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Reviewed Article:

Diet of the Poor in Roman Italy: An Exploration of Wild and Cultivated Plants as an Essential Dietary Component

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Most of the population of Roman Italy was poor, whether they were the poor who were constantly in search for food and shelter, or the temporarily poor who were artisans or shopkeepers but could fall into poverty at times (Garnsey, 1998, pp.226-227). In classical literature, pleasures of the mind were favoured over pleasures of the body (Gowers, 1993, p.2). Epictetus (*Ench*. 41) wrote that only stupid men spent time dwelling on matters of the body such as eating, and drinking, and that attention should be devoted entirely to the mind.

Plutarch (*Mor.* 686 c-d) wrote that taking pleasure in the lingering smell of cooking was not the characteristic of a free-born man, and held contempt for those who were too fervent about minor pleasures (*Mor.* 1094 c). Gowers suggests that this bias, which is common amongst philosophers, could have affected the transmission of classical texts (Gowers, 1993, p.3). In other words, those works which concerned the simple joys of food and cooking may have largely been lost, as they were deemed unimportant. Although we do have surviving literature describing food and consumption, there are no candid descriptions of what the typical people in Roman Italy would have eaten. Instead, we have an upper-class bias of the sources which provide descriptions of extravagant meals and satirical dinner parties (Gowers, 1993, p.7), with little to no mention of the lives of common people. How then are we to determine what the poor inhabitants of Roman Italy ate, and how they experienced food? Three methods may assist in this pursuit. First, we can look to the past and identify the wild plants present in Roman Italy, as well as analyse the bones of the people living there to see what they consumed. Second, we can look to present-day poor Italians to see what their relationship to food looks like. Third, we may use experimental archaeology to fill in the gaps in our knowledge. This paper introduces these paths, exploring the archaeological data above, and ethnographical evidence. My aim is to provide greater distinction to our understanding of how diets may have varied among social classes during Roman antiquity, most predominantly as regards to diet among the poorer classes in Roman Italy, and to show that wild and cultivated plants played a more important role in these diets than modern scholarship suggests.

> To get a better idea of how people in antiquity lived, I believe we must use all of our senses. We have to see the colours of the ingredients, smell them cooking, hear the crackling of the fire, feel the warmth of the food in a homemade bowl, and taste the final product; all the while imagining that you are in their time. There is something ingrained in us that

Food for the Poor in Roman Italy: Ingredients

There was a large variety of food available to people in Roman Italy because of the long growing season, and even more variety as the empire expanded in size and began to import ingredients and cultivate new species. Evidence of these foods can be found in archaeological remains, literature, and iconography, though my attention is focused primarily on archaeological finds to reduce elite biases of texts. Archaeology has its own biases of course, and no reconstruction will be perfectly accurate, but the potential that lies in an ever-growing archaeological dataset deserves the greater focus of this paper. This section serves to provide the reader with background on the types of food that would have been accessible for the poor, first by looking at archaeological evidence of material remains, and then by exploring the possible importance of wild and cultivated foods.

Archaeological Evidence

makes working with one's hands, and producing something from nothing, that has been missing from our lives, and we are taking back those skills that are in our ancestral memory, and in our bones.

Archaeological finds can consist of preserved seeds, pollen grains, and charred plant remains from cooking. Animal bones can tell us which animals were eaten, and how frequently. Isotopic studies of human bones can determine the proportion of vegetation, terrestrial meat, and aquatic organisms consumed. According to archeological and literary evidence, meat was a small component of the Mediterranean diet overall (Prowse *et al.*, 2005, p.4), and smaller still for the poor. Consumption of fish was not common in the Roman world overall, but occurred more frequently in coastal towns such as Portus Romae, and in the elite circles of society (Prowse *et al.*, 2005, p.4). For these reasons, I will leave meat consumption out of this paper to concentrate on the most common foods in the diet of the poor. Within the archaeological finds for plants, we can find both imported species, and species grown locally. As the poor have to utilise what they can obtain cheaply or gratis, imported foods would not likely have been part of their diets. We thus have to focus on native, and wild vegetation, and those species in particular which were widely cultivated in Roman Italy. I will first look at some isotopic studies of human bones to detail the proportion of the different food groups consumed, and then discuss which specific foods would have made their way into the diets of the poor in Roman Italy.

Isotopic studies have only been utilized in classical archaeology fairly recently, but they are helping us to better understand diets in a revolutionary way. Stable isotopic values from bone are directly correlated to an average of dietary composition of an individual, covering a period of approximately 10 to 15 years prior to death (Craig *et al.*, 2009, p.573). Carbon isotope values (δ13C) can distinguish between the consumption of marine foods (13C enriched) and terrestrial foods (13C depleted), and between C4 plants (13C enriched) and C3 plants (13C depleted) (Craig *et al.*, 2009, p.573). Nitrogen isotopic values (δ15N) increase from three to five percent with each increasing tropic level, so can distinguish between plant-rich and animal-rich diets, as well as the consumption of high trophic level fish (Craig *et al.*, 2009, p.573). Isotopic studies cannot distinguish between the diets of rich and poor, but by analysing the stable isotope composition of the human bones, we can determine the ratio of the types of food consumed by an individual (Prowse *et. al.*, 2005, p.5), and, through comparative work, more general subsets of populations.

A study carried out by Pate *et al.* (2016) sought to determine the diets of residents of Pompeii in the first century CE by examining the remains of 31 individuals (12 males and 19 females) found in the streets, rooms of houses, and villas (Pate *et al.,* 2016, p.128). Although we cannot be sure of the status of these individuals, they were selected at random from different locations, so as not to bias the results. Results from this study suggest an omnivorous diet dominated by C3 plants (such as wheat, barley, and various vegetables and fruits), meat from animals, which ate these plants, and supplemented by marine protein (Pate *et al.,* 2016,

p.130). The diets at Pompeii are similar to Greek colonies on the coasts of southern Italy, as indicated by previous palaeodietary studies, but included more marine protein (Pate *et al.,* 2016, p. 130). However, the mean δ15N values were lower than those in southern Italy which may suggest the residents of Pompeii were eating lower quantities of animal protein, or marine foods from lower tropic levels such as garum (Pate *et al.,* 2016, p. 130). An isotopic study from the southern Roman coastal site of Velia, dated to the first to second centuries CE, sought to analyse collagen from 117 adults in order to determine diet (Craig *et.al*., 2009, p.572). The majority of this sample was found to have a diet consistent with those at Pompeii: high consumption of cereal and other C3 plants, variable meat consumption, and minor fish consumption (Craig *et.al*., 2009, *p.579*).

Another study done at Isola Sacra near Rome, comprised of individuals living between the first to third centuries CE had slightly different results. The people who were buried here were involved with maritime trade at Portus Romae, and had a higher presence of marine foods in their diets than the previous two examples, perhaps due to their very close proximity to the water (Prowse *et. al*., 2005, p.11). The authors also note a possible elite bias in the sampling, as there were more terrestrial meats consumed (Prowse *et. al*., 2005, p.11). There are many more isotopic studies available to examine, but for the purpose of this paper, these three are all that I need to demonstrate that diets can vary greatly from place to place during the Roman period, and that the overall trend is a diet high in plants and grains.

There is abundant archaeobotanical evidence regarding what ancient people from Roman Italy consumed, and these mostly come in the form of carbonized or mineralized plant matter, and pollen samples. There were many species of grain growing in Roman Italy, some of them wild, and some of them cultivated. A perennial species of rye, *Secale montanum,* and 15 annual species of oat are native to the Mediterranean and were cultivated in the Roman times (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.77-78) Some important introduced species cultivated in Roman times include free-threshing wheats such as durum wheat and common wheat (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.62), hulled wheats such as emmer and einkorn (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.62), spelt, barley, broomcorn millet (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, pp. 57, 67-68, 83,85), and latecomers such as sorghum and rice, largely unknown until the Roman times (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, pp.89,91). The consumption of cereals dominate our sources, and they were undoubtedly important to the Romans, however, it is my contention that more attention needs to be paid to non-cereal foods in order to get a more complete picture of the ancient Mediterranean diet.

An archaeobotanical dataset referenced by Banducci includes condiments, fruits, nuts, and vegetables found in Italy, and ranks them according to how common or rare they were (Banducci, 2018, p.183). The most common finds were the species grown locally, and found abundantly, likely meaning they would have been available to the poor (Banducci, 2018, p.183). In Pompeii, remains of olive, grape, walnut, hazelnut, pomegranate, and poppy seeds

were recovered from the fourth to second century BCE (Banducci, 2018, p.183). After the first century BCE we see additions of apple, peach, pine nut, and almond (Banducci, 2018, p.183). The most important legumes from the Copper Age through to the Roman period in Italy were lentils, chickpeas, and green peas, with fava beans being the most pervasive (Banducci, 2018, p.183*;* Anzidei *et. al.*, 2010, p.340). As we can see, ingredients can differ greatly based on region and time period. All of the above-mentioned vegetables, fruits, nuts, pulses, legumes, and grains are good contenders for possible staple foods of the plebeian diet due to their pervasiveness, and local accessibility.

In regard to taste, and how food would have been flavoured, the most abundant condiments were coriander, celery, and dill (Banducci, 2018, p.133). Pepper, a rare condiment which was imported from India, and most likely only available to the wealthiest members of society, was featured in almost every recipe attributed to Apicius (Banducci, 2018, p.186). It is quite common for our surviving Latin recipes, written by elite members of society, to have daring or unusual flavour combinations. These recipes often feature sweet and bitter flavours all at once (Banducci, 2018, p.186), and it is likely that these rare flavours would have been experienced by very few people, while the rest of the population perhaps did not even know of their existence (Banducci, 2018, pp.193-194). To summarise these findings, Table 1 shows some of the major and minor dietary components of people in Roman Italy using data compiled from the works of Banducci, and Zohary and Hopf, though I excluded cereals so that we can focus on the other types of vegetation not commonly talked about in our sources.

Species	Prevalence	Locality
Coriander	abundant	cultivated
Celery	abundant	wild
Dill	abundant	wild
Cumin	rare	cultivated
Black Pepper	rare	imported
Grape	abundant	wild
Fig	abundant	wild
Olive	medium	wild
Apple	abundant	cultivated
Plum	abundant	wild
Pear	medium	wild
Apricot	rare	cultivated
Pomegranate	rare	cultivated
Turnip	medium	wild
Beet	rare	wild
Leek	rare	wild

Garlic	rare	cultivated
Cabbage	rare	wild
Lentil	abundant	wild
Chickpea	rare	cultivated
Fava Bean	abundant	wild (perhaps)

TABLE 1. SOME MAJOR AND MINOR COMPONENTS OF THE DIET IN ROMAN ITALY

The prevalence of these species shown in the second column of Table 1 indicates how frequently they are found in the archaeological record, which is not necessarily correlated to how frequently it was grown, but representative of how well the plant is preserved post-deposition. The third column is representative of how the plant was acquired and thus how accessible it was. The combination of these attributes can tell us how likely it was for any given food to be included in the diets of the poor. Pepper for example was rarely found in the archaeological record, imported, and thus expensive, so would not likely have been consumed by the poor. Grape on the other hand was frequently found in the archaeological record, and was growing wild, so was more likely to be included in their diets.

Archaeological records, as important as they may be, cannot tell us everything we need to know about this subject. To get a better idea of what the diet of the poor in Roman Italy looked like, we must also examine ancient literary sources, and dietary patterns and behaviours among relatively 'underprivileged' modern Italians. This is not to say that there is a direct parallel between ancient Italians and Italians today, but important information may be gleaned from comparing the diets, habits, and connections of foodstuffs of these two groups, as they are living in the same ecological and geographic landscapes. Especially regarding wild plant resources, there may be some connections between past and present. I will therefore move on the ethnographical components of this paper.

Importance of Wild and Cultivated Vegetables, Legumes, and Pulses

Cereals were very important in the Roman Empire, and this is apparent by the introduction of the *frumentatio,* which was a grain distribution system used to ensure that all Romans would be able to meet their basic nutritional needs. However, Gaius Gracchus' *frumentatio* introduced in 123 BCE required an initial payment of six and one-third asses per *modius* of grain, equivalent to approximately one and a half sesterces (Garnsey, 1998, p.237). It was five times that amount to receive the actual handout (Garnsey, 1998, p.237). From this time until 58 BCE, when the law of Publius Clodius Pulcher abolished the cost, the lowest socioeconomic classes would not have been able to afford the *frumentatio,* and would have had to go without (Garnsey, 1998, p.237). Even though the grain began to be handed out for free, the grain was un-milled, and thus required processing in order to be edible (Garnsey, 1998, p.237). If the poorest Romans did not have access to grinding tools or baking facilities then they would have had to pay someone for these services, though Garnsey points out that

communal milling may have been an option (Garnsey, 1998, p.237). Baking costs would also have to be met, unless they were content with *puls* rather than bread (Garnsey, 1998, p.237). Professional bakers were available in Roman times, but sources like Pliny suggest that public ovens may have been an option as well (*NH.* 18.107). Evidence of shared olive presses where poor farmers could bring crops for processing, with the possibility of renting out equipment were found in recent excavations in the Roman Peasant Project (MacKinnon, 2019). This is very promising evidence to add to the theory of communal processing in antiquity, and something that needs further investigation and publication.

As we can see, cereals were probably more difficult to come by, to process, and to make into something easily edible. It seems much more likely that the poor would have had to make use of vegetation that was easier and cheaper to obtain and process. The consumption of high levels of C3 plants are evident by the isotopic studies done on the bones of individuals from Roman Italy; however, we do not know what proportion of this was made up of cereals, and what was fulfilled by other vegetation. An underrepresented aspect of dietary studies is that of the importance of wild and cultivated vegetables, legumes, and pulses in the diets of the poor, and I suspect that they may have depended more heavily on these than our sources suggest.

A study from 2014 presented new archaeobotanical data from six sites in Bronze Age Sardinia, with aims to document the importance of cultivated and wild plants. Within the remains recovered, there were four taxa of legumes represented, and 27 taxa of wild plants such as figs, grapes, juniper, olive, myrtle, and elderberry (Ucchesu et.al., 2014, p.351). These wild plants provided the protein, minerals, sugars, and vitamins (Ucchesu et.al., 2014, p.351), not otherwise provided by grains. They were abundant, reliable, easy to collect, and store, and though before the time period that this research is concerned with, these plants were abundant in mainland Italy, and we can see how they could potentially have been important food resources for the poor.

Several writers make mention of wild plants and cultivated gardens, and though some people in antiquity were capable of buying their produce from the markets, many would have practiced foraging and growing plants of their own. These insights can help us to understand the relationship that people in Roman Italy had with plants. In Pliny's *Natural History,* he goes through numerous examples of *herbae sponte nascentes* (the weeds which grow) used by other peoples throughout the world. However, when he mentions his own people, he says that many do not know strawberry, wild vine, butcher's broom, samphire, hydrangea, or French asparagus in Italy (Plin. *NH* 21.86). This may be a commentary on the elite faction of the population who buy primarily from the market, or do not venture to the countryside, as anyone living close enough to a forest or meadow would undoubtedly know all of these wild Italian plants. Cato (149.2), when describing the sale of winter pasture rights, says that greens, asparagus shoots, and firewood belong to the owner, though the land was sold for someone

else to pasture. Including greens and asparagus with other natural resources is proof that they were also of this category, and that it was typical to collect these wild plants for food (Frayn, 1975, p.33). Columella (11.3.54; 12.8.3) describes the caper plant being found growing on deserted fields, and documents how to harvest and prepare pepperwort, and savory, among other things. He uses the word *compertam,* which is to discover, or find, suggesting that these were growing in the wild. Palladius (11.4) writes about transplanting wild radish to cultivated pots, and though this could mean transplanting within the confines of one's own garden; the word *transferre* is used by Pliny to describe moving a wild plant to cultivation (*NH* 19.23) so it may be the same meaning here.

Pliny (*NH* 19.21) says that in the city of Rome, a poor man's field was a garden, and that ordinary people got their market produce from their own plots. As for the amount of land that the poorest gardener would have been allotted, between two and seven *iugera* would have been common (Frayn, 1974, p.15). According to Livy (6.36.7-11), in the fourth century BCE, the plebeians were allotted two *iugera,* which would have been scarcely enough for a dwelling and burial place (Frayn, 1974, p.15). In 367 BCE this amount was increased to seven *iugera,* and to compare, legionaries received thirty *iugera,* and *equites* received sixty, the latter being considered exceptionally large (Frayn, 1974, p.15). Thus, within the city, the only option for a poor person was to grow their produce in a garden, which may have been very small, whereas poor people who lived outside of Rome may have been able to utilise much larger areas. The urban poor may have transplanted wild varieties in their gardens so that they had nearer access, whereas the rural poor had opportunities for more frequent wild foraging.

These agricultural and horticultural writers do not suggest that these practices were the ways of past generations, but offered as a current, and perhaps common way of cultivating or gathering plants from the wild (Frayn, 1975, p.36). One really has to dig through the sources, which were all written by members of the elite, to gain knowledge about wild and cultivated plants, as it was not a necessity for them to forage for food to survive. Given the ancient evidence that survives, we can see that even in the upper class, people had knowledge of picking and growing plants, so I think that it is very likely that poor, who needed this knowledge more readily, would have used wild and cultivated plants extensively in their diets.

The importance of wild plants to the poor of Roman Italy may be argued further when one considers the use of these resources among modern cultures in Italy. Wild plants, which includes both native and naturalised taxa, have been utilised in the Mediterranean diet for millennia, and recent literature has begun to focus on its importance in the past and in present day culture (Geraci *et al.,* 2018, p.2). *Cucina povera* (poor kitchen), is an Italian phrase that is used today and in yesteryears to describe simple, rural cooking made from locally available ingredients. In Johns' book regarding Italian culinary tradition, she tells us about Virio Neri, the *calzolaio* (cobbler) of Montepulciano, who swoons when he talks about *cucina*

povera. Neri has such positive memories, yet he grew up with hunger and poverty. Johns suggests maybe the desire made everything taste better, or perhaps the simple, pure flavours of his childhood are not easy to find anymore (Johns, 2011, p.3). In Sicily, wild vegetables still play a key part in lunch or dinner meals or for special holiday preparations (Geraci *et al.*, 2018, p.17). *Beta vulgaris* (beet) leaves are served with fava bean puree in the autumn, wild thistles are fried in batter on Christmas night, and the shoots of *Asphodeline lutea* are added to omelettes in spring (Geraci *et al.*, 2018, p.17).

If the poor were, by chance, able to afford to buy some food, Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices is a good source to look at to see what would have been the most affordable things to buy. For cereals, emmer and oats were the most inexpensive at 30 *denarii* per *kastrensis modius* (a double bushel) followed by millet at 50, and barley and rye at 60 (Erim and Reynolds, 1973, pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, p.11). Fava beans were the cheapest legume and protein source overall, at 60 *denarii* per *kastrensis modius* (Erim and Reynolds, 1973, pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, p.11). As far as alcohol goes, one *sextarius* (a pint) of ordinary wine was eight *denarii,* and a *sextarius* of barley beer was only two *denarii* (Erim and Reynolds, 1973*,* pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, p.12). The cheapest oil was radish seed oil at eight *denarii* per *sextarius,* ordinary olive oil was 12 *denarii,* and vinegar was six *denarii* (Erim and Reynolds, 1973*,* pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, p.12). Vegetables were relatively inexpensive, with the most affordable things being lettuces, cabbage, beets, leeks, radishes, onions, and gourds, which were all four *denarii* per 10 or so units (Erim and Reynolds, 1973*,* pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, pp.14-16). Some of the most inexpensive fruits were apples, plums, and quinces and priced the same as the vegetables above (Erim and Reynolds, 1973*,* pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, pp.14-16). I will not go into wages for now, though they are listed in the Edict as well, for my main focus is on the easiest to obtain wild and cultivated foods. This list does give us a good idea of the sorts of things that were the cheapest to afford if one was able to do so.

We now have a clearer picture of what sorts of grains, fruits, vegetables, and pulses would have been accessible to poor individuals in the Roman period, as well as an idea of how they would have obtained these foods, whether it be the grain *frumentatio,* the market, wild harvesting and foraging, or garden cultivation. There are many more plants that could have been utilised in the diet that were not found at the local markets. In this way, it is possible that the rural poor would have had more diversity in their diets than the urban poor if they were foraging for wild plants. In Table 2, we can see the most likely components of the diets of the poor in Roman Italy, based on archaeobotanical evidence, and ancient commentary on plants. The species included are the most likely to have been utilised by the poor because they are either native to Italy, were growing wild in the Roman era, or are among the most affordable listed on Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices.

Condiments	Fruits	Vegetables	Legumes/Pulses	Cereals
Celery	Grape	Turnip	Lentil	Emmer

Dill	Fig	Beet	Fava Bean	Oat
Pepperwort	Olive	Leek		Rye
Savory	Plum	Cabbage		
	Pear	Asparagus		
	Strawberry	Radish		
	Caper	Lettuce		
	Apple	Onion		
	Quince	Gourd		

TABLE 2. THE MOST LIKELY COMPONENTS OF THE DIETS OF THE POOR IN ROMAN ITALY

Experimental Archaeology: Food of the Poor in Roman Italy

As with anyone, on a daily basis, the poor would have needed food. What ingredients then could they have sourced that would have been cost effective, and locally obtained? In this section I attempt to recreate some simple recipes written by Cato and Apicius, that I believe are good examples of what the poor in Roman Italy may have eaten. For all of these recipes, I used elements that would have been grown locally, whether cultivated or found wild, as access to these ingredients would have been key to survival. They are made as genuinely as possible to remain true to the times in which they were created. For that reason, I omitted any exotic or imported ingredients in the ancient recipes I chose, as these would not have been accessible to the very poor. The main component of this part of my research agenda was growing bottle gourd for one of the recipes by seed, and I used Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* as a guide. I had to start them very early to account for Winnipeg's short growing season, trim the vines to produce more flowers, and pollinate the flowers by hand when they opened at night to ensure that they would produce fruit. These recreations are not to say that this is precisely what the poor in Roman Italy would have eaten, but instead, I am laying out some possibilities, and attempting to explore the underrepresented aspects of poor culture using the textual and archaeological information available.

Today, cooking is more like a science than an art. Until a generation or so ago, children learned to measure ingredients by eye, and mixed them until they felt, looked, or tasted right (Leon, 1943, p.214). Measuring something by a handful, or bucket, would have been comprehensible in Cato's days, and even in the times of my grandparents, though this system of measurement would be too imprecise for many people living now (Leon, 1943, p.214). With written recipes in the ancient world, ingredients are often measured by weight, not unlike modern European recipes (Leon, 1943, p.214), or not given any indication of measurement at all, like the recipes that I chose. Most of the recipes in this section are attributed to Apicius, whose identity we do not positively know, but who is probably one of two Apicii living between 100 BCE and 40 CE (Starr, 2009, p.397). Both of them had a reputation of being well acquainted with food (Starr, 2009, p.397); however, I did not choose the recipes because

either Apicius was poor, but because his recipes are neatly organised, and most are very simple. I selected the simplest recipes, and of those, narrowed them down to the ones that included the most locally grown and accessible ingredients. These were more likely to be foods consumed by the poor. As mentioned earlier, if a recipe included a rare, exotic, or imported ingredient, I omitted it from the recipe entirely.

Nearly every modern source I looked at which mentioned wine, labeled it as a luxury item for the rich (Prowse *et al.*, 2005, p.4), but I disagree with that classification. As we saw earlier in Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices, wine was not extraordinarily expensive (Erim and Reynolds, 1973, pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, p.12), and beer was even cheaper. A more recent example is from my own family. My Great Grandfather was from Croatia, not far from Italy, and like the rest of my family, he was very poor. Yet, back in the old country, families always found a way to make wine, or other types of alcohol. It was always on hand. He grew potatoes here in Winnipeg and made wine from them, and also made another more traditional wine from early, small, dark grapes that grow wild here. He did all of this with very little money, very unsophisticated equipment, and in his shed. As I have mentioned earlier, grapes were growing wild in Roman Italy, and if they grew on public land, they may have been accessible for the making of wine, which need not be an overly complicated process. Therefore, I have decided to keep wine in the recipes which follow.

Oil has been said to be an ingredient for the rich as well, but referring back to Diocletian's Edict again, radish seed oil was even less expensive than wine (Erim and Reynolds, 1973, pp.101-104; Kropff, 2016, p.12). Additionally, communal milling and oil pressing may well have been as common as it is today in Italy, and as noted, there was a recent discovery of olive presses that may have been used in this way. Olives and other oil producing plants such as flax, poppy, radish, and sesame were accessible, and growing wild in Roman Italy (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, pp.125-145), and some of the poor may have had the land to grow these things and press them for oil, so I decided to keep oil in these recipes as well.

As for the cooking part, the recipes were translated by me for the most part, but I also relied on the translation by Vehling as a verification for my own translations, or as a source for the Vulgar Latin words I was unfamiliar with. Making these recipes coincided with many power outages due to a snowstorm, so I fashioned a simple fire pit in my yard from bricks and garden stones (See Figure 1). It was a very efficient way to cook, and easy to manage the fire from the front. It seemed the simplest, and most genuine way I could cook food over fire for these 2,000-year-old recipes. The pan I used was a heavy, cast iron model coated with ceramic- not exactly what they would have used in antiquity, but the closest I could get to an earthenware pot.



Pulmentarium ad Ventrem (Vegetable Dinner, easily digested) Apicius, *De re Coquinaria* 3.2.1
(See Figure 2)

The ingredients for this recipe are beets, leeks, pepper, cumin, broth, and must. Beets are not found frequently in Italy's archaeological record, but are native to the area (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.200). The same can be said for leeks (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.195). Remains of pepper and cumin are both rarely found as well, but pepper was imported, and cumin was cultivated locally (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.206). I therefore decided to keep cumin in the recipe, but omit pepper. Broth would have been easy to make, and must made from local grapes would have been accessible to lower social classes. The recipe mentions to add must to sweeten the dish, but I realised after I had cooked everything, that the beets were already sufficiently sweet, so it was excessive. Either Apicius wanted this recipe to taste as a dessert should, or the beets which he was consuming were not as sweet as the ones which I grew.



Gustum de Cucurbitas (Taste of the Gourd) Apicius, *De re coquinaria* 3.4.1
(See Figure 3)

The ingredients for this recipe are bottle gourd, cumin, pepper, silphium, rue, stock, vinegar, and condensed wine. Remains of bottle gourd are rarely found from Italy, but it was grown locally, as discussed in the previous section. I kept cumin and omitted pepper for the reasons mentioned in the last recipe. Silphium and rue would have been found locally as well (Gowers, 1993, p.183), but I could not source them fresh, so I omitted silphium from the recipe, and replaced rue with another bitter herb, wormwood. Stock, vinegar, and condensed wine would have been relatively easy to access, and made with local ingredients, so I included all of these. Pliny (*NH* 19.24.71) says that though the rind of the bottle gourd is tender when the fruit is green, it is always peeled off when used for food, so I did peel the gourd first. Apicius says that harder bottle gourds should be boiled first to make them more palatable, but my gourd was fresh and soft, so I omitted this step. It is then to be cut up and placed into a baking dish. I used a ceramic coated cast iron pan. He says to add pepper, silphium, rue and cumin to a mortar. It is then to be mixed with stock, vinegar, condensed wine, and poured over the gourd. I omitted silphium, rue, and pepper, adding wormwood instead. It is to boil three times, and then be taken from the fire. The dish was done after about 20 minutes of cooking. It smelled fantastic, and the taste was okay. It was a touch bitter for my liking, so if I were to make this again, I would use less wormwood, considering gourd is already bitter itself. Silphium is even more bitter than

wormwood, so if I had used it, I think it would have been unbearably bitter to eat, and the smell would not have been pleasant either. Anything else salty, sweet, or bitter added as a garnish would have overloaded the senses. The saltiness of the vinegar, and sweetness of the wine with a touch of cumin was very nice, yet it was still simple.



Patina de Persicis (Dish of Peaches) Apicius, *De re coquinaria* 4.2.34
(See Figure 4)

The ingredients in this recipe are peaches, and oil, along with a cumin infused wine. Translation was difficult for this recipe, as *Persicis* is referring to something Persian, and *Persica* means peach. One commentator thought it may have referred to a Persian fish (Starr, 2009, p.2467), but the recipe is in the fruit section, placed between a recipe for apples, and one for pears, and the instructions read like they are for a fruit more than a fish, so the translator went with peach (Vehling, 1977, p.2467). The peach was not cultivated in Rome until the first century CE, but became a valued fruit crop in the Mediterranean soon after (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.182). As it was a rare fruit crop, and probably only found in the gardens of the elite, it is doubtful that poorer people in Roman Italy would have utilised it in cooking. For that reason, I used some large plums that had a similar texture and hardness as a ripe peach, as plums were growing wild in Roman Italy (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.180). The rest of the ingredients were used for the reasons described previously. The fruit is supposed to be cut, stewed, and served with a bit of oil, along with some cumin infused wine. The recipe did not take more than five minutes to make, and it was simple enough to be convincing as a dessert for the poor. The taste of the cumin contrasted with the sweet plums was very enjoyable, and I could imagine that stewing the plums in cumin infused wine would have been even better.



Pultes Julianae (Julian Meal Mush) Apicius, *De re coquinaria* 5.1.1
(See Figure 5)

The ingredients in this recipe are spelt, oil, pepper, lovage, fennel seed, broth, wine, brains, and meat. As I only had access to ground spelt, I used whole barley instead. Barley was known as a poor man's food and grew almost anywhere (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.62), so it was a good substitute anyways. *Puls* is meant to be a simple porridge, perhaps eaten by people in Roman Italy before the use of bread, or as alternative to bread if grain milling or baking was not an option

(Garnsey, 1998, p.237). Apicius probably added meats and rare spices to make it appealing to the rich, and perhaps a bit jokingly, as the recipe was named after Emperor Julian, who was a vegetarian (Starr, 2009, p.2707). As meat was not a staple for poor Romans, it was omitted, along with imported pepper. Lovage was not available fresh at the time that I made this, so I omitted it, but kept everything else. The grain is cleaned well, soaked, and cooked. When it was cooked, I added oil and thinned it down as instructed. The next part of the recipe deals with the meat and brains, so I skipped that and just added the remaining broth, wine, and fennel. This is one of the more simple recipes, and it was very good without being overly complicated. It is a filling, and flavourful meal, which was very likely eaten by the poor in Italy.



Conchicla cum Faba (beans in the pod) Apicius, *De re coquinaria* 5.4.1
(See Figure 6)

Ingredients for this recipe are fresh beans in a pod (presumably fava beans), pepper, lovage, cumin, green coriander, broth, wine, and oil. Fava beans were found locally, and have been abundant in the archaeological record for the Roman period (Banducci, 2018, p.133). Since it was too late to obtain fresh fava beans in the pod, I used shelled fava beans and immature green beans in a pod in order to get a sense of both flavours. Pepper was omitted, and lovage was out of season for acquiring fresh, so I omitted that as well. Cumin was cultivated at the time, and green coriander (cilantro) grew wild (Banducci, 2018, p.133), so I kept those. For reasons stated above, I kept wine, broth, and oil. Apicius writes to cook the green beans, so I just simmered them in a bit of water until bright green. Next the cumin, and cilantro were crushed in a mortar and pestle, and wine and broth were added to make a sauce, as per instructions. This was then added to the green beans in the saucepan with the fava beans, and some oil, and heated until hot. This was definitely the best tasting and most flavourful recipe, made with only a few simple ingredients.



Panem Depsticivm sic Facito (kneaded bread made thusly) Cato, *De Agricultura 74*
(See Figure 7)

Ingredients for this recipe are flour, and water. I chose spelt flour to be used in this recipe, since it was abundantly found in Roman Italy (Zohary and Hopf, 2000, p.57), and fairly easy to come upon in present day. Cato either left salt out of the recipe because he did not want it to contain salt, or because it

was implied that salt should be added to bread, but nevertheless, I omitted it. Cato says to wash hands and mortar. Add flour to a mixing bowl, and add water to flour gradually. I started by making a small ball of dough with the flour and some room temperature water. He then says to work well, and shape. I kneaded the dough for a couple of minutes, formed into a small loaf, and put into a heavy ceramic pot with a lid. Cato writes that it should be baked in a crock, presumably on a hearth, and under hot embers for even cooking. Instead, I baked it for 40 minutes at 180 degrees Celsius in my oven. I thought the temperature and the even heating would be a good attempt at accuracy. After 40 minutes, the outside looked fine, but the inside was not yet cooked, so I put it in for another 40 minutes, checking occasionally. After 80 minutes total cooking time, it turned out great- crunchy on the outside, soft on the inside, nutty, fragrant, and dense. This recipe, featuring two relatively easy to acquire ingredients, would have been inexpensive to make, and is very hardy and rich in nutrients, making it a perfect staple food for poor households if they had access to a flour mill.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Isotopic studies have revealed that the people of Roman Italy were primarily vegetarian. Vegetables, legumes, and pulses are mentioned far less in our ancient sources than cereals are, and we thus have a skewed vision of what the diet of individuals from Roman Italy looked like, and in particular what the poor would have eaten. Not only is this an issue with written sources, but also archaeobotanical data. Cereals dominate our records, but I do not think this is because they were used more frequently, but because they are preserved better. Cereals are preserved by desiccation and charring, and are present due to burning (accidental or use as a fuel), and dumping after extracting grains and seeds (Kemp, 2007, p.62). Very little of the cereal plant is actually consumed, so there is a lot of waste for archaeologists to come across, whereas with other plants, the opposite is true. Take carrots for example; both the roots and the greens are edible, leaving behind only very tiny seeds. Additionally, cereals use proportionally more land to grow than other vegetation to get a very small amount of edible product. I believe that this lack of evidence downplays the importance of other vegetation in the diet.

We have seen that there was a great variety of vegetables, fruits, condiments, legumes, and pulses found frequently in the archaeological record, and that many of them were growing in the wild, or were cultivated. These were generally much easier to access than cereals were, as grains require hand-processing, milling, and grinding before they can be used in most cases. The poorer city folks were likely at a disadvantage compared to country-dwellers. The urban poor would have likely had small garden plots in which they could grow some things, and the rest would have had to be obtained from the market. The rural poor on the other hand, may have had larger plots, and would have been closer to public lands from which they could forage wild foods. Agricultural writers suggest this was a fairly common way for people

outside of cities to obtain food, and that a number of species grew wild in Italy. Looking to modern day Italians, we can see that the tradition of eating wild foods is very much still alive, and plays an important role in holiday meals especially. I would suggest that poorer groups maintain strong traditions through time, and this may be even more true for rural populations. This part was not as long as I had wanted it to be, as there was limited information available to me, specifically peer-reviewed material concerning *cucina povera* today in Italy.

As I discovered by cooking recipes from Apicius and Cato, even the simplest recipes yielded plenty of flavour and colour, and contained many essential vitamins and minerals. The typical peasant food staples, *puls* and *panem* were very hardy, nutritious, and the sort of stick-to-your-ribs foods that would have been essential to get one through winter. The fact that these foods were so flavourful and yet simple was not surprising to me, because I am an adherent of *cucina povera;* partially due to necessity, but also because I find joy in old-fashioned, simple foods, just like the *calzolaio* of Montepulciano.

This last section of my paper was the most essential part of my work. To get a better idea of how people in antiquity lived, I believe we must use all of our senses. We have to see the colours of the ingredients, smell them cooking, hear the crackling of the fire, feel the warmth of the food in a homemade bowl, and taste the final product; all the while imagining that you are in their time. There is something ingrained in us that makes working with one's hands, and producing something from nothing, that has been missing from our lives, and we are taking back those skills that are in our ancestral memory, and in our bones.

Having said all of this, there are some things I would like to see more focus on in the future, whether it be by me, or by other academics. First, there need to be more studies concerning gardens, growing space, and utilisation of wild foods for non-Roman (slaves, Latini, Socii, Peregrini, Provinciales) poor in ancient Italy. The vast majority of sources dealing with gardens are concerning those on the grounds of villas owned by the very wealthy. This makes sense, as the homes were grand, and were preserved well in the archaeological record, whereas shabby gardens attached to homes in the city or countryside would have not left as big of an impression. These smaller domiciles also would not have been mentioned as much in literature. On top of that, the homes that belonged to the poor who were not Roman received even less attention, so we have next to nothing concerning their gardens or wild food foraging habits. Second, there needs to be more focus on recreating life as it was known to the people who we are studying. I do think that this type of work makes for more interesting learning, and certainly could give more relevance to one's work. Third, more attention needs to be given to the similarities between modern and ancient food culture, and culture in general. This is something I am very passionate about, and I hope to pursue this very idea in my own further studies. We need to talk to people living now who still possess the skills that the ancients in our sources had, as they are important in our understanding of how and why

certain traditions can continue on for thousands of years, virtually unchanged, in a world which has changed so rapidly. If we can be multi-disciplinary in our approach, and include the passion of living people along with the people who have long passed, why would we not pursue that? I hope that this paper has provided the reader with understanding of the possible diet and practices of the poor in Roman Italy, and illuminated some further pathways for investigation.

Keywords food
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Country Italy

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FIG 1. SIMPLE FIRE PIT (BRITTANY BAUER, 2019)



FIG 2. PULMENTARIUM AD VENTREM (BRITTANY BAUER, 2019)



FIG 3. GUSTUM DE CUCURBITAS (BRITTANY BAUER, 2019)



FIG 4. PATINA DE PERSICIS (BRITTANY BAUER, 2019)



FIG 5. PULTES JULIANAE WITH BOTTLE GOURD BOWL AND SPOON (BRITTANY BAUER, 2019)



FIG 6. CONCHICLA CUM FABA (BRITTANY BAUER, 2019)



FIG 7. PANEM DEPSTICIUM SIC FACITO (BRITTANY BAUER, 2019)