

the BICRANIAL BEAR, DECEMBER 2021

Greetings to the Citizens of Adiantum!

This issue of the *BiCranial Bear* focuses on Roman festivals and food.

On Tuesday evening, Dec. 7, Arts & Sciences Night will host Lady Fina MacGrioghair sharing a presentation on Festivals and Food in the Roman Empire followed by a general discussion of Roman food and things. There's a four page handout and five delicious recipes here to accompany her presentation, plus some websites for further exploration.

In service to Adiantum,

Yseult of Broceliande, OP, OL, Baroness of Court
Chronicler

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Festivals and Food in the Roman Empire

By Fina MacGrioghair

How important were holidays and festivals to Roman life?

- They formed a major part of Roman life.
- They affected the conduct of public business, weddings, legal proceedings, and even agriculture.
- Some even mandated days where labor was not to be performed by anyone, including slaves.
- There was no month in the Roman year that did not feature multiple holidays and/or festivals.

How full was the Roman calendar?

Ianuarius – 12 days	Quintilius / Quinctilius / Iulius – 20 days
Februarius – 15 days	Sextilis / Augustus – 14 days
Martius – 7 days	September – 6 days
Aprilis – 20 days	October – 14 days
Maius – 11 days	November – 4 days
Iunius – 18 days	December – 15 days

So the Roman calendar included 156 public festivals / holidays over the course of a 12 month year 43% of the Roman calendar involved some sort of festival, holiday, or religious observance. This number doesn't include various Ludi (games) or Mercatus (markets or fairs) which occurred either as part of a holiday or after a holiday had concluded. It also doesn't include any of the private holidays that were specific to certain families.

Types of Roman Holidays / Festivals

Feriae privatae

Private holidays specific to a family or held to honor a private individual. Held to mark the births or other important days in the lives of the family members (like the 10 days of mourning after a death)

Feriae publicae

Public holidays that formed the basis of the Roman religious calendar. Celebrated by the vast majority of the Roman population. Many holidays received some form of public funding.

Feriae publicae were of three types:

Conceptivae – annual holidays with a moveable date on the calendar. Dates were generally announced by the priests or magistrates in charge of them. They included Compitalia, Sementivae, Fornacalia, Feriae Litinae, Ambervalia / Amburbium

Stativae – Annual holidays with fixed dates. There were many of these:

Saturnalia, Agonalia, Parentalia, Lupercalia, Feralia, Caristia, Terminalia, Regifugium, Equirria, Liberalia, Quinquatria/Quinquatrus, Tubilustrum, Veneralia, Cerealia, Fordicidia, Parilia, Lemuria, Mercuralia, Vestalia, Matralia, Poplifugia, Vitulatio, Lucaria, Neptunalia, Furrinalia, Portunalia, Consualia, Vulcanalia, Opiconsivia, Volturnalia, Meditrinalia, Augustalia, Fontinalia, Armilustrum, Epulum Jovis, Bona Dea, Opalia, Divalia, Larentalia, Dies Natalis Sol Invicti, Brumalia.

Imperativae – Special celebrations or observances held by command of consuls, praetors or dictators. They usually met an emergency or celebrated a victory. They usually lasted several days and most often were held in response to some event that indicated the gods needed to be appeased. For example, one occurred in 192 BCE after a 38 days series of earthquakes affected the region. Because they were often about appeasement, ferias imperativae were often grim rather than festive, and they were rarely named in the same way as the Ferias Stativae and the Feriae Conceptivae.

Ludi

Not holidays in the same sense as the feriae privatae or publicae. They were games of different varieties meant to entertain the populace. However, many ludi were also dies festi, that is, not necessarily holidays in the traditional sense, but they did allow for the average Roman to have a day off from regular duties.

Food in Festival Observance

There are around 47 different 'named' feriae. Of these, there are 18 which specifically detail food/drink servings as either part of the celebration or as an element of ritual sacrifice. That's a little more than 1/3 of all feriae that involved food as a central element.

Compitalia – celebrated once a year a few days after Saturnalia in honor of the Lares Compitales, household deities of the crossroads, to whom sacrifices were offered at the places where two or more roads/paths met. The sacrifices consisted of libum (a type of honey-cake) presented by the inhabitants of each house.

Fornacalia – the Feast of Ovens, related to the proper baking of bread, celebrated in honor of the goddess Fornax (considered a divine personification of the oven). This sacrifice was meant to ensure that bread in the ovens wouldn't be burnt over the course of the year. The final day of the festival, the Quirinalia (Feast of Fools) also involved a public feast.

Feriae Latinae – This festival commemorated and reaffirmed the alliance of the 30 settlement / tribes of the Latium region that was organized for mutual defense. During the festival, the representatives of each settlement would bring offerings of agricultural products like cheese, sheep, etc. The currently presiding Consul of Rome would also make a libation of milk before sacrificing a pure white heifer. After the sacrifice, the flesh of the heifer would be cooked and served as part of a communal meal.

Parentalia – A nine day festival to honor the family ancestors. Offerings included flower garlands, wheat (emer), salt, wine-soaked bread, and violets left at family tombs. These offerings were meant to strengthen the ties between the departed ancestors and the living family. The families shared cake and wine both in the form of offerings and as a meal among themselves while visiting the tombs of their ancestors.

Caristia – This immediately followed the Parentalia and was seen by some as the final day of the festival. However, the focus of this festival was on the living members of the family and strengthening the bonds of those present at the festival. Celebrated with gifts of wine, bread, and sportulae, but also featured a family gathering where the family members would dine together as well as make offerings of food and incense to the Lares (household gods).

Lupercalia – This celebration was observed as a ritual purification of the city. It was also intended to promote fertility and health. Celebrations included both animal sacrifices (males) and an offering of mola salsa (salted flour/meal cakes) prepared by the Vestal Virgins. This was followed by a sacrificial feast after which the Luperci (priests of the Lupercalia) would run around the Palatine striking women on the hand with leather thongs in the hopes of promoting fertility and/or guaranteeing a successful delivery if they were already pregnant.

Terminalia – Celebrated in honor of Terminus, the god of boundaries. Owners of adjacent properties met at the boundary and built a rough altar used to make offerings of wine, honeycombs, and grain, as well as sacrificing a lamb or suckling pig. The public part of the festival was celebrated at the sixth milestone on the road. Prior to the calendar change that made December the last month of the year, this was also part of the recognition of the change of the year, as it also marked the boundary between one year and the next.

Liberalia – This festival honored Liber Pater, a god of wine and fertility, and Libera, his consort. The priestesses dedicated to this god made libum (a type of honey cake) which would be sacrificed on behalf of worshippers. Additionally, during this feast boys who had reached adult age (according to Roman practices) would lay aside the garments of childhood and don the toga virilis, signally that they had come to adulthood and were now citizens of Rome, with all the rights that came with citizenship.

Parilia – This started as an agricultural festival to purify shepherds and their sheep. Its many parts included: •Preparing a bonfire through which the shepherd and his sheep jumped •Sacrificing milk, millet, and cakes to Pales (the patron of shepherds and sheep) •Burning burranica which is sapa (a boiled wine) mixed with milk. •And the shepherd jumping through the fire three more times. In later years, the elements of this festival (especially in urban areas) would be combined with other festivals occurring around the same time and celebrated by priests. During the time of Julius Caesar, it was converted into a celebration of the birth of the city of Rome, and games were added to the celebration in addition to the public feast.

Lemuria – The Roman festival of the dead, observed to appease the restless dead as well as to expel evil spirits. The spirits were offered beans to appease them prior to being driven from the

home by the banging of bronze pots and yelling for the spirits to leave. It was also at this time that the Vestal Virgins prepared the mola salsa (a salted flour/meal cake made from the first of the wheat) that were used in various rituals and observance.

Voluturnalia – Voluturnus was the god of the river Tiber, although he was also considered the god of fountains. During his festival, he (and, some think, his daughter Juturnus, goddess of a spring) were honored through games, drinking of wine, and feasting.

Meditrinalia – A celebration to honor the new vintage of wine. Libations of new wine were offered to the gods. On this day Romans began drinking the new wine mixed with the old wine, believing that the mixture held healing properties.

Epulum Jovis – Jove was celebrated at this festival with a decadent ritual feast. All of the gods were invited, and statues of them were arranged on couches in the places of highest honor in the dining room. During the feast, epulones (priests whose job it was to carry out the ritual) would also serve the finest of food to the statues of the gods, and then serve as proxies of the gods in eating the food.

Larentalia – Scholars debate whether this festival was celebrated to honor the Lares (household deities) or Acca Larentia (the nurse of Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome). Regardless of which it was, the festival was celebrated by making offerings of food to the dead, usually at an altar dedicated to Acca Larentia.

Brumalia – The winter solstice festival to honor Saturn and Ceres. Celebration primarily involved drinking, evening feasting, and generally having a good time.

Vinalia – there are two vinalia: the Vinalia Urbana and the Vinalia Rustica. During the Vinalia Urbana the first grapes were picked and the first pressing was blessed, after which a sacrifice was made to Jupiter to ensure the growing and ripening of the grapes. Jupiter was offered a libation of the previous year's sacred wine. During the Vinalia Rustica the growth of vegetables and the grape harvest were celebrated, and the vineyards and gardens were dedicated to Venus in the hopes of guaranteeing their fertility. There were also libations of wine.

Saturnalia – A multi-day festival in honor of Saturn that began with a sacrifice in the temple of Saturn. The majority of the observance then centered around public celebrations that included: a convivium publicum (public banquet), private parties, and private exchanges of presents that often involved things that might be considered gag gifts or figurines called sigillaria. In addition, there was a general carnival-like atmosphere to the festival that involved a relaxation of Roman social forms. For example, •gambling, which was normally forbidden under Roman law, was allowed; •a role reversal took place in which masters served their slaves or lower-status freed men at table; •a person was selected to serve as 'the King of Saturn' and preside over the festivities as well as give orders for revelers to follow.

What foods were part of these festivals?

Known festival foods: Libum, Grain (far (spelt), millet, and wheat (emmer)), milk, wine, bread, honeycombs, beans, mola salsa (a salted flour/meal cake), grapes, dormice, wine-soaked bread, heifer (beef).

Plausible festival foods: feasts and communal meals featuring foods of the season. While there was some variation between classes in the foods eaten, recent archaeological evidence and

research indicates that citizens across all social castes had access to a wide variety of food items as well as a nutritional and diverse diet.

Pullum Oxyzomum: Chicken with Piquant Sauce

Original Text:

Pullum oxyzomum: oleum acetabulum maiorem, laseris satis modice, liquaminis acetabulum minorem, aceti acetabulum perquam minorem, piperis scripulos sex, Petroselinum scripulum, porros fasciculum.

Translation:

Chicken (with) piquant (sauce). Take an acetabulum of olive oil, a small but sufficient quantity of laser, a little less than an acetabulum of liquamen, and the same amount of vinegar. Add six scripulos of pepper, a scripulum of parsley, and a bunch of leeks.

Redaction:

Ingredients:

- 1 chicken, jointed (can also be made with chicken thighs)
- 1 oz vinegar
- 1 bunch of leeks, chopped
- 1 tsp Pepper
- 1.25 oz olive oil
- 1 oz liquamen (fish sauce)
- 1/4 tsp Parsley
- Chicken stock

Brown chicken in oil. Add chicken stock to pan and bring to a boil. Simmer in stock for 15 minutes. Turn chicken in the cooking fluid and continue to simmer. After 20 minutes, turn the chicken again and add leeks to the cooking liquid. In separate bowl, mix liquamen, vinegar, pepper, and parsley. Mix well. Pour over chicken and leeks, and cook for an additional 5-10 minutes. Remove chicken to serving dish and pour sauce over chicken.



Recipes for Roman festival dishes

Libum: Honey cakes

Ingredients:

½ cup flour
1 cup ricotta cheese (drained)
1 egg, beaten
Bay leaves
½ cup honey

Beat cheese until soft. Stir into flour. Add beaten egg to mixture and mix until soft dough is formed. Divide dough into four and shape each section into a small bun. Place on greased baking dish on top of fresh bay leaf. Bake in 375 degree oven until golden brown (about 40 minutes). Warm honey and pour onto flat plate. Place buns in warm honey and allow to rest until all honey is absorbed.

Caroetae Frictae: Fried Carrots

Original Text: *Caroetae frictae oenogara inferuntur.*

Translation: Carrots fried in oenogara.

Redaction:

Ingredients:

- 4 carrots (or parsnips)
- 3.5 oz white wine
- 1.25 oz Liquamen (fish sauce, Thai fish sauce is the closest and is available in most markets)
- 2 oz Olive oil

Peel and pare carrots into thin strips. Heat the olive oil in a pan. Add the carrots and fry until golden and cooked through. Combine the wine and liquamen in a separate container to make the oenogara. (This can be made well in advance of cooking.) Pour the oenogara over the carrots, and bring to a boil. Simmer for about 5 minutes. Turn into a bowl and serve.



Aliter pisam sive fabam: Peas or Beans Another Way

Original Text:

Aliter pisam sive fabam: despumatam subtrito lasare Parthico, liquamen et caroeno condies. Oleum modice superfundis et inferes.

Translation:

Beans another way. When skimmed flavor them with crushed Parthian laser, some liquamen, and some caroenum. Pour a little olive oil over these, then serve.

Redaction:

Ingredients:

- 1 cup dried chickpeas
- ½ tsp asafoetida (also called hing, available in most natural grocers as well as Asian markets)
- 2 tbsp liquamen (fish sauce, Thai fish sauce is the closest and is available in most markets)
- 1 1/3 tbsp caroenum (grape syrup, can be made at home by boiling grape juice until it's volume is reduced by one-third)
- Olive oil

Soak chickpeas overnight in cold water. Drain and place in pan. Cover with twice the amount of water and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer for 1 hour or until tender. Drain. In separate bowl mix liquamen, caroenum, and asafoetida. Pour mixture over chickpeas in serving bowl and mix well. Drizzle with olive oil and mix well. Serve.



Dulcia Domestica: Home sweets

Original Text:

Dulcia domestica: palmulas vel dactilos except semine, nuce vel nucleis vel piper tritum infercies. Sales foris contingis, frigis in melle cocto, et inferes.

Translation:

Home sweets are made thus: dates are stuffed, after seeds are removed, with a nut or with nuts and pepper, sprinkled with salt and candied in honey and served.

Redaction:

- Ingredients:
- Dates
- Pine nuts
- Pepper
- Coarse ground salt
- Honey

Mix pepper with pine nuts to taste. Stone dates and fill with nut and pepper mixture. Roll stuffed dates in salt. Warm honey in pan until honey has become more fluid. Place dates in pan. Cook, turning the dates occasionally, until the skin of dates begins to split (about 5-10 minutes). Serve drizzled with remaining cooked honey from the pan.



Follow Fina's research on her website at <https://finamac.wixsite.com/medievalexperiment/the-medieval-test-kitchen>

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Roman Food Online, by Emma Haldane

For my money, the top Pro online is Sally Grainger. <https://www.atasteoftheancientworld.co.uk/> is her website, featuring her books, and her YouTube channel. Grainger is a degreed Reconstruction Archaeologist, and pops up on British educational TV all the time. I first met her on Time Team, where she cooked Ancient Roman feasts more than once!

Grainger collaborated with Chris Grocock on *Apicius*, the current academic standard translation of the ancient Roman recipe collections credited to the apocryphal gourmand Marcus Gavius Apicius. {<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marcus-Gavius-Apicius>}

She wrote a companion cookbook, *Cooking Apicius*, for modern kitchens and cooks. Her most recent book, published in 2020, is *The Story of Garum*.

You can download several of her papers here: <https://reading.academia.edu/SallyGrainger>

Timeline link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6ZxaZUXCXs> (This is a Timeline feature, so lots of ads, but great video quality.)

<https://www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk/symposiasts-at-work-sally-grainger/>

Blogs

Make yourself a sandwich, grab a beverage, pull up your favorite search engine, and search for Ancient Roman Food blogs. You'll be there a while. Here are some of my favorites:

<https://notjustdormice.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.cibiantiquorum.com/>

<https://tavolamediterranea.com/>

<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/cook-a-classical-feast-nine-recipes-from-ancient-greece-and-rome/> (This isn't exclusively about food, but an excellent post in a great history blog. Andrew Dalby and the aforementioned Sally Grainger are the quoted authors in this post, which features recipes from their book, *The Classical Cookbook*. While aimed at a popular audience, the scholarship is top-notch.)

<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/historical-city-travel-guide-rome-1st-century-ad/> Lots of information about all aspects of life in ancient Rome.

<https://romanasum.com/> A wide-ranging web site by Sharon Rose / Tullia Saturnina with a good page of Roman Resources (links to various museums, recipes, dye info, other living history groups, etc., etc.) and a page of her own papers on Clothing, Roman Life, and Roman Jewelry.

Happy cooking!