which lies just two miles south of Monticello. From



Photo: John Thomson

that same cookbook we sampled ground-almond macarons [prepared by Carroll and John Thomson] and minted fruit cordial [Julie and Bob Lewis], a refreshing nonalcoholic drink made with grape and citrus juices.

Among the Republic's founders, Jefferson stood out not only as a visionary politician and philosopher but as a scientist, artist, and epicure. He tested over 300 varieties of edible plants and developed new techniques to grow them in his fields, orchards, and a terraced garden that took seven slaves three years to build. His harvests included not only the traditional plants of Europe but also species native to Africa and Asia such as watermelon [Doris Berkenfeld], okra, and eggplant, as well as American natives such as the tomato, sweet potato, and pecan. The way in which Jefferson put all of this to use at his bountiful table is seen in a recipe like sweet-potato biscuits with chopped pecans [Pat Cornett and Mel Annis], a delicious quick-bread that he described in his journal. The recipe was reconstructed by Martha McCulloch-Williams in her *Dishes & Beverages of the Old South* (1913, facsimile edition 1988) and more recently in the *City Tavern Cookbook* (1999), the latter from the historic Philadelphia pub that greeted Jefferson and many other delegates to the first Congresses. It was Jefferson himself who had introduced the pecan, a native of the interior of the continent, to Virginia; surviving trees can still be found at Monticello.

Jefferson was also a great connoisseur of French and other European continental dining, to a degree that irked other founding fathers. At one political rally Patrick Henry, the Virginia legislator and patriot, criticized Jefferson's Gallic tastes, griping that he had "abjured his native victuals" and abandoned traditional dishes like hearty roast beef. Before becoming president, Jefferson had served as a U.S. diplomat in France for several years, traveling widely and further imbibing the region's culture and cuisine. Later, in Washington, he would hire a French head chef, Julien, and a French *maitre d'hôtel*, Étienne Lemaire, under whom labored Edy Fosset and Fanny, the slave cooks that were brought from Monticello. During Jefferson's presidency Lemaire purchased an average of over 200 bottles of wine monthly, mostly from Europe. White wines from Spain [Dan Longone], notably Pedro Ximenes Malaga, as well as others from France, Madeira, and elsewhere, were among the favorites, used daily in the White House kitchen and dining room.

continued on next page

FOOD OF THE PRESIDENTS *continued from page 11*

Back at Monticello, Jefferson's French governess Annette sometimes prepared breakfasts featuring toast topped with *capitolade* [Randy Schwartz], a *ragoût* of diced chicken, shallots, mushrooms, herbs, butter, and white wine; the recipe is now widely available, most recently in Leslie Mansfield's *The Lewis & Clark Cookbook* (see *Repast* Fall 2003, p. 7). Green beans dressed with herbs and olive oil [Pat Cornett and Mel Annis] recall Jefferson's love of the olive, which he extolled as possibly the most precious gift of heaven to man; he tried without success to transplant some 500 Mediterranean olive trees to South Carolina and Georgia. Jeffersonian desserts include homemade vanilla ice-cream and egg-white meringues [John and Carroll Thomson] from Marie Kimball's *Thomas Jefferson's Cook Book*, and bread pudding with brandied apricots [Bob and Midge Lusardi] from Randolph's *The Virginia Housewife*. Jefferson left extensive notes describing how he made such vanilla ice cream, rich with egg yolks, in a *sorbetière* that he had purchased.

Washington and Jefferson were essentially aristocrats, not of a hereditary but of a "natural" kind (as they saw it). The hostesses of their landed estates in Virginia supervised the work of the kitchen slaves who did the cooking. By contrast, Abigail and **John Adams**, who preceded Jefferson as the first residents of the White House, were thrifty, puritanical Yankees who had no slaves and who entertained infrequently. Abigail used some hired servants, but she sometimes did cooking and other household chores herself.

The Adamses often breakfasted on codfish balls, and on Sunday evenings supped on hasty pudding, a sweetened cornmeal porridge. But they were also exposed to more elegant dining, as when they were posted to France and England in the 1780s. Earlier, during the First Continental Congress in September 1774, John was invited to the mansion of Philadelphia mayor Samuel Powell and famously summed up the dinner in his journal: "a most sinfull Feast again! every Thing which could delight the Eye, or allure the Taste." Two weeks later, after a similar feast at the home of Pennsylvania Chief Justice Benjamin Chew, Adams marveled at the "Turtle, and every other Thing – Flummery, Jellies, Sweetmeats of 20 sorts, Trifles, Whip'd Syllabubbs, floating Islands, fools – &c., and then a Desert of Fruits, Raisins, Almonds, Pears, Peaches – Wines most excellent and admirable. I drank Madeira at a great Rate and found no Inconvenience in it." Recalling these feasts—and thereby acquitting ourselves magnificently of our patriotic duties—we picnicked on poundcake baked with brandy-soaked currants [Sonia Manchek] and blueberry flummery served with nutmeg whipped-cream [Sherry Sundling]. A recipe for flummery, the Yankee term for this type of baked fruit-pudding, is given in *The Presidents' Cookbook* by Poppy Cannon and Patricia Brooks.

A Broader Democracy

"As for the dinner itself, it represented the infancy of art: the vegetables and fish before the meat, the oysters for dessert. In a word, complete barbarism." Ouch! That is how Alexis de Tocqueville, the French traveler in America, characterized the formal dinner bestowed upon him by New York prison officials in May 1831. His letter home continued, "I confess that during this august ceremony I couldn't keep from laughing in my beard on thinking of the difference 1,500 leagues of sea make in the

position of men... The greatest equality reigns here in the laws. It is even in appearance in the customs."

What struck de Tocqueville as "complete barbarism" was actually a social leveling that was working its way into the American fabric. This was the era of Jacksonian democracy. Voting and other political rights were being extended to broader segments of the people. Attention was also shifting more and more from high art to folk culture. All of this was bound to be reflected in the dining habits of even the most powerful Americans.

Virginia patricians **William Henry Harrison** and **John Tyler** successfully portrayed themselves as heroes of the frontiersmen in their "log cabin and hard cider" presidential campaign of 1840. Their slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" called attention to Harrison's victory over the Shawnee at Tippecanoe in 1811, when he was governor of the Indiana Territory. At rallies in the frontier states, the pair would have a symbolic log cabin thrown up, then regale crowds of local voters with hard cider, hot chow, and rousing speeches. In *America Eats: Forms of Edible Folk Art*, William Woys Weaver gives a recipe for the ever-present corn dodgers [Randy Schwartz], which were humble breads of coarse cornmeal, the size and shape of goose eggs, baked on a griddle or else in a skillet, Dutch oven, or dripping-pan. The running mates served these with barbecued ham or Kentucky burgoo (a stew of meats and vegetables), to crowds as large as 30,000 in towns like Wilmington, OH and Wheeling, WV. When the elderly Harrison died after only a month in office, Vice President Tyler assumed the reins of power. Tyler Pie [Alison and Guy Cooper], a variant of the chess or sugar pie of Southern plantations, takes its name from the president's well-established Virginia family who kept up the tradition of making it. A recipe can be found in *James Beard's American Cookery*.

Unlike Tyler or Harrison, **Abraham Lincoln** really was born in a log cabin in Kentucky. His family moved to Indiana, then Illinois. As a young lawyer and co-owner of a tavern in New Salem, IL, he and Mary Todd Lincoln hired as their full-time cook a Portuguese former washerwoman, Frances Affonsa. Later, in the White House, their cook was an African-American woman, although for state dinners a French caterer was also brought in. The Lincolns weren't entirely cut off from good Midwestern eats in Washington, either. Abe's biographer Ida Tarbell noted that he would sometimes receive a homemade cherry pie [Eleanor Hoag] from New Salem, or for that matter a peach, blackberry, elderberry, or gooseberry pie. For, even in the Civil War years, the women of that town, remembering Lincoln's craving for fruit pies, took the trouble to bake them in double crusts, with steam gashes in the shape of "C" for cherry, etc., carefully wrapping and shipping them to the President.

In *The First Ladies Cook Book*, Margaret Brown Klaphor and Helen Claire Duprey Bullock give a recipe for election cake [Toni Hopping] in a form popular with the Lincolns. Election cake, also called training cake, is really a generic term for any yeast-raised cake served at rallies or to celebrate Election Day (Training Day), the day set aside for people to vote or, from colonial times, for the militia to train and parade. In their earliest form, in New England, the cakes were simple breads sweetened with brown sugar and spices, glazed with egg and molasses, and stamped with the King's coat of arms, the American eagle, or other patriotic insignia (see Weaver's book for photos). The Fall

2004 newsletter of the Culinary Historians of New York includes a cover story on Hartford [Connecticut] Election Cake, one of the seminal versions. The custom was taken by settlers into the Midwest, and by Lincoln's time the cakes tended to be lighter, made with refined white flour and sugar and brandy-soaked currants, and glazed with orange or lemon juice.

Andrew Johnson and his large family were esteemed as gracious hosts in the nation's capital. Johnson, a former Senator from Tennessee, was the Vice President who succeeded Lincoln upon his assassination. One of his favorite dishes, reportedly served at small gatherings, was stuffed eggplant, Spanish-style [Marion Holt]. In the recipe reconstructed in *The First Ladies Cook Book*, the hollowed eggplant halves are stuffed with a chopped and simmered combination of the eggplant pulp, tomatoes, celery, onions, and seasonings; sprinkled with breadcrumbs; baked; and garnished with fresh slices of tomato and broiled strips of bacon.

The million-selling *Centennial Buckeye Cook Book*, first published in 1876 as a fundraiser by the women of the First Congregational Church of Marysville, OH, is a snapshot of life among the burgeoning middle class in late 19th-Century America. It was dedicated "to those American housewives who cannot afford to employ a French cook." The work ethic of middle America also comes through in a story of the time from Ohioans **James Garfield** and his wife Lucretia. It had always been hard for Lucretia, an intellectual like her husband, to settle down to household chores such as kneading and baking great batches of white loaf bread [Sherry Sundling]. But in the summer of 1870 she had a revelation:

It came to me one morning when I was making bread. I said to myself, "Here I am, compelled by an inevitable necessity to make our bread this summer. Why not consider it a pleasant occupation, and make it so by trying to see what perfect bread I can make?" It seemed like an inspiration, and the whole of life grew brighter. The very sunshine seemed flowing down through my spirit into the white loaves! and now I believe my table is furnished with better bread than ever before. And this truth, old as creation, seems just now to have become fully mine—that I need not to be the shirking slave to toil, but its regal master, making whatever I do yield me its best fruits.

William Henry Harrison's grandson **Benjamin Harrison** and Benjamin's wife Caroline were also from Ohio (in fact, 7 of the 11 U.S. presidents serving between 1869 and 1923 were Ohio-born). One journalist of the time recorded that President Harrison "likes the plain dishes of Dolly Johnson, the colored cook he engaged from Kentucky, better than the complicated French menus of her predecessor, Madame Pelouard. In her way Dolly Johnson, too, is an artist." Caroline herself took a great interest in cooking and compiled a book of recipes, *Statesmen's Dishes and How to Cook Them* (1890), mostly contributed by legislators' wives. Cannon and Brooks also provide a recipe for Caroline's "spicy macaroni" [Phil and Barbara Zaret], a simple macaroni-and-cheese casserole with a dash of powdered red pepper. Two years before Harrison's election, cookbook author and dietician Sarah Tyson Rorer had praised macaroni as "the bread of the Italian laborer. In this country, it is a sort of luxury among the upper classes; but there is no good reason, considering its price, why it should not enter more extensively into the food of our working classes." Indeed it would. Thomas Jefferson had imported macaroni from Europe a full century earlier, but dishes like Caroline's show that new waves of

immigration were leading to the popularization and Americanization of Italian and other ethnic cuisines.

Grover Cleveland was a New Jersey native whose family had moved to New York, where he became governor. He entered the White House still a bachelor, bringing with him his female cook from Albany, and his younger sister Rose as official hostess. During his second term (he was married by then) his steward, the Paris-trained Hugo Ziemann, led in the publication of the original *White House Cookbook* (1894). From that cookbook we sampled a classic deep-fried treat of the Middle Atlantic coast, crab croquettes [Doris Miller]. Cleveland was also partial to foods of old New England, such as corned beef and cabbage, brown bread, and snickerdoodles.

Casserole Cooking in the American Century

The White House got its first real modernization during the second term of Harry Truman, who showed it off in a televised tour. The world wars and global reconstruction of the first half of the 20th Century had left America as the preeminent power, with a complex and modern society. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations were perhaps the last in which members of the president's family took a direct or leading role in running household operations at the executive mansion.

Harry Truman and his family, who liked simple but well-prepared food, brought their cook Vieta Carr with them to Washington from Independence, MO. Bess Truman, who was a good cook herself, suffered from hypertension, and this encouraged them to eat foods moderate in fat, salt, and sugar. Private suppers included humble dishes like tuna-noodle casserole, meat loaf, bean soup, cornmeal dumplings, turnip greens, and Ozark apple pudding. Still, the couple always enjoyed a drink before dinner. White House Chief Usher James Bernard West, in his *Upstairs at the White House: My Life with the First Ladies* (1973), amusingly recounts the Trumans' preference for old-fashioned [Art and Joanne Cole], which are bourbon cocktails served in squat, thick-bottomed glasses. When the butler first served these, they were laced with bitters and garnished with fruit. Bess complained about how sweet they were, saying "They make the worst old-fashioned here I've ever tasted! They're like fruit punch!" After some further attempts, the butler eventually caught on and served straight bourbon on the rocks. Upon tasting this, Bess enthused, "Now that's the way we like our old-fashioned!"

Recipes associated with **Dwight Eisenhower** more often came from him than from his wife. Mamie, from a wealthy family, hadn't been taught to cook. Dwight became a proficient cook by preparing most of the couple's meals in the period when he was a rising army officer. Much later they employed a French chef, François Rysavy, in the White House for a few years, but even then Ike was known to hit the kitchen to make soups, stews, and other dishes. When they were alone they often ate their supper from trays, away from the dining room. Just after her husband died, Mamie contributed one of his favorite recipes, tomato pudding [Joanne and Art Cole], for the charitable *The Officers' Wives Cookbook* (1970). This pudding, intense both in flavor and color, was a popular side-dish in the 1950s and was adapted for later editions of *The First Ladies Cook Book*. Its preparation begins with cubes of white bread in a casserole dish; then melted butter and a boiled purée of tomatoes, brown sugar,

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FOOD OF THE PRESIDENTS *continued from page 13*

and salt are poured in. The pudding is finished with a half-hour in the oven. “Danish tomatoes” [brought by Anne and Lenny Karle-Zenith as well as by Gwen and John Nystuen], from *The Presidents’ Cookbook*, are simple enough that even Mamie enjoyed preparing them: large, ripe tomatoes are sliced thickly and sprinkled with salt, pepper, brown sugar, and wine vinegar.

Adlai Stevenson, who twice lost the presidency to Eisenhower, was later appointed U.S. ambassador to the United Nations by **John F. Kennedy**. In a January 1962 visit to New York, Kennedy had a luncheon meeting with Secretary-General U Thant in Stevenson’s apartment at the Waldorf-Astoria. Adlai’s housekeeper there, Viola Reardy, prepared a Stevenson family dish of shrimp and artichoke casserole [Julie and Bob Lewis]. Rich with cream, sherry, and parmesan cheese, it was a hit with JFK. There was a small sensation when the recipe appeared in newspapers at that time, which is how Bob’s aunt picked it up; it can also be found in *The Presidents’ Cookbook*.

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy’s refined tastes and her fondness for chic European styles helped shape America’s image here and abroad. French chef René Verdon of the Carlyle Hotel, the Kennedys’ favorite hotel in New York, was appointed to supervise the White House kitchen. After Verdon’s first luncheon, where the presidential couple fêted British Prime Minister Macmillan and his entourage, a reporter quipped: “The verdict was that there was nothing like French cooking to promote good Anglo-American relations.” The chicken-curry canapés [Patty Turpen] that we sampled came from Verdon’s *The White House Chef Cookbook* (1968). Mimosa salad [Gwen and John Nystuen], the English course on one of Jackie’s four-course menus for UN Day (October 21), is a crisp green salad whose topping of mayonnaise and crumbled egg yolks gives it the appearance of flowering mimosa trees. The recipe appears in later editions of the *White House Cookbook* as well as *The Presidents’ Cookbook*. The latter also contains several more of Mrs. Kennedy’s favorites, such as asparagus vinaigrette [Margot Michael].

Jackie was fond of Italian as well as French and British food. Her recipe for Italian rice with mushrooms [Fran Lyman] is widely available on the Internet. When she was later married to Aristotle Onassis, she hired an Italian, Marta Sgubin, as governess and eventually cook, a role Sgubin held for 25 years. From Sgubin’s *Cooking for Madam: Recipes and Reminiscences from the Home of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis* (see *Repast* Winter 1999, p. 9), we tasted summer spaghetti salad as well as lemon poundcake [both from Nancy Sannar]. The salad, served at room temperature, combines *al dente* spaghetti, mozzarella, tomatoes, and herbs. Sgubin wrote that Jackie enjoyed such simple dishes.

Lyndon Johnson and his family brought an abrupt change of style to the White House. When Chef Verdon was let go, Bill Moyers, LBJ’s press secretary and fellow Texan, acerbically told reporters: “His reputation as a chef far exceeds the pleasures he delivers to the table.” (Verdon was replaced by the Swiss-born chef Henry Haller, who continued through the 1980s.) Thus, instead of eating more of Verdon’s canapés, we dipped taco chips into *guacamole* and *picadillo* [Joann and Ned Chalot] as appetizers symbolizing the Tex-Mex barbecues that the Johnsons liked to throw on the White House front lawn. *Picadillo*, popular



Photo: Pat Cornett

throughout Latin America and the Gulf Coast states, is a “hash” of minced or ground beef, tomatoes, vinegar, raisins, almonds, herbs, and spices, eaten as either a dip, a condiment for beans and rice, or a stuffing for buns or vegetables. Cannon and Brooks note that *picadillo* was also famously prepared in the White House kitchen by Bess Truman and her classmates as part of a Spanish lesson given there in April 1946. Joann uses a recipe from a Winterthur book, *American Elegance: Classic and Contemporary Menus from Celebrated Hosts and Hostesses* (1988).

The late **Ronald Reagan** and his wife Nancy were fond of seafood mousses, and Sherry Sundling made us a beautiful one, adapting a recipe from Haller’s *The White House Family Cookbook*. She used smoked whitefish, dry sherry, chopped watercress and other ingredients, garnished the mousse with grape tomatoes and slices of lemon and cucumber, and provided a condiment of creamy horseradish sauce. Nancy Reagan reportedly enjoyed bringing bold flavors such as these to the White House.

Roland Mesnier, the French-born White House pastry chef, had been hired by Rosalynn Carter in 1979, but he says that it was early in the Reagan administration when he came into his own. One of the Reagans’ favorite desserts was pumpkin pecan pie [Judy Goldwasser]. The recipe given in *The First Ladies Cook Book* permits the use of canned pumpkin, but Mesnier himself was a stickler, insisting that all sweets served at the executive mansion be made on the premises from fresh ingredients, and that they be impeccable both in flavor and appearance. When President Bush last year hosted visiting Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki, Mesnier researched the African nation and fashioned some miniatures for each dinner table—coffee mills made of chocolate, giraffes made of blown sugar. After 25 years in the White House, the great artist Mesnier, age 60, retired this summer on July 30, the day before our picnic. Look for his just-published pastry text for the home cook, *Dessert University*, co-authored with Lauren Chattman. ■

For information useful in writing this report, the editor is grateful to all of the picnic participants as well as to Leni A. Sorensen, Research Coordinator at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit.

MORSELS & TIDBITS

Readers of this theme issue might like to find out more about ancient Roman cooking and eating, and about the Roman presence in North Africa, by visiting "A Taste of the Ancient World: Feeding Karanis" (<http://www.umich.edu/~kelseydb/Exhibits/Food/text/karanis.html>), a website of the Univ. of Michigan's Kelsey Museum of Archaeology. The website and accompanying museum exhibit were the joint work of Museum staff and the students in Classical Civilization 452 (Food in the Ancient World) as part of UM's Fall 1996 Theme Semester on Food. The course is taught by Prof. **Susan E. Alcock**, whose commentary "The Use and Abuse of Food, Then and Now" appeared in our Spring 2004 issue. Karanis, a farming town in late Roman Egypt, was excavated by the University of Michigan from 1924-35. The Museum holds 44,000 artifacts from Karanis (not counting the *papyri*), representing about half of its entire collection.

The First Biennial Symposium on American Culinary History will be held May 13-15, 2005 at the University of Michigan's William L. Clements Library. The symposium, and a related exhibition (May 16-Sept. 20), will introduce the public to the **Janice Bluestein Longone** Culinary Archive and Center for American Culinary Research. Next September, Jan will deliver a free public lecture about the archive, aimed at the local community. More details about the symposium, exhibition, and lecture will be available as they become finalized, at the Clements Library website (<http://www.clements.umich.edu/culinary/symposium.html>).

The **Mila Simmons** Memorial Fund, announced in this column in our last issue, garnered donations sufficient to purchase two gifts for the Culinary Archive at the Clements Library. The first gift is a copy of the new, two-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, edited by CHAA friend **Andrew F. Smith**. The second is a rare copy of *Good Cooking and Health in the Tropics* (Manila, 1922) by **Mrs. Samuel Frances Gaches**, who was a Filipino nursing official. The latter gift is especially apt, since Mila was a Philippines-born researcher in environmental health.

The whole world mourns the passing of **Julia Child**, who died at her home in Montecito, CA on August 13, two days short of her 92nd birthday. Julia was a powerful force in elevating the cooking practices and food awareness of Americans. She was also a friend of our organization and a reader of this newsletter. One of the world's most beloved culinary celebrities, she will be greatly missed by millions. *Repast* subscribers might like to look back at our major tribute, "A Birthday for Julia: 'The French Chef' Turns 90" (*Repast* Fall 2002).

CHAA member **Pat Cornett** was the head instructor for "Cooking Up a Family Cookbook," a four-session class that met at the Birmingham (Michigan) Community House in September and October. The class covered the basics of how to produce a keepsake cookbook, from recipe testing to self-publishing. One of the sessions was taught by **Sylvia Lee**, a local professional pastry chef and cookbook author. Pat is

planning to organize a panel discussion on creating family cookbooks for CHAA's October 2005 meeting.

The journal *Victorian Literature and Culture* seeks articles for an upcoming special issue on "Food and the Victorians," edited by Ross Forman and Suzanne Daly. Articles may address any aspect of the production or consumption of food or drink in this context. Submissions (two copies, please) are due by November 1, 2005 and should follow MLA guidelines. Send submissions or inquiries to either Suzanne Daly (sdaly@english.umass.edu) or Ross Forman (rf19@soas.ac.uk), both at Department of English, Bartlett Hall, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA 01003-9269. ■

Just a Note from Carroll

The seasons seem to whiz by, and I need to thank so many people for helping make this group so interesting and successful. It's hard to know what order to list people in, so alphabetically by last name is probably the easiest.

First of all, thanks to all of you who help with refreshments. It is certainly appreciated by all of us "tasters" after each meeting. You give so generously of your time and talents: Doris, Pat, Marjorie, Linda, Ann, Eleanor, Toni, Jane, Julie, Midge, Fran, Gwen, Hazel, Jane, Sherry, and Mary Lou.

Next: A very special thank you to Julie Lewis, who finds interesting and informative speakers to enlighten and refresh us with knowledgeable and entertaining presentations. Julie and Bob also continue to faithfully proofread each issue of the *Repast* newsletter prior to publication.

Third: How can I not acknowledge Jan and Dan Longone, who continue to inspire us and enjoy our growth... and challenge us with those contests and quizzes. Dan— thanks for keeping us afloat financially and keeping track of membership dues and expenses. In addition, Margot Michael has worked hard to print out mailing labels and to organize our membership lists by category and renewal dates.

Randy: How do we thank you for those newsletters that just keep outdoing themselves with content, interest, and education. WOW and double WOW.

And of course, my husband, John, who helps with refreshments, set-up, clean-up, computer lists, newsletter-folding, stapling, stamping, and mailing and generally keeping me up to snuff.

Thanks again for all those who assist with the special picnics and dinners and offer regularly to assist in any way possible. What a great bunch you are.

— Carroll Thomson, CHAA President

CHAA CALENDAR

(Unless noted, programs are scheduled for 4-6 p.m. at Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave.)

Sunday, November 21, 2004

“Fresh from the Past: Why 18th-Century
Food Matters Today”

Sandra Sherman, Prof. of British Literature, Univ. of
Arkansas and author of *Fresh from the Past: Recipes and
Revelations from Moll Flanders’ Kitchen*

(Taylor Trade, 2004)

(Sandra will also be signing copies of her book
at Borders Books & Music downtown, 2-3 p.m.)

Sunday, December 12, 2004

CHAA Participatory Holiday Dinner

“Foods of Ancient Greece, Rome,
and the Holy Land”

4-7 p.m., Huntington Woods Public Library,
26415 Scotia Road

Sunday, January 16, 2005

“Culinary Biographies”

Alice Arndt, editor, food historian, and
author of the forthcoming

Culinary Biographies (Yes Press, Inc.)

Sunday, February 20, 2005

“Coffee: From Yemen to Starbucks
in 1400 Years”

Allen Leibowitz, managing partner,
Zingerman’s Coffee Company

Sunday, March 20, 2005

Joan Reardon, author and biographer,
on the subject of her new book,

*Poet of the Appetites: The Lives and Loves
of M.F.K. Fisher* (North Point Press, 2004)

Sunday, April 17, 2005

“‘In Close Fraternal Conjunction’: Canadian Cookbooks
in a North American Context”

Elizabeth Driver, President, Culinary Historians of Ontario
and author of the forthcoming

*Culinary Landmarks: A Bibliography of Canadian
Cookbooks, 1825-1949* (Univ. Toronto Press)

REPAST

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Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Volume XX Number 4, Fall 2004

First Class

Food and Feasting in Ancient Rome. Patrick Faas. In addition to a wealth of material about culinary customs and techniques in ancient Rome, Patrick Faas translated more than 150 Roman recipes and reconstructed them for the modern cook. Here are eight recipes from the bookâ€”from salad to dessert. Æ' Æ' Æ'. Columella Salad. Columella's writings suggest that Roman salads were a match for our own in richness and imagination. 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. Ancient Roman cuisine changed greatly over the duration of the civilization's existence. Dietary habits were affected by the political changes from kingdom to republic to empire, and the empire's enormous expansion, which exposed Romans to many new provincial culinary habits and cooking methods. In the beginning, dietary differences between Roman social classes were not great, but disparities developed with the empire's growth. Ancient Roman cuisine changed over the long duration of the ancient Roman civilization. Dietary habits were affected by the influence of Greek culture, the political changes from kingdom to republic to empire, and the empire's enormous expansion, which exposed Romans to many new provincial culinary habits and cooking methods. In the beginning, dietary differences between Roman social classes were not very great, but disparities developed with the empire's growth. YouTube Encyclopedic. 1/5. In Ancient Rome, wine was normally mixed with water immediately before drinking, since the fermentation was not controlled and the alcohol grade was high.