

# COOKING APICIUS



ROMAN RECIPES FOR TODAY

BY

SALLY GRAINGER

PROSPECT BOOKS

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*APICIUS*

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRAS KALDOR



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# **A note on the illustrations**

Andras Kaldor's pictures are based on the mosaic pavements of the Rio Verde Roman villa at San Pedro de Alcántara near Marbella in Spain. These date to the first century ad. In the peristyle or patio there are several decorations relating to food and cookery, such as animals, ovens, bowls, grills, soup dishes and so forth. These are all in black and white tessellae.

# Preface

This new collection of adapted recipes taken from the ancient cookery book known as Apicius was in part inspired by the completion of the recent edition of the Latin text that my husband Dr Christopher Grocock and I have published. In that volume I hope we have managed to translate the Latin in as precise a way as possible, and to solve some of the more common confusions found in the original recipes.

I began reconstructing Roman dishes in the mid-1990s, and in 1996 published with Andrew Dalby *The Classical Cook Book* for the British Museum Press. It seemed entirely appropriate that I should take advantage of the publication of Apicius to select and test a new batch of recipes for the modern cook to follow.

Over the years we have endeavoured to understand these Roman recipes by reconstructing them using authentic equipment and techniques. The translation of the written text is the result of a learning process where we stood in the shoes of the slave-cooks and attempted to prepare the food as they might have done, given the obvious limitations of time and situation. We do not expect that our readers will be willing or able to follow our lead and build their own Roman kitchen, though I am aware that there will be many fellow re-enactors who will, I hope, benefit from my recipes.

The recipes that follow are a selection from Apicius that you will find easy to reproduce in your own kitchen from ingredients that can be sourced with a little effort. I do not include items that are unfamiliar or bizarre such as sterile sow's womb or dormice. There are over 450 recipes in the original text to choose from but many, particularly the sauces, are repetitious both in taste and form, and I have selected only those that appealed to me. There are also a number of large-scale dishes in Apicius that use boned and stuffed lamb, kid or suckling pig, and I have avoided these too. It is possible to interpret these dishes using smaller joints of meat and occasionally I have included one. I have included a section on *gustum*, 'hors-d'œuvre', which includes side-dishes, a section on *mensae primae*, 'main courses', a section on vegetables and side-dishes, and sections on fish and also desserts. I have tried to avoid the more elaborate and expensive foods and to concentrate on the many everyday dishes that are found in Apicius and that represent the



diet of a reasonably financially secure Roman citizen.

The original selection that I made from Apicius for the Classical Cook Book was quite small. Over the years, I added to my repertoire many more recipes which I found appealing, but they were added in a piecemeal fashion. In order to prepare for this book I had to cook Apician recipes day after day. I have always considered Roman food to be underrated, but even I have been pleasantly surprised at new dishes and new tastes that emerged from the testing process. These new recipes have only now come to life for me, and I hope for you, because I was able to learn from the constant repetitive cooking. The difference between a good cook and a really successful one is the repetitive working process that irons out faults and flaws and gives you that sense of confidence in your choices. I hope I have been able to pass on to you that confidence in these recipes. There are a few recipes that I have chosen (seven in fact) that I have already interpreted in the Classical Cook Book but I have revised them here. One or two of them cannot be bettered and are so successful that to miss them out of a book entitled *Cooking Apicius* would have simply been wrong. In the case of others, we have re-interpreted the Latin, and therefore the recipes themselves, and this has led to a re-interpretation of the modern adaptations.

Roman food, and particularly Apician Roman food, has a terrible reputation. Many of the recipes in Apicius have so many spices, herbs and liquids that the food they represent seems, to the untrained eye and palate, to be simply over-done. The consensus among scholars and archaeologists over past decades has been that the spices were there to reflect wealth, not taste, and were chosen by the decadent Roman gourmet for the status they projected rather than their suitability or flavour. But crucially, these modern commentators have not had the requisite training to interpret recipes written by cooks for other cooks to read. For this, in fact, is the true nature of Apicius: a practical handbook of recipes, many written in a kind of shorthand that only another cook could understand. It is therefore a tricky business to turn the recipes in Apicius into successful dishes without acquiring some prior knowledge of the techniques and ingredients. The numerous spices were used with considerable restraint and in fact the very subtlety of their use is easy to misinterpret, and the results of such misinterpretation would support modern criticisms, but with care, the flavours of the various ingredients can be balanced (*temperas*, 'balance', is a recurring instruction), and the results are stunning. We would not criticize the food of the Indian subcontinent for its spicing, nor that of South East Asia or Africa, though the cuisines of these

areas can be just as intoxicating in their use of spices. In Rome, literary tastes developed an appreciation for surprise and complexity of expression and just such an appreciation came to dominate their cuisine. This does not mean that all their food was intensely flavoured; there are numerous recipes for simple and plainly seasoned food in Apicius, something often overlooked. We have defined the collection as a whole not so much as simply 'high status' but more as a cosmopolitan and urban collection of recipes covering a wide section of the population of Rome and her empire.

Thanks are due to the team of tasters who helped us to consume weekly Roman feasts; and to Andrew Dalby for his advice on modern wines and syrups. Christopher Grocock, my husband, deserves especial thanks for his enthusiastic appreciation of all the Roman food he was compelled to eat. Sometimes, in the text which follows, the authorial 'I' slips into 'we'. This is intentional, for many of the conclusions have been arrived at jointly with my husband in the course of working on our edition of Apicius.

SALLY GRAINGER, 2006



# Introduction

## Historical background

I believe the recipes in Apicius were actually read and used by slave-cooks rather than read by any gourmet. It is a practical handbook, a 'blue-collar' text we might say, and consequently there is some confusion over the title and the author of the book. There are many references in ancient sources to a notorious gourmet called Marcus Gavius Apicius (ad 14–37). He is famous for two things in particular: sailing around the Mediterranean looking for the largest prawns, and for dying in style by poisoning his last banquet; he was certainly no cook. Cooks were skilled slaves who laboured to produce, while the élite consumed the fruits of that labour. There was a complete separation of the production and consumption of high-status food in the Roman world. What then (if anything) has this man to do with the collection of recipes which appears to bear his name? In studying this text we have come to the conclusion that, apart from the few recipes that seem to be named after him, there may actually be little direct connection at all. We believe that the name Apicius became associated with gourmet food through Apicius' reputation. Later it became associated with the food itself and the cooks who prepared it, and ultimately came to refer to the collection that contained those recipes. In reality, Apicius is the title of a book rather than a reference to its author, though later commentators didn't necessarily understand this and assumed that the name referred to a single individual. This is why I put the title in italics to distinguish it from the man Apicius himself. We discuss this in detail in our scholarly edition, but in summary the following points need to borne in mind.

## Latin style

Apicius the gourmet would have been ashamed of the Latin used in the recipes, to say the least. He would have been a member of the educated ruling élite in the first century ad and would almost certainly have written in the polished style familiar from classical Latin. The Apicius text is written in what we have called 'blue-collar' Latin, and what is usually termed 'Vulgar Latin', the Latin of the street and work-place rather than the study and poetry

reading.

## Context

Many ancient literary works about food provide not so much instruction about how to prepare a dish, but instead emphasis on the origins and qualities of the various ingredients. The knowledge that these gourmet authors had was theoretical rather than practical and the recipes that these books contained were obtained from the cooks. The Apicius text has no emphasis on the source or even identity of ingredients and there is no narrative or general information as we might expect if the text had been read by gourmets. It simply would not satisfy an educated Roman looking for information about the food he could expect to eat.

## 'Author's voice'

There is no author's voice in Apicius. There is also, crucially, no compiler's voice either. We simply do not hear at all from any of the cooks as individuals, as we might expect had the book been written, even in part, by a confident and successful ex-slave cook. We might also expect to hear from someone who, as a controlling hand, may have compiled the book, but we hear nothing. This has led us to believe that Apicius was not compiled by a single hand, but that it grew 'organically' from a small original collection into its final form as recipes were added haphazardly in the kitchen. The person responsible for transmitting the book was a disinterested scribe rather than a compiler. The existence of this scribe explains many of the inadequacies of the text: the repetitions, the confusions over the titles of the recipes and the general lack of precision.

In summary, then, Apicius was written from the perspective of the producer of meals, not the consumer. The gourmet Apicius might well have enjoyed eating (some of) these dishes, and describing them in purple terms, but he certainly was not the author of the Apicius text.

## Dining in Rome

Here I want to give you a brief description of the daily habits of an urban Roman of secure financial means so that you can place the recipes in context and understand what was being eaten and when. There are many reference books which can give you a more detailed account of daily life in Rome and I

have included a brief bibliography in the back if you want to read more detail.

The Apician recipe book existed and was used in a hot Mediterranean environment. Italy, North Africa, Spain, Greece and Turkey was its sphere of influence. The Roman day in this Mediterranean world would have been somewhat different from the span of the working day in northern Europe and particularly in Britain. The weather and the amount of daylight hours would have surely altered the traditional daily routine and also the kinds of foods on offer. In northern regions even the foods available to those wealthy enough to buy from traders would have been very different from the fresh produce in Italy. We know that the most wealthy Romans living in Britain would have been able to control such things as temperature and light as well as being able to purchase the very best imports so that they could pretend they were still in Italy, but they could never entirely deny their geography. The recipes in Apicius are not British and should not be transferred directly to a British context without taking account of the differences. Slave-cooks in Britain may well have used similar recipes but there is no direct evidence that they did and certainly no evidence that these recipes had a measurable effect on our culinary heritage. Such influence that Roman food had on that came much later, through the international medieval cuisine that subsequently developed from Roman food and spread across Europe in the late Middle Ages.

Our context, then, is Rome. We will not think in terms of the excessively rich, who (according to the poets) indulged in the debauched and gluttonous banquets of the Roman imperial court. Rather we should consider the audience for Apicius to be the ordinary well-to-do Roman knights, businessmen and traders of all kinds, land owners and skilled craftsmen and even, occasionally, the more successful members of the proletariat. The day begins at dawn and the average Roman dresses with considerable speed, as the process of washing and changing clothes occurs when they visit the baths later in the day. Breakfast is a scratch meal of the barest minimum: water and a piece of bread, or cold left-overs from the night before. Time is at a premium if one is to do the day's labour or social activities in the comfort of the morning's heat rather than the afternoon. The length of the Roman 'hour' fluctuated according to the seasons but, according to Carcopino, it seems the day's labour did not extend beyond seven hours in summer and probably six in winter. For those of secure means, whether through their own labour or through private income from their land, the afternoons were free. Lunch for the non-labouring classes was, as with breakfast, a snatched meal of left-overs, cheese, fruit, bread, simple single items involving the minimum of

cooking. The whole gourmet experience was confined to the evening meal: the *cena*. We may assume that the labouring classes who needed to keep their energy levels up during the working day may well have consumed considerably greater volume of food at mid-day.

The proletariat of Rome – traders, craftsmen, skilled labourers, retailers of all kinds as well as the unskilled labouring masses – lived in the urban sprawl in *insula*, flats constructed of wood above the stone-and brick-built houses and businesses on the ground floor. The higher up you lived, the poorer you were, and the less likely you would have access to cooking facilities. Street food, or to be precise ‘fast food’, was a common factor in the diet of the proletariat. Therefore we can imagine ordinary labourers buying such things as pasties made with a coarse oil-based pastry filled with pulses and mince meat; meatballs; blood sausages as well as offal; white sausages with cooked pulses; and simple *patinae*: the Roman frittata with any amount of meat, fish or vegetables in them. All these were potential lunch items available from street vendors, but also available at home. You will find examples of these dishes in the section ‘Hors d’œuvre and side-dishes’ and also in the section ‘Vegetable side-dishes’.

As the day moves towards the time for dinner, the leisured classes and those now free from labour headed for the baths. Women had already been to their ablutions at mid-day. Wealthy men had private bath houses in their own homes or exclusive clubs but the labouring classes had access to large-scale public bath complexes such as the baths of Caracalla or Diocletian where thousands could engage in the same basic routine. This was to exercise, socialize, bathe and get a massage, change your tunic, possibly shave and get a hair cut, attempt to get a dinner invitation if you didn’t have one, snack on small delicacies and ultimately wander home to a lavish or more humble dinner.

There are many examples in Apicius of food that might be on sale at the baths. We actually have two recipes in Apicius that are specifically designed for after bathing. These are meatballs in a sauce (Apicius 2.2.7) and cuttlefish (Apicius 9.4.3). The Roman fort of Caerleon in south Wales had a bath complex with a vast swimming-pool designed for amphibious training. Archaeologists have found that the drains were blocked with the bones from chicken wings and lamb chops. The marinade for chicken on page 68 would be a suitable sauce to accompany chicken wings. The marinated liver, the stuffed kidneys and any of the meatball recipes are all potential bath-house snacks.

The *cena* itself was a very formal meal with a set number of courses – three – though the number of individual dishes within each course was limitless. The meal always started with a drink, either of honeyed wine, *mulsum* (a mixture of wine and honey rather than a mead), or a *conditum* (a spiced wine generally using pepper but sometimes also dates and saffron). The modern phrase ‘from soup to nuts’ is mirrored in Rome by the term ‘from eggs to nuts’. Eggs typically formed part of the *gustatio*, ‘first course’, along with numerous small appetizers to stimulate the palate. A banquet menu recorded by Macrobius lists amongst many things for the *hors d’œuvre*, oyster patina, fish patina and sow’s udder patina, which suggests that the eggs served at the beginning of the meal could be quite elaborate. Salad, olives, bread, tuna, *isicia* or ‘meatballs’, shellfish of all kinds with dipping sauces are all candidates for the *gustatio*. The *mensae primae*, ‘first tables’ (because the tables were brought in already laid), comprised the impressive main courses. Roasted joints of meat and poultry, whole stuffed piglet, lamb or kid, whole baked fish, more *patinae*, *minutal* or ‘stews’, moray eel, hare, the list is endless, and this book has many examples of both more elaborate and simple main-course dishes.

The best way to imagine a Roman banquet is to think in terms of a Chinese meal. There was a vast array of dishes served in bowls and platters and, we think, the guest often had a small dish or platter to eat from. Food moved from the large communal serving dish to individual dishes and then was eaten with the fingers. Softer foods were eaten with spoons and the guests could also have a knife to cut their own meat from the joint if slave-carvers were not present. Each person would have a relatively small amount of each item on his plate at any one time and the process of consumption was slow and steady, rather than the hurried meal we are used to. In fact, the meal itself could take many hours to complete. The position of the various items on the table seems to be very important, as is the position of the guest on the couch. We even hear of some less important guests, freedmen or hangers-on at the lower end of the couch, failing to get the most desirable foods because they could not reach them. Bearing this in mind, a Roman meal should not resemble the meat and two veg. of modern dining. There should be at least four or more individual *hors d’œuvre* served in separate bowls, with small dishes or plates for each guest to eat off so that they can take from the communal dishes. This is equally true of the main course. The whole roast beast with elaborate decoration would be carved into small pieces by a slave so that each guest only picks up what he needs and



dips the meat into the accompanying sauces, served in little bowls.

The *mensae secundae*, 'second tables' or dessert, comprises fairly simple items such as fruit, nuts and sometimes honey cheesecakes. In Apicius there are few dessert recipes, and this has largely been explained by the fact that baked goods tended to be dealt with in a separate literary form. Apicius is a cook's collection rather than a literary cook book, and this separation of sweet and savoury shouldn't necessarily apply. Recorded menus that have come down to us that give examples of dessert do suggest that single uncooked or unprepared items were the norm. This may be a better explanation of the absence of more complex sweet dishes from Apicius. I have sampled all of the cooked desserts in Apicius and you will find most of them in this book. Serve one with a selection of fruit and nuts to finish your meal.

## How to use this book

The recipes that follow have been tested in my own kitchen using conventional kitchen equipment. There are, however, some essential items that you will need before these dishes can be embarked upon. First you will need a large pestle and mortar, either a replica Roman *mortarium* – if you are lucky enough to get one – or a heavy Chinese stone mortar with a large basin. Many of the recipes benefit from being made in a mortar rather than a food processor. You will find the results much closer to the authentic experience of Roman food, even though you may find the labour involved a little taxing at times. If this is not possible, an electric spice (or coffee) grinder will be useful and, of course, a food processor to replace the mortar. Finally, a small diabetic scale or a digital scale will be useful too.

I have found that the use of spices in Apicius needs particular care. The spices are deployed with subtle restraint to create complex sauces that are not overpowering. When a recipe contains many different spices, none should be used to excess or be allowed to dominate in the finished sauce, but rather a balance of all of them is necessary. Some spices are stronger than others, some are bitter, some sweet, so a balance of equal amounts rarely works. This is particularly so with spices like lovage, which is very bitter and can overpower and spoil a dish very easily. Cumin is ubiquitous and a wonderful spice in its place, but it does need to be kept at bay by the other ingredients if possible. Fish sauce is the magic ingredient that brings everything else into balance and should be used just as we would use salt. Read the section on

special ingredients and follow the instruction on how to adjust the salt levels in your Thai or Vietnamese fish sauce to ensure you have the right balance before you start. I also try to add the fish sauce to a sauce at the end of the cooking process, unless I state otherwise, so that it doesn't concentrate the saltiness too much. You never find that the fish sauce dominates. Taste often to see how the flavours work together. If you have overdone the fish sauce there will be a strong cheesy/fishy quality that will overpower everything else, and it will also be too salty. Honey can often bring it back.

I do not claim to have achieved the definitive interpretation of these recipes. Rather they are Sally Grainger's Roman recipes, and the next Roman cook will do it very differently, I am sure. Bearing this in mind, I have been precise in the amounts of spices I recommend and I suggest that you select and use the measuring spoon, etc., carefully at first. After you have got the measure of Roman food you can take some risks with the spices and the ratios.

## Other equipment you will need

Small teaspoons: this is what I mean by the 'tsp' measure. Choose a small coffee spoon rather than the standard size used for stirring tea and note that, unless stated, the measure is always level. It is helpful to use a knife to trim the laden bowl of the spoon. A 'heaped tsp' is a rounded measure not bursting over the sides.

Large teaspoons and dessert spoons are occasionally used and are referred to as 'large tsp' and 'dessert spoon'.

Tablespoon, 'tbsp', is a large serving spoon rather than an over-sized dessert spoon. This is generally used for liquids: the oil, wine, vinegar, fish sauce and honey that make up the basic sauces of Roman food. This tablespoon corresponds in weight on a diabetic scale to about 1 oz/25 gm. I use a spoon because measuring a small volume of liquid in a jug can be inaccurate, and I also wished to follow the habit of the Roman slave-cooks who frequently gave their quantities by ratio rather than with precise measures.

As a general rule, I give metric volume or weight measures for larger amounts of solids or liquids. Once you have selected your measuring equipment, do not switch to different forms particularly within a recipe.

If you are testing a recipe or two, it is recommended that you roast and grind the various spices needed for each dish each time. Neither buy them

already ground, nor anticipate your labours by pre-grinding in batches and storing. The flavour will never be adequate and the texture of the finished dish will not correspond to one where a mortar has been used, Roman style. If you are using a coffee grinder for convenience (I certainly do), do not grind the spices too finely. You should be aiming to replicate the product of a mortar. If you are preparing a feast or special meal with many dishes, you can then pre-grind a batch of the spices that you will need, such as lovage, cumin, celery seed, coriander, dill etc.

With the exception of peppercorns, spices benefit from the release of their fragrance by roasting before they are ground. Use a heavy frying-pan, without fat or oil, and dry-fry them over a slow heat, tossing them frequently, so that they take colour and toast, but do not burn – in which case they will be acrid. Each spice reacts differently to heat, so they should be roasted individually.

The volume of whole seed to ground spice is virtually equal (i.e. for the purposes of the recipes, 1 level tsp whole cumin = 1 level tsp ground cumin) You will find both ground and whole spices referred to in the recipes.

Many of the dipping sauces that you find served with cold meat require that a paste be created in the mortar. This can be done in a food processor but the texture will always be a little grainy as the nuts and fruit will be cut into small pieces rather than rubbed into paste. You may also find a hand blender successful.

In the recipes I occasionally stipulate set or runny honey. Set honey can be controlled in the spoon, while runny honey can run away from you!

The majority of the recipes serve at least 6 people with a small or medium portion of the dish.

## Special ingredients

The Romans cooked with an array of unusual spices, sauces and other ingredients that you will need to obtain or prepare in advance of cooking Roman food successfully. A few may take some effort to locate or make and I have here and there suggested alternatives. Investment in your Roman store cupboard will yield the dividend of dishes much closer to an authentic taste of Apician food.

## Herbs and spices

You will find that many of the most common herbs in use today are found in Apicius, such as oregano, green coriander, thyme, mint, dill weed and

parsley. However, some that are less familiar are also employed.

**ivory** (*Satureia hortensis/montana*). This comes in summer and winter varieties and is a small woody shrub with thin, oblong, dark leaves similar to thyme in appearance but with a distinctive flavour not unlike marjoram. It is readily available from herbalists in dry form but grows with little attention in any English garden so you can dry your own.

**ie** (*Ruta graveolens*). A bitter perennial herb with small grey-green leaves and a pungent aroma. It has a reputation for being dangerous and it should be avoided by pregnant women. In small quantities it is quite safe and adds necessary bitterness to sweet dishes in Roman food. It is not regularly available as a culinary herb and the only sure way to obtain a supply is to grow your own. It is pretty much indestructible and establishes itself well in a sunny site. Many garden-centres sell it and, as you will only require a small amount in any dish, it should not take long to be ready. It should be picked with great care as a chemical in the leaves can react with sunlight and, if touched, can burn the skin. Pick in the shade and, if you think you are susceptible, it would be best to avoid the task or get someone else to pick it for you. Out of the sun it is generally harmless unless you have particularly sensitive skin.

**ivage** (*Levisticum officinale* syn. *ligusticum*). This is a hardy umbelliferous perennial similar to angelica in appearance and with a strong celery taste. It is not absolutely clear whether Roman cooks used the green herb or just the seeds in their recipes – they never identify the spice beyond its name. I believe that the seed was the standard ingredient, largely because in the recipes the spice occurs after the pepper at the beginning of a list and never among the other obvious herbs. It is also worth noting that the list of kitchen ingredients at the beginning of the *Vinidarius* collection of recipes includes lovage seed. For these reasons I do not often use the green herb. Lovage seed is a flat, ovoid seed similar in length to cumin, with ridges running from end to end. It is not in any way similar to celery seed in appearance or to the ajwain or ajowan (which does look like a large celery seed) which I have often found in packets in Indian supermarkets labelled as lovage. Care should be taken to identify the correct spice. It is available from herbalists and garden-centres. In the long term, growing and harvesting your own is the surest way to obtain the right spice. The flavour of ajwain is often likened to thyme; it can act as an emergency substitute.

**asafoetida** (*Ferula assa-foetida*). This spice is obtained from the resin leached from a umbelliferous plant native to Iran and Afghanistan. In Roman cookery the resin was called laser and the plant was called silphium, though this was originally a separate and distinct plant native to north Africa which became extinct around ad 50 after which the resin from Parthia (Iran) replaced it. It has a distinct and pungent aroma reminiscent of fermented garlic, and is very common in Indian food. It is in Indian supermarkets that you will find it today. It comes as a yellow powder, sometimes under the name 'heng', and needs to be used with care. Its effect is considerable. Sometimes the true resin can be bought from Indian suppliers and it is recommended that you try to find this if you can, though the powdered form is perfectly adequate and was in fact the most common form of the spice in the ancient world. If you are able to acquire a piece of resin do as the Apicius cookery book recommends at 1.13 and place it in a glass vessel or jar with 20 pine kernels. The flavour and aroma will transfer to the kernels which you use instead of the resin – replacing them with a new supply. You will have to experiment over time to gauge the strength of flavour of the kernels and adjust the recipes. The use of asafoetida is very much a personal one, like the heat of chilli; you need to know your limitations and that of your guests!

**bay berries** (*Laurus nobilis*). These are small round kernels about the size of a pea (often also split) which have a similar flavour to bay leaf, but can be eaten – while bay leaf itself is generally not consumed. **Note well** that this is the berry of the bay tree and should not be confused with the flowering laurel (*Laurocerasus officinalis*) which is very poisonous and produces berries similar in appearance. Until recently bay trees in the UK could not set berries in the autumn for lack of the correct temperature. Instead, they would attempt to flower again, producing small, pale green buds. Recent global warming has resulted in berries forming on many large bay trees, particularly in the south of England, and it is now possible to obtain them through careful harvesting. The berry will be a dark red to black in colour and should be left for as long as possible on the tree to ripen. Harvest just before the frosts and dry carefully. The skin will peel off to reveal the kernel which needs to be fully dried before storing in an air-tight container. The flavour is very interesting and I use them in a number of successful recipes in this book.

**myrtle berries** (*Myrtus communis*). The common myrtle is a hardy ornamental shrub that produces berries which are dried and still used in Middle Eastern cooking. You may be able to purchase them from Turkish or Iranian delis or

greengrocers. Alternatively, plant your own bush or raid a neighbour's. Just as with bay berries they will need to be left on the bush until late autumn and taken when dark blue to purple, then dried carefully and thoroughly before storing. Note that if these berries are not fully dry they rapidly go mouldy in their container.

## Fish sauce

Fish sauce – which they called *garum* or *liquamen* – is fundamental to Roman food; in fact it is the ingredient that brings all the others together in a harmonious balance. Without it, the many flavours of the spices and liquids would be loud and discordant in the mouth, and the reputation that Roman food has for overpowering seasoning would be all too true.

The taste of fish sauce has recently been identified as the 'fifth flavour' alongside sweet, sour, salt and bitter. Umami is the 'all-round-the-mouth' meaty taste one gets from mushrooms and monosodium glutamate. It is not just salt flavour, there are all kinds of complex cheesy elements to it too, though the Romans used their fish sauce instead of salt and rarely used salt alone in their savoury or their sweet cooking. The effect of the sauce is not fishy or rotten or rank but immensely satisfying and integral to the cuisine. The Romans cooked with a variety of fermented fish sauces whose distinguishing characteristics can be difficult to understand in the modern world. It is only recently that I have been able to identify and classify the various types with any degree of accuracy. It may be that other food historians will have different opinions as to the nature of these sauces. I would not claim to have solved all the problems of interpretation. If you wish to read more about Roman fish sauce see the excursus on *garum* and *liquamen* in the appendix to our edition and translation of the Latin text.

*Garum* was a sauce made from the fresh blood and viscera of selected fish, mainly mackerel, fermented with salt. As it fermented, the mixture cleared and a dark brine was drawn off that was used at table by the diner (and sometimes in the kitchen). We do not find *garum* on its own mentioned in Apicius. Experiments we have conducted have produced a sauce with a distinctive blood aroma which makes it quite different from the other fish sauces. It was a relatively high-status condiment and was used in some of the *oenogarum* sauces that were part of Roman cuisine. However, these sauces using blood *garum* do not appear in Apicius. I believe its use was predominantly by the diner at table rather than by the cook in the kitchen.

For the purposes of this little book we only really need to know about liquamen. This was made by dissolving whole small fish, as well as larger pieces of gutted fish (including the empty mackerel bodies used to make garum), into a liquor with salt. The fish, often anchovy, were layered with salt in a barrel or pit and left for anything up to four months. The whole mixture cleared from the top and settled into layers. The paste at the bottom was called allec and was used as a pickle in its own right. The liquor was called liquamen.

We know that cleaned fish and slices of fish such as tuna were also salted to preserve them. The salt leaches water out of the flesh in the early stages, and this effusion we can firmly identify as muria, a fish brine. It is quite pale and far less 'fishy' than the other fish sauces. We find this form of fish sauce in other food literature but not in Apicius. It appears to have been used predominantly by the lower classes, though this is not at all certain. In Italy, in the Bay of Naples, a modern company reproduces the ancient techniques and makes a liquor from the salting of fish. It resembles many of the Thai fish sauces familiar today and could not be distinguished from them in blind tastings.

We know about a fourth kind of fish sauce made from a mixture of whole small and medium-sized fish with extra blood and viscera. This composite sauce, made by combining the elements of garum and liquamen, was a late development to the culinary tradition dating from the 6th century ad and I do not believe it was used in the recipes of Apicius. If you have some knowledge of fish sauce and you are asking yourself 'what about..? She has not considered...?' then please read the article on garum and liquamen in our edition.

For the purposes of reconstructing Roman recipes today we only really have access to the various South East Asian fish sauces. These are similar to liquamen in nature because anchovy and salt are allowed to dissolve together into a liquor. The differences, however, can be crucial. Some of the best Thai fish sauces are fermented for anything up to 18 months. They are also made with a much higher ratio of salt to fish than that indicated for Roman sauces. An ancient sauce was made with one part salt to seven parts fish, while a Thai sauce is made using a ratio of 1:3 and some times even 1:1. The length of time required for fermentation is not an issue we can deal with, but the salt can be adjusted to correspond to Roman liquamen. The following recipe produces a suitable blend for the recipes in this book. There are many varieties of fish sauce available and each one is slightly different. Some are

very salty, others less so. Some are dark, almost black, while others are quite pale and golden. Still more are blended with sugar. You may only have access to one type and you need to assess its qualities. For our purposes, pale is better than dark and the less salty is also better. Ideally, you should buy a blended variety already slightly sweetened, as this is how the salt levels are adjusted.

## Adapted fish sauce

1 l. carton white grape juice

1 bottle 'Oyster brand' fish sauce or a pale variety  
of fish sauce

Tip the grape juice into a large saucepan and bring to a gentle simmer. Cook at the lowest setting for however long it takes to reduce by half. This is never set in stone as grape juice can have a higher or lower sugar content. Cool and store. You can use this for other recipes in Apicius as well as for your fish sauce. The ratio that works for me is two-thirds fish sauce to one-third grape syrup. This produces a blend that is neither too salty, nor has it lost too much of the cheesy/meaty elements that you need. You might find that you need to adjust this ratio depending on the type of fish sauce that you have. The darker varieties tend to be saltier but unfortunately this is not always the case! You might try half and half to achieve the correct blend. Experiment! The initial cost is low and well worth the effort in the long run.

## Grape must syrups

### **Defrutum**

This is a syrup made from grape juice similar to that described for the fish sauce above but it has special flavouring and needs to be much thicker. It is defined as 'fresh must boiled down to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its volume'. This reduction is not necessarily fixed as the sugar content of grape must can vary. What matters is the flavouring. This could be from either figs or quinces, added to the syrup



while cooking. It is possible to purchase this variety of syrup in Italy and the UK today. It is known as 'Vincotto with figs'. The English translation on the label is 'sweet vinegar condiment' but this is not quite accurate. It is not a vinegar as it has not soured, although it has been aged 4 years. Many of you will already know that Italian saba, Latin sapa, meaning a grape syrup, is the origin of balsamic vinegar. Such syrups were left to age for longer than usual and they soured in the oak barrel producing the luscious vinegars we know today. There are a number of recipes that call for defrutum, and often the liquor is used to give colour to various sauces. The following recipe makes a relatively large quantity and is easily performed. You will find it is extremely useful as a condiment for all kinds of dishes where you would ordinarily use balsamic vinegar. Try it on salads, or in sauces and gravies, too.

2 l. red grape juice  
5 dried figs

Bring the grape juice to a gentle simmer and cook on the lowest setting for at least 2–3 hours. Check constantly to ensure it does not reduce too much and take it off the heat when the volume has reduced by two-thirds. You might find it useful to mark the pan in some way to indicate the correct level. Cool and remove the figs. Store in a corked or close-fitting, lidded bottle. The figs are quite amazing and I recommend you plan the process so that they can be served as a dessert immediately with ice-cream or crème fraîche.

## **Caroenum**

The identification of this particular liquor is difficult. It is likely to have been a grape must reduced by one-third and therefore similar to defrutum but thinner. Alternatively, it might also have been a sweet wine, some of which may or may not have been reduced to a similar degree before fermentation. A way out of this dilemma may be to find an inexpensive substitute, for example there are modern sweet wines which have cooked grape must added such as 'Ambrato di Comiso' from Sicily. However, I believe caroenum was a cooked syrup made at home. If a caroenum is made from a must taken from fresh

grapes such as would normally be used to make a passum (i.e. a raisin wine, see below) then the must would be sweeter than usual. And when one-third of its volume has been boiled away with two-thirds remaining it would be a thin yet flavoursome syrup. This is in contrast to the excessive sweetness, thickness and colour normally associated with defrutum. Caroenum was used in the recipes as a bulk ingredient rather than to flavour or colour; that was often the role of passum and defrutum. There are numerous sauces called oenogarum (see below) that contain no other form of 'wine' but caroenum and it could not therefore have been too thick or too rich. Andrew Dalby has pointed out that the original Greek term karyinos refers to a nut-brown colour, and this suggests to me that a white grape rather than a black one would have been the norm. To make a basic caroenum that will suffice for reconstructing these recipes, simmer a carton of white grape juice in a pan until you have lost one-third of its volume. Cool, return to the bottle and store. Alternatively, you can use the grape juice which you boiled to half its volume in order to adjust your fish sauce (see page 29 above) as a substitute for caroenum if you have made plenty. All these diverse wines and syrups – heavy raisin wine, rich and thick to add colour, and sweet thin syrups – were added to fish sauce and formed the basis of the ready-made sauce oenogarum.

## Wines

### **Passum**

This was a dessert or raisin wine made with grapes that were either allowed to shrivel on the vine or dried on rush mats. More sweet must, from other grapes that had not been dried, was used to aid the pressing of the fruit. The result was then fermented and aged. It is not a process we can duplicate but there are modern varieties of sweet wine that correspond to this. The one that I currently use and that most closely resembles dark passum is called 'Malaga Dulce'. 'Malaga Virgen' and 'Malaga Moscatel' are broadly similar. It is relatively cheap to purchase in the Malaga region of Spain, although, unfortunately, it is quite expensive in Britain, as are many of the other

varieties of sweet wine that might suit. Candidates, all made from white grapes, might be 'Rivesaltes' from southern France, 'Amavrodaphne' from Cyprus, 'Muscat of Samos' and 'Muscat of Lemnos', these last two from Greece. Any very sweet dessert wines such as a heavy muscat or a heavier Sauternes will also do. Passum could be either dark or pale as long as it has that raisin flavour. In the recipes here, I sometimes suggest a lighter raisin wine, particularly if the sauce in question is described as white.

## **Date syrup**

Roman sauce recipes regularly include dates but it is unclear whether they used the whole fruit, fresh or dried, or made a paste in advance to make life easier. Most recipes list the dates among the other liquids rather than with the nuts etc. and I feel that a pre-ground thick syrup would have been used. You can find thick date syrup in health-food shops in Britain.

## **Ready-made sauces**

### **Oenogarum/hydrogarum**

Oenogarum was a common component of a Roman meal and in many respects it would resemble a simple salad dressing such as vinaigrette. Pepper, and occasionally other spices, are mixed with fish sauce and oil and then sweetened with wine and sometimes one or more of the syrups described above. Again like vinaigrette, a sauce like this is unstable and needs to be beaten frequently to maintain an emulsion which can be poured over food or used for dipping. It will separate if left to stand for any time. We find surprising evidence from wear-marks in the small Samian-ware bowls that were used at table that diners often did whisk their sauces themselves. Other oenogarums can be thickened with starch to form a stable emulsion for pouring over a finished dish. A number of recipes in the original text have precise quantities, yet the ratio of fish sauce to wine and oil is often quite varied. There is no definitive set of proportions that will make a Roman sauce to suit all conditions. However, a basic all-purpose sweet sauce might be as follows:

1 part fish sauce

1 part medium white wine  
1 part passum  
1 part oil  
generous freshly ground pepper

Combine all the ingredients at the last minute to pour over the salad, vegetable, etc., or use as a dipping sauce. Beat before use.

You will also find a sauce called hydrogarum in this book. This is a cooking sauce that resembles the French cooking liquor 'court bouillon'. Fish sauce, water and a few herbs and pepper are combined, and various meats poached in the boiling sauce. Some times the sauce is then used as a digestive.

## Wheat products

The Romans served a starch component to their meals just as we do: this was predominantly bread, the staple food and main ingredient of the meal for many people, though they would often eat it with some form of relish such as meat, cheese, or vegetables. Even at the elaborate dinners of the wealthy bread was served, though it would have been white and aerated as opposed to the dense, brown loaves of the lower classes. 'White' was the most desirable form of bread; sometimes chalk was added in order to bleach the flour and give it a whiter appearance. In everyday meals, flat bread was common and may have been the means by which certain foods were picked up with the fingers. Small pieces of bread are certainly a very efficient way of picking up food and keeping the fingers clean. These flatbreads were called lagana and a simple whole-wheat Indian bread recipe such as chapatti or roti is ideal (see below). Lagana were used to make the dish Apician Patina which is a tower of flat bread layered with meat and fish in a sauce (page 64).

Bread was leavened with either a sourdough or an ale-barm. The first is a process whereby day after day a percentage of the dough is saved and used to leaven the next day's baking. It contains a living culture of wild yeast cells which can leaven a large batch of dough. Sourdough bread can be bought in many bakeries today, or you might like to make your own. Learn more about it at <http://www.sourdo.com> (see also World Sourdoughs from Antiquity: Authentic Recipes for Modern Bakers, Ed Wood, Berkeley, 1996). The alternative form of leaven in the ancient world involved using the froth from the top of the barrel in which you made beer. This was a process common only in countries where beer was the staple drink, namely most of northern

Europe. You will find some artisanal bakeries offer ale-barm breads.

Other starches served with Roman food included rice. We find rice used to thicken sauces and so we might conclude that it was also available on its own. Boiled cracked wheat and even plain porridge made with fine semolina or wheat starch that probably resembled a thick white sauce were served as separate items in feast menus.

A further item for the store cupboard you will find useful to make in advance is the dried pastry sheets known as tracta. These are not pasta – there is no evidence that they were cooked in water or that they held their shape when they were used in stews. Rather they are sheets of dried pastry similar in appearance to a coarse filo. The only Roman recipe for tracta is found in Cato's farming manual *De agricultura* (76), dating from the second century bc. Here the sheets of pastry are layered with goat's cheese and honey to make a baked cake called placenta. We don't find these cakes or tracta used this way in Apicius. Here we find them dried, crumbled and used to thicken meat stews. The dough is made with *alica*; a fine semolina soaked with water and kneaded with flour into a dough which is rolled out into discs and dried. The discs are friable and easily crumbled into very small pieces. In this state they act as a very efficient thickener.

## Lagana (chapatti/roti)

300 g whole wheat flour  
100 g strong plain flour  
250 ml water

Sieve the two flours together and discard the largest flakes of chaff. Add the water and begin to knead the dough with your hands until it forms a single ball. Flour has different absorbency rates and so more or less water may be necessary. Continue to knead for 5–10 minutes until smooth and pliable. Put in a bowl and cover the dough with cling-film or a damp towel. Leave to rest for one hour. Bring it out on to a floured surface and divide in half. Return one half to the covered bowl and roll the other into a sausage. Divide this into ten parts. Put all the pieces back in the bowl, dust with flour, cover in cling-film. (At all times the raw dough needs to be kept under cover so that it doesn't dry out.)

Prepare the area for rolling in advance. Dust the surface with flour and have a pile of flour to one side. Use a small cake-decorating rolling pin about

16 cm long and 2.5 cm thick. Take a griddle or heavy frying-pan and heat over a medium flame or setting. Take one ball and pat it into the flour all over and roll it out to a disc roughly 20 cm in diameter. Do not push from the centre but use a brisk back-and-forth motion at the edges, and use plenty of flour to stop it sticking. After each motion, ensure the dough has not stuck by moving it around and then roll again. You might want to trim the edges or use a flan ring or cutter to make a neat circle (do this particularly if you are using them to make the patina Apiciana on page 64). When you have a few discs ready you can begin cooking. Place each one on the hot, dry frying-pan and leave for roughly 20–30 seconds, at which point the base should have brown patches. Ensure the pan is not too hot, as it will burn before it cooks, or too cool, when the bread will dry out. Turn it over and cook for a further 10–12 seconds and remove with tongs. If you are serving them as bread, pile them up in a basket lined with a napkin. Leave them covered until ready for service. Alternatively, re-heat in an oven wrapped in tin foil.

This recipe is based on the one in *Classic Indian Cookery* by Julie Sahni (Grub Street, 1997), p. 331.

## Tracta (dried pastry)

100 g fine semolina

200 ml water

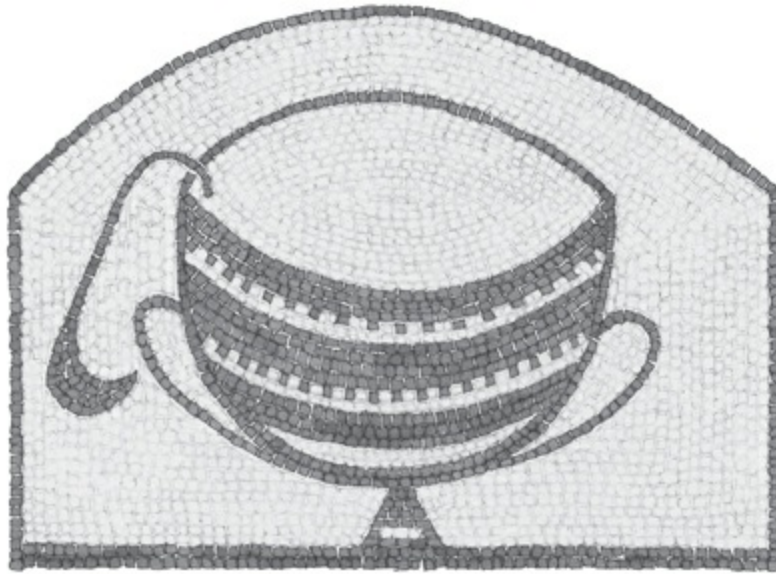
150 g plain flour

Make these tracta when you are cooking other things such as bread or when the oven is in constant use, so that you can keep the kitchen warm while they are drying.

Pour the water over the semolina and allow to stand for 30 minutes. Tip the mixture into a fine sieve and allow the water to drain away. Stir it a little to ensure most has passed through, but do not push the softened semolina through the sieve. Tip into the bowl and add 100 g of the flour and mix until a soft dough is formed. Turn on to a table and continue to knead while adding finger-fulls of flour each time the dough becomes sticky again. You may use more or less than the stated amount. Knead until the dough is firm and smooth. Cover with cling-film or a damp cloth and leave to stand for 1 hour. Divide the dough into two and return one half to the bowl. Roll the other into a

sausage and cut into 8 pieces. Return all the pieces to the bowl and sprinkle with flour so they don't stick together. At all times the raw dough needs to be kept under cover so that it doesn't dry out. Take one ball and pat it into the flour all over and roll it out to a disc. Roll a few times and then turn it over, roll a few times more and turn again and repeat constantly so that it never sticks to the table. Do not push from the centre but use a brisk back-and-forth motion at the edges and use plenty of flour to stop it sticking. When a large rolling pin ceases to work, switch to a small one (used for cake decorating) and continue to roll and then stretch the dough into a fine sheet. The shape doesn't matter, all that does is that the disc is as thin as possible. Eventually you will not be able to get it any thinner without it beginning to pull apart and sticking so completely to the table that you won't be able to release it. That is the time to stop. As long as the edges are all equally thin, place the sheet to one side on a floured tray and begin the next one. You will make 16 in total and it will be difficult to keep them all separate while they dry. It may take some time to dry the sheets fully, but once a skin or crust has formed they can be stacked a little closer together. It may take overnight or even longer, depending on the temperature and the weather. You may wish to put them in a warm but cooling oven after it has been used for another purpose. Do not use direct heat. The texture should be very friable and easily crumbled. When you are sure they are fully dry, store in an air-tight tin until you need them. If you have failed to dry them fully, they will go mouldy in the tin so be careful. It is a lot of labour to repeat.

# Hors-d'œuvre and side-dishes



## Roman bortsch, Apicius 3.2.3

This soup combines two separate recipes attributed to the agriculturalist and linguist Varro. As a remedy it could be drunk to aid the digestion, and it also served as a soup with the chicken included. I choose to leave the meat in, to give some texture to the soup. The dish is quite unusual in not using fish sauce. The sweet/savoury balance is surprisingly good.

500 ml white wine  
500 ml water  
100 g honey  
1 leg and thigh of a large chicken  
2 tbsp olive oil  
4 medium-sized raw beetroot  
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Combine the wine, water and honey in a medium-sized saucepan. Add the chicken leg and bring to heat slowly. (Were you making a larger quantity, you would use a whole chicken.) While the stock is simmering, peel and grate the beetroot. Add to the soup and top up with more wine or water as it reduces.



Cook for about 1½ hrs. Take out the chicken, skin and shred the meat from the bone and return some or most of it to your serving bowl. Skim the fat from the surface of the soup, season with salt and pepper, pour over the meat and serve.

## Barley and vegetable soup, Apicius 4.4

This is a nourishing and warming soup, quite delicious and modern in its taste and texture. There is a long list of green vegetables required, though it is really unnecessary to stick rigidly to the list supplied in Apicius: the cook would have used whatever he was able to obtain, as we must do. I was testing the recipe in the winter and was rather limited in my choice. The original recipe calls for leek, coriander, green dill, green fennel leaf (you will find sufficient on 1 or 2 fennel bulbs), spinach beet and cabbage, none of which should give you much trouble outside the coldest season. Only leaves of mallow (*M. sylvestris*) would be more problematic as they are a summer crop and are not normally cultivated in Britain. The addition of asafoetida to the soup is desirable for those who like it, but I left it out of my portion as it is often not to my taste. This recipe makes four generous or six smaller bowls.

60 g chickpeas  
60 g red or brown lentils  
60 g green split peas  
60 g pearl barley  
2 small leeks with the darkest green removed  
150 g cabbage  
100 g yellow or red swiss chard or spinach beet  
100 g mallow leaves or a substitute such as baby  
spinach, pak choi,  
Chinese cabbage or any suitable green-leafed vegetable  
10 g each of fennel leaf and dill weed  
50 g fresh coriander  
800 ml water  
2 heaped tsp fennel seed  
½ level tsp lovage seed  
½ tsp dried oregano

2 tbsp fish sauce  
generous freshly ground black pepper

Soak the dried pulses separately overnight in cold water. Using a spice or coffee grinder mill the barley until most of the grains are broken at least once. Do not go too far and create barley flour. Put the chickpeas in a pan filled with fresh water first and, after they have come to the boil and cooked for 10 minutes, add the remaining pulses and barley. Cook them all together until tender. Wash, trim, and shred the green vegetables and roughly chop the herbs. Put the coarser green leaves such as the cabbage in first (but retain 50 g of that as a garnish) and bring the soup back to the boil and continue to cook. Add the softer greens and the green herbs and continue to simmer gently. Add a little hot water if necessary to achieve a thick soup consistency. Cook the extra shredded cabbage lightly and retain until the end. Roast and grind the fennel and lovage seeds and add with the oregano. Flavour with the fish sauce and pepper and taste. The pulses need a lot of salt as a rule but you do not want too strong a fish sauce taste either. Serve in a large serving vessel with the lightly cooked shredded cabbage sprinkled over the top.

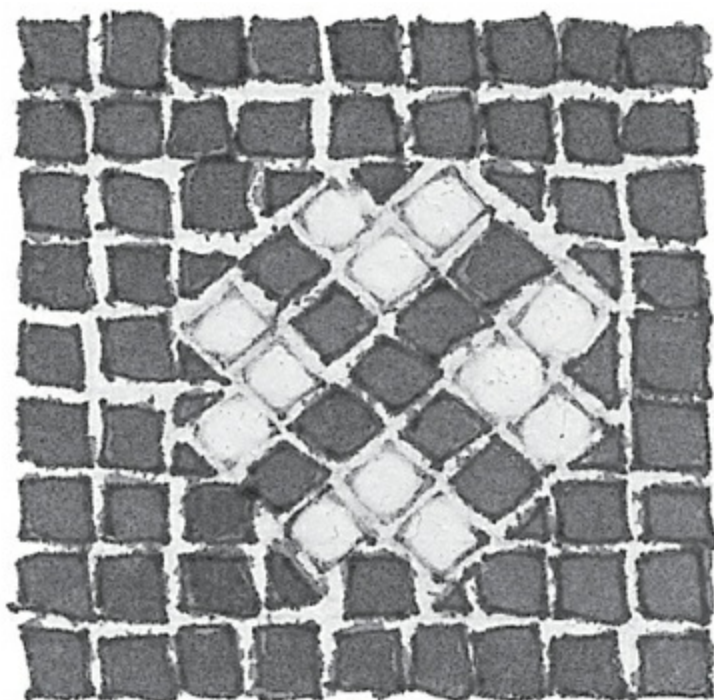
## Beef or lamb faggots, Apicius 2.1.7

We might claim these meat faggots as the closest thing to a burger in Roman recipes. The meat of choice is pounded in a mortar with a pestle until a smooth paste is formed. This takes considerable time and effort and it has to be admitted that the work is done in a fraction of the time in a food processor. Once the faggots have been made they can be oven baked, grilled or even barbecued as the original recipe suggests. The flavour of the myrtle berries is interesting, rather flowery and unexpected; if they cannot be obtained, juniper berries serve as a suitable alternative. Caul fat is the membrane that holds the intestines together in the intestinal cavity in all animals though pig's caul is generally the one most readily available. You will find caul fat at any butcher's who makes his own sausages and especially if he makes faggots. You may have to buy a large quantity as it comes in ½ kg frozen blocks but it is very inexpensive.

250 g beef or lamb mince

50 g fresh bread crumbs  
2 tbsp white wine  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
25 g pine kernels  
2 large tsp whole black peppercorns cracked in a mortar  
5 myrtle berries or, if unavailable, 3 juniper berries  
50 g caul fat

Place the meat, bread crumbs, wine and fish sauce in a food processor; process until the whole has formed a smooth paste and the mince has lost its structure. Add the pine kernels and peppercorns and pulse briefly to combine them evenly. Transfer to a bowl. Open up each individual piece of caul fat to its full extent. Take a lump of the mixture and form it into a small ball about the size of an egg. Lay it on the edge of the sheet of fat and cut a circle round it about twice as big as the ball. Take up the ball with its fat and pull and stretch the fat to cover the ball. Place it down on the bench and flatten it out. Ensure that the minimum amount of fat is used for each ball and do not fold over the excess but cut it off. Grill, roast in a hot oven or barbecue until well done, brown and crisp. Serve with a sweet wine oenogarum, see page 33. You can also make them smaller and serve them on cocktail sticks as party food.



## Chicken pottage to serve with meatballs, Apicius 2.2.9

This sauce is thickened with a paste of cooked rice and the resulting mixture is reminiscent of the mushy-pea pottage on page 93 that is also served with meatballs. It is quite likely that such plain and relatively simple food was served outside the home at the better popina or taverns and also at the dining-rooms of collegia or trade guilds.

650 ml fresh chicken stock  
20 g pudding rice  
½ leek sliced thinly  
1 tsp dill weed  
1 tsp celery seed  
2 tbsp defrutum (see p. 30)  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
salt  
generous freshly ground pepper

Prepare the stock by simmering chicken bones or a chicken quarter in plenty of water for 2 hours. Place the rice in a separate pan and add 150 ml of the stock. Simmer gently until the rice is very soft and most of the stock has boiled away. Cool and mash with a potato masher or process until smooth. Strain the bones out the rest of the stock and measure ½ litre into a new pan. Add the sliced leek, the dill and a little salt. Bring to the heat and cook gently. Dry-roast and grind the celery seed and add to the pan. Add the defrutum and the fish sauce. Take small amounts of the rice paste and beat into the sauce until a thick sauce is achieved. You will probably have some of the rice left. Simmer for a few minutes and serve in bowls with meatballs such as those described on the next page.

## Chicken meatballs in hydrogarum, Apicius 2.2.4

This recipe for meatballs has been 'created' to accompany the thick chicken sauce on the previous page. Chicken flesh is flavoured with pepper, cumin, fish sauce and sweet wine in keeping with the style of forcemeat elsewhere in the Apicius text. The meatballs are cooked in the liquor called hydrogarum described in Apicius 2.2.4.

300 g organic corn-fed chicken breast meat  
1 tsp roasted and ground cumin seeds  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
2 tsp chopped fresh parsley  
1 tbspc caroenum (see p. 31)  
1 tbspc fish sauce  
20 g fresh bread crumbs  
1 small egg

For poaching:

30 black peppercorns, coarsely ground  
1 coffee cup of fish sauce  
1 coffee cup of caroenum  
11 coffee cups of water

Chop the chicken breast and put it in a food processor with the roasted and ground cumin, pepper and parsley. Process until quite finely minced. Add the liquids, bread crumbs and the egg. Pulse for a few moments and turn out into a bowl. Put the pepper, fish sauce, caroenum and water in a frying-pan and bring to a gentle simmer. Using two dessert spoons, mould little quenelles of chicken meat by scooping from one spoon to the other, and then drop them into the simmering cooking liquor. Poach until firm and remove with a slotted spoon. Serve with the chicken sauce above. This meatball recipe can also be used with lamb or beef and any other kind of minced fowl or game.

## Marinated liver, Apicius 7.3.2

Liver and all kinds of offal were considered a great luxury in the Roman world and this is not surprising given its rarity in relation to the quantity of meat on a carcass and the fact that some offal must be used fresh. Here, liver is marinated in a combination of fish sauce, bay berries and lovage, then wrapped in caul. Bay berries add the flavour of the bay leaf in a form that can be ground and consumed. The caul gives the liver added moisture while it is cooking and the finished item is an ideal gustum – hors-d'œuvre and finger food at parties.

200 g lamb's or calf's liver  
½ tsp lovage seeds

2 bay berries (or a broken bayleaf)  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
a small amount of caul fat

Prepare the liver by removing the larger sinews and skinning if necessary. Cut into roughly 5 cm chunks and leave aside in dish. Dry-roast the lovage seed and bay berries and grind to a powder in a mortar. Add to the liver in the dish with 2 tbsp of fish sauce and the pieces of bay leaf if you cannot get bay berries. Turn over in the marinade and leave for a few hours to marinate. Open up the caul fat into a sheet and cut pieces a little larger than the liver. Wrap each piece. Ensure that you use the minimum caul fat necessary; avoid folding the fat too thickly over the liver. Grill until the fat is crisp on the outside and the blood ceases to flow when the liver is pierced. These are ideal as barbecue food, but can also be roasted in an oven. Serve with a separate dish of a sweet oenogarum (see page 33), on cocktail sticks so they can be dipped into the sauce.

## Stuffed kidneys, Apicius 7.8

This is my favourite Apician recipe. I included it in *The Classical Cook Book* and I make no apology for reproducing it here. This confirms for me that Roman slave-cooks were very skilled in their craft of combining flavours and made exceptionally fine food. The flavour of kidney is strong compared with other offal, but the fennel seed and coriander are a good match for it.

2 level tsp fennel seed  
generous amount of freshly ground black pepper  
large handful fresh coriander (1/2 a bunch)  
100 g pine kernels  
8 lamb kidneys  
enough caul to cover all the kidneys  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
olive oil to fry

Dry-roast the fennel and grind to a fine powder with the pepper. Put this with the coriander and pine kernels in a food processor and process until a firm paste is formed. Do not over-mix at this stage or the oil in the nuts will leach

out and make the stuffing oily. Cut each kidney almost in half, leaving a little flesh to hold them together. Remove their cores. Fill each cleaned kidney with a generous amount of stuffing and fold the two halves back together. Wrap each kidney in the caul fat to secure the stuffing. Trim any excess. Shallow-fry in a little olive oil to seal and brown the caul fat and then roast in a medium oven (375°F, 190°C, gas 5) until well done. Sprinkle a little fish sauce over them in the dish. Slice the whole kidneys into 2–3 pieces and serve hot with warm bread – don't forget the juices from the pan. Some of our tasters have even preferred the juice to the meat. Alternatively; cut the kidneys in half completely, place stuffing in the hollow and wrap each piece in caul fat so the stuffing is secure. Thread them on a skewer and cook on the barbecue until crisp and well done.

## Prawn balls in hydrogarum, Apicius 2.1.1

The prawn balls are cooked in a special cooking sauce made with fish sauce and water known as hydrogarum. A modern counterpart would be a 'court bouillon' designed for poaching. This hydrogarum is flavoured simply with celery leaves and pepper.

300 g raw king prawns  
⅔ tsp lovage seeds  
1 level tsp cumin  
pinch asafoetida resin or powder  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 egg  
2 dessert spoons soft bread crumbs

For the hydrogarum:

1 coffee cup of fish sauce  
7 coffee cups of water  
a small handful of celery leaves  
freshly ground black pepper

Peel and clean the intestinal tract from the prawns. Pound or process into a paste. Roasted and grind the three spices, mix them with the pepper and add to the prawn paste with the egg and bread crumbs. Process until combined. In a small, deep frying-pan place 1 measure of fish sauce to 7 measures of

water using a small coffee cup. To this add the green leaves from a head of celery. Bring to a simmer. Check the seasoning, adjust with more pepper if necessary. Using two large teaspoons, make egg shaped balls by scooping the mixture from one spoon to the other. Drop them in the simmering hydrogarum and gently cook until they have set (no more than 4–5 minutes). Serve warm with salad leaves dressed with an oenogarum (see page 57).

## Chicken salad, Apicius 4.1.2

This form of composite salad has quite an unusual mixture of cold ingredients: bread, cheese, cucumber, capers, cooked chicken livers interlayered with pine kernels with a creamy mint sauce poured over. It is difficult to know precisely how the salad is put together according to the instructions in the original text of Apicius as the Latin is a little obscure. I had assumed in the past that the bread is meant to line the vessel and the other ingredients are layered inside, but it is also possible that the bread also separates the layers. With either method, the salad can be turned out onto a plate. The dominant flavour of the sauce is mint and celery seed with a creamy egg dressing. I take this dressing to be made from raw egg yolk. This may cause some of you concern. It might be possible to replace the raw egg with a little mayonnaise. This recipe benefits from being made in a large mortar, although a small food processor produces acceptable results.

For the salad:

60 g Parmesan cheese

100 g chicken livers

olive oil

½ cucumber

25 g capers

30 g pine kernels

1–2 large ciabatta loaves

200 ml posca (100 ml water/100 ml white wine vinegar)

For the dressing:

generous freshly ground pepper

1 level tsp celery seed, roasted



3 heaped tsp fresh chopped mint  
30 g pine kernels  
40 g full fat cream cheese  
2 egg yolks  
1 tbsp honey  
1 tbsp vinegar  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
80 ml water

Prepare the salad ingredients: grate the Parmesan cheese; cook chicken livers by frying in a little olive oil, then cool and chop them into small pieces; peel and slice the cucumber thinly; drain and chop the capers finely. Cut the ciabatta into thin slices and lay them out on a large tray. Dribble the posca over the slices and allow the fluid to be absorbed. Repeat occasionally while you prepare the dressing. In a mortar grind the pepper and roasted celery seed. Add the mint and the pine kernels and grind to a fine paste. Add the soft cheese, egg yolks and the honey and blend again. Then dilute the paste with the vinegar and the fish sauce. Gradually add the water and blend. Take a two-pint pudding bowl and lay a piece of the bread, gently squeezed out and cut to fit, in the bottom. Sprinkle a little of all the salad ingredients over this bread, finishing with cucumber, but do not let the slices overlay each other. Add another layer of bread and repeat until all the ingredients have been used up. Always finish with a layer of bread. Pour the dressing over the salad and chill for 2 hours. Turn out onto a plate and decorate with more cucumber slices.

## Asparagus patina, Apicius 4.2.5 & 6

A patina could be a simple custard like this one or could resemble a frittata or omelette. It might also be a more elaborate, composite dish made with many layered ingredients. This asparagus custard is surprisingly delicate and quite delicious. The recipe does not require that the asparagus should be cooked, instead the vegetable is pounded and soaked in wine: the juice extracted from this is used for the custard. The asparagus is discarded. It took a number of experiments before we decided that this was not in fact a mistake in the transmission of the recipe. It is a quite different experience to using cooked asparagus as it is so fresh-tasting. It may be that large, coarse asparagus spears that had bolted were used in the original recipe – past their

best if eaten as cooked asparagus but suited to this method. This is one of a number of recipes in Apicius that have precise quantities, and they work very well here. I have not changed them apart from the number of eggs (ancient eggs were probably much smaller than the average egg today).

300g large asparagus spears  
250 ml white wine  
45 ml fish sauce  
45 ml white wine  
45 ml passum (see p. 32)  
90 ml olive oil  
6g black peppercorns  
5 eggs  
6 small asparagus spears as a garnish

Roughly chop the large asparagus and grind them in the processor until very fine. Add the wine and leave to stand for a few hours, or overnight if possible. Strain the juice from the vegetable matter and squeeze out as much of the liquor as possible; discard the asparagus pulp. In a separate pan place the fish sauce, wine, passum and olive oil and heat up gently. Grind the pepper and add along with the asparagus juice. Beat the eggs together and combine with the sauce off the heat. Grease an ovenproof dish and pour in the mixture. Place inside another larger dish filled with water and slide into a preheated cool oven (300°F, 150°C, gas 2). Bake slowly for 25–35 minutes until just set. Steam the garnish spears while it is cooking. Remove, cool, and garnish with the cooked asparagus. Alternatively, bake in separate ramekins. Sprinkle with freshly ground pepper.

### Lettuce patina, Apicius 4.2.3

This patina uses a crisp lettuce with its stalks and is flavoured with caroenum. The lettuce you use could be iceberg or even chicory. I have made it with a Chinese cabbage in the past, which has more in common with lettuce and is perfect for this dish as it has thick juicy stalks. Unlike the asparagus patina above, the lettuce is pounded and used in the finished dish. It has a simple delicate flavour and is ideal as an accompaniment to any of the meat or fish dishes in this section.

500 g iceberg lettuce or Chinese leaves  
2 tbsp olive oil  
2 tbsp caroenum (see p. 31)  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
5 eggs

Trim the lettuce so you have mainly the lower base and rather less of the green leaf. Process or pound into a fine paste. Tip into a saucepan and add the oil, caroenum, fish sauce and pepper. Bring to heat and cook gently for 5 minutes. Grease a shallow ceramic dish and beat the eggs. Pour the lettuce purée into the dish and stir in the egg, briskly so that the egg doesn't cook in the sauce. Put in a cool oven (300°F, 150°C, gas 2) until set. Sprinkle with pepper and serve in wedges with one of the savoury dishes in this section such as the meatballs or liver.

## Cheese and fruit dip (Hypotrimma), Apicius 1.33

The name of this sauce is Greek and the word is associated with a paste ground in a mortar. In a modern context it may be made in a mortar or a small food processor. The finished sauce is very similar to the sauces in the section on meat dishes on pages 60, 71 and 75. Like pickles, they are all thick, sweet and piquant, and almost certainly raw and served cold. We have one reference to a hypotrimma being served with dogfish (which we call rock salmon), though this kind of sauce is so rich that pieces of bread or even crudités would be suitable.

½ level tsp lovage seeds  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
3 heaped tsp chopped fresh mint  
50 g raisins (softened in a little hot water)  
50 g pine kernels  
50 g full fat cream cheese  
1 tbsp date syrup  
1 tbsp honey  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
2 tbsp vinegar

1 tbsp olive oil  
1 tbsp defrutum (see p. 30)  
100 ml white wine

Roast and grind the lovage, mix with the pepper and add the mint. Add the raisins and pound or process to a fine paste. Add the pine kernels and continue to process into a paste. Add the cheese, date syrup and the honey, and blend. Dilute gradually with the fish sauce, vinegar, oil, defrutum and wine. Taste; balance the sweetness with a little more vinegar if necessary. Tip into a dish and serve with dipping items such as bread, cucumber, carrots, spring onions, cold cuts of meat, large cooked prawns or small pieces of cooked dogfish on cocktail sticks.

## Melon with mint dressing, Apicius 3.7

This is remarkably successful as a simple starter. Used with any type of sweet melon the effect is so refreshing and surprising that I have resolved never to serve melon any other way again. It is ideal as an alternative to sorbet at a modern dinner party as a refreshing amuse-bouche between courses. It is also a potential dessert. Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) is a low ground-cover mint with a strong, dense flavour. I have access to a large patch in my garden and it is good to use the original suggestion from the manuscript of Apicius, but for ordinary purposes a standard dried or fresh mint will do.

1 round sweet ripe melon such as Galia,  
honeydew, etc.  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
2 tsp dried mint or 3 tsp of fresh chopped  
pennyroyal or culinary mint  
2 dessert spoons runny honey  
1 dessert spoon fish sauce  
2 dessert spoons vinegar

Cut the melon into quarters and take the flesh off the skin. Dice the flesh and place in the serving dish. Combine the other ingredients and whisk until the honey is fully combined. Pour over the melon about 15 minutes before it is to be served and turn the fruit over in the sauce. Chill and serve with cocktail sticks to pick the pieces up.

## Assorted salad leaves with oenogarum

The sauce known as an oenogarum takes many forms. In this case it resembles a vinaigrette and is suitable to dress salad leaves to accompany all the other hors d'œuvre in this section. Select chicory, baby spinach and beet leaves, rocket, dandelion, or loose-leaved lettuce of all kinds. Wash and drain and just before your guests arrive, dress with the oenogarum that you will find on page 33 in the section on special ingredients.

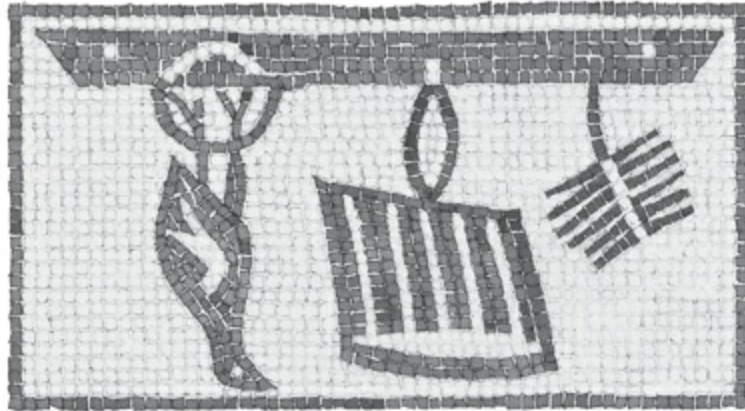
## Soft eggs in pine kernel sauce, Apicius 7.13.3

This is a easy standby recipe that is similar to egg mayonnaise but with an extra kick from the lovage. The pine kernels are soaked in water or wine to soften them so that they make a soft creamy sauce.

100 g pine kernels  
50 ml wine  
1 dessert spoon honey  
1 tbsp white wine vinegar  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
½ tsp lovage seed  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
4 soft-boiled eggs, cooled and shelled

Soak the pine kernels in the wine overnight. Put them in a food processor with the honey, vinegar, and fish sauce, and process until smooth. Roast and grind the lovage seeds, mix with black pepper, add to the sauce and taste. Adjust the texture with the wine used to soak the pine kernels. Shell the eggs carefully and cut them in half, spooning a little sauce on each half. Serve with a green salad dressed with an oenogarum as above.

# Meat dishes



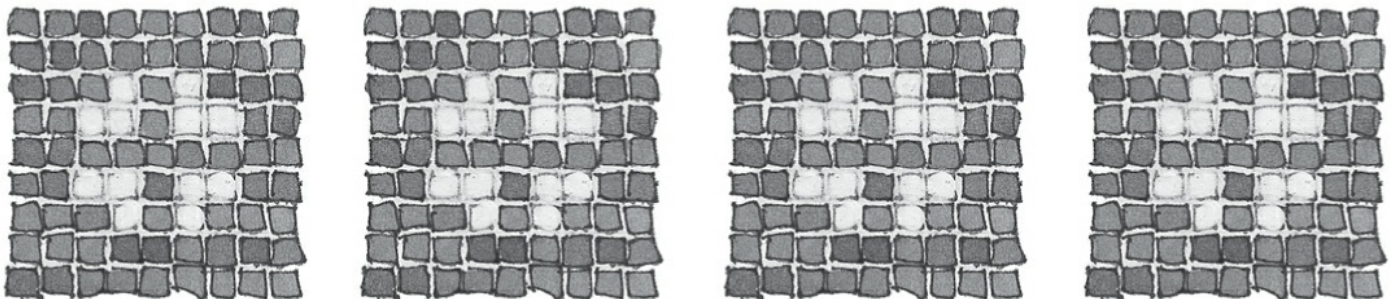
## Sauce for cooked meat, Apicius 7.6.12

Many of the dishes in Apicius are designed to utilize pre-cooked and technically 'left over' roasted meat from the previous evening. Impressive whole roasted or boiled beasts were very common at wealthy dinners. We would consider them 'cold cuts': sliced or diced lamb, pork or beef ready prepared, so that the diner can simply pick up the meat and dip into various different piquant pickles. These last were often served cold, whether or not the meat was re-heated. The sauces were quite thick and clinging so that diners didn't get sprinkled with sauce as they brought the meat up to their mouth. It must be borne in mind that the diner was reclining on a couch and only able to use one hand to feed himself. There are many recipes for sauces of this nature – and we have already seen a hypotrimma in the hors d'œuvre section, a Greek version of the same kind of dip (p. 55). Initially, I tried to interpret some of them in terms of a modern sauce, thin, hot, plentiful and pourable, and found them very unsatisfactory. When I considered them more as a pickle or dipping sauce, as in a Chinese meal, the likely use of these sauces became clear. Serve them in a little dish on a larger plate filled with sliced or diced cooked meat. This first such sauce (others are on pp. 71 and 75) is made with chopped cooked egg. It makes a superb accompaniment to cold lamb or any wild fowl.

1 heaped tsp cumin seeds

1 level tsp myrtle berries  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
2 heaped tsp chopped fresh parsley  
½ small leek with the dark green removed  
2 hard-boiled eggs, shelled  
2 dessert spoons honey  
2 tbsp vinegar  
2 tbsp olive oil  
2 tbsp fish sauce

Roast and grind the cumin and myrtle, mix with the pepper and combine with the parsley. Chop the leek and cook in a little water. Strain and place in a food processor or large mortar and grind or process into a paste. Add the cooked eggs and process or grind again. Add the spice and herb mixture, honey, vinegar, oil and fish sauce and blend by pulsing a few times. Tip into a bowl and store until required. Only store in the fridge if you are preparing or storing left-over sauce overnight. Preparing it the day before does improve the flavour but bring back to room temperature before serving.



## Baked ham in pastry with figs, Apicius 7.9.1

This is a very simple dish that has no fish sauce or long list of spices; in fact it would not be out of place in any modern recipe book and probably survives in many cultures. The gammon is boiled with figs and bay, smothered in honey, then wrapped in a simple flour and oil pastry and baked. The meat finishes cooking in its case while retaining the juices, which caramelize with the honey – wonderful! The pastry is not thick and stodgy but similar to a strudel dough. If you wrap the meat a second time and oil between the layers you get a crisp and crunchy texture that works a treat.

1 kg piece of gammon, pre-soaked if necessary

5 dried figs  
3 bay leaves  
250 gm plain white flour  
¼ tsp salt  
2 tbsp olive oil  
100 ml water  
100 g set honey  
olive oil for brushing  
fish sauce, or salt and honey for seasoning

Cover the gammon in cold water, add the figs and bay leaves and bring to the boil. Simmer for 20 minutes per 500 grams plus an extra 20 minutes. Remove from the heat and cool in the water. While it is cooling, sieve the flour and salt together into a bowl and add the oil and the water gradually to form a dough. Knead until smooth and pliable. This amount of dough should cover at least a two-kilo joint so adjust the amount to suit the size of your joint. Cut the dough in half and roll one portion out into a large thin sheet. Follow the method in the recipe for tracta on page 37. The pastry sheet should resemble that used for apple strudel rather than filo and the thicker edges of the sheet should be trimmed before you begin to wrap the meat.

Place the meat on a board and remove the skin. Score the fat with a knife right through to the flesh to create a criss-cross pattern. Spread the honey over the fat and into the cuts. Spread it over any surfaces of the lean meat too. Brush your first pastry sheet with olive oil and lay the meat at one end. Roll the meat up in the dough, fold over the edges to make a parcel, and brush its exterior with more oil. Trim away any excess pastry. Roll the other half of the dough into a sheet and brush its upper surface with olive oil. Wrap the meat again, this time tucking the minimum amount of excess dough under the joint. Brush the exterior with more oil. Bake in a medium oven (375°F, 190°C, gas 5) for 1 hour until the pastry is crisp and light brown. Remove and allow to stand for 10 minutes. Strain 250 ml of the cooking liquor into a small pan and season with a little fish sauce or salt if desired, and a little honey. Taste and adjust the balance of flavours. Carve thick slices of meat and spoon a little of the liquor over them. Serve it forth.





## Patina Apiciana, Apicius 4.2.14/15

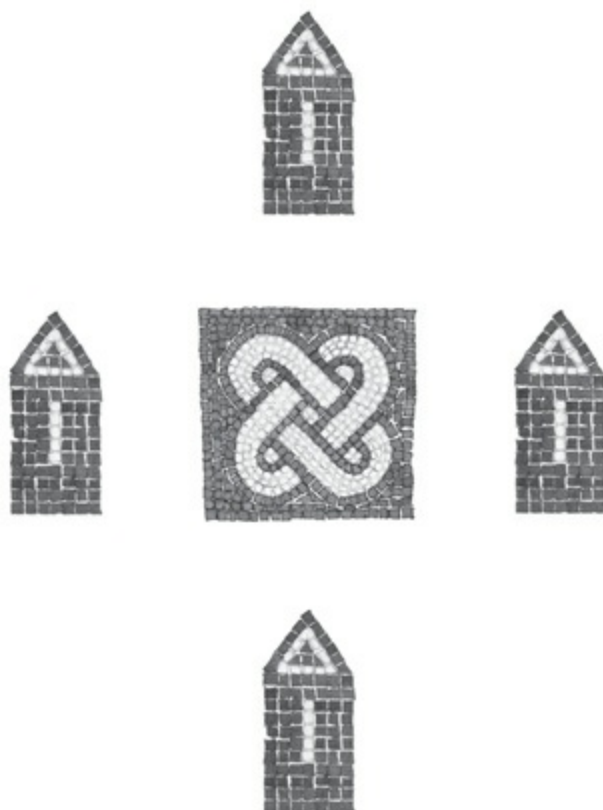
This recipe has often been associated with lasagna as it uses layers of a wheat-based product that has been interpreted as pasta, with meat and fish in a sauce that is thickened with egg between the layers. These layers are called lagana, which is a medieval Italian dialect term for pasta, but in Roman times the term referred to unleavened bread. The finished dish is made in a vessel but there the resemblance to lasagna ceases, for it is not put in the oven and is subsequently turned out onto a serving dish. It is also apparent that the layers are not single: bread, sauce, bread, sauce but make use of a double layer of bread. The Latin original is quite specific and I think it refers to each 'layer' being made up of two layers of bread with the sauce in the middle. The diner then takes this off the pile as a single serving and rolls it up like a hot wrap.

The filling has many different kinds of meat and fish bound in a thick sauce. The recipe calls for udder, which we don't often knowingly consume

these days but we can substitute belly pork; a cooked fish of your choice, any firm white fish will do; chicken meat; and meat from a game bird. In addition, an Italian sausage will be suitable, even mushrooms and literally anything else that's of good quality, to quote the Latin. You can use any meat, fish or vegetable that you particularly like. This dish is intended to be made from left-over foods, mainly roasted meats served the previous evening and returned to the kitchen to be used again. This means that to duplicate the dish you need to have a similar situation. After a large family party or even after Christmas would be a good time to try this, when a selection of meat and fish is available. You will only need a relatively small quantity of each. An alternative is to make a large quantity for a party. The dish looks good and tastes familiar, even modern. If you want to serve a Roman meal to guests who might find some of the more intense Roman sauces a bit too out-of-the-ordinary, this is ideal.

75 g belly pork or cold roast meat  
75 g cooked chicken breast  
75 g cooked breast meat from either pheasant,  
guinea-fowl or quail,  
50 g cooked large prawns or lobster  
50 g cooked firm white fish such as skate  
400 ml white wine  
100 ml passum (see p. 32)  
1 tsp ground lovage seeds  
1 tsp chopped lovage leaf or parsley  
generous freshly ground pepper  
2–3 tbsp fish sauce  
50 ml concentrated cooking liquor  
50 g mushrooms or leek  
50 g smoked sausage or any meatball recipe from  
the hors d'œuvre  
section  
cornflour to thicken  
3 eggs  
3 tbsp olive oil  
1 batch of lagana bread (p. 35)  
100 gms pine-kernels  
1 tbsp whole black peppercorns

All the meat and fish needs to be cooked in advance. When you roast, or poach in a little water, reserve the cooking liquor and meat juices. If you are using left-over meats, make a little stock with the carcasses. Put the wine and passum in a saucepan and add the ground lovage, lovage leaf, pepper, fish sauce and concentrated cooking liquor. Add the mushrooms or any other vegetable used and cook them in the sauce. Chop the meat into small pieces roughly 2 cm square, slice the sausage, peel the prawns and place all the ingredients in the sauce and bring to the boil. Simmer gently until everything is well blended: do not over-cook. Thicken with the cornflour. Blend the eggs with the oil and stir into the hot mixture, turning it from the bottom at all times, and continue to cook over a low heat until the eggs begin to set the sauce. Do not boil vigorously and take off the heat when it is thick enough. You will need a deep, straight-sided casserole roughly 20 cm across and the same diameter as the flat bread known as lagana. Put in one flat bread, then a ladle of the meat and fish sauce and spread it out right to the edges. Sprinkle the sauce with peppercorns and pine-kernels. The casserole ensures the sauce does not run over the edges. Cover with 2 flat breads and then 1 ladle of sauce, another 2 flat breads and 1 ladle of sauce until you use up all the sauce. Turn it out immediately and serve or hold in a warm oven until ready to serve. This makes 10 servings of bread and sauce.



## Chicken in sweet and sour sauce, Apicius 6.8.1

The first part of this recipe is a remarkably good sweet and sour dipping sauce for chicken pieces. These are excellent for finger food and easily prepared for parties. Roast or poach a whole chicken, or just breast meat, pull the breast into strips (or let your guests do this bit) and dip in the finished sauce. The original recipe includes laser root, which is not available, and I suggest asafoetida as an alternative. It probably does not have quite the same flavour as the root but if you have developed a taste for this pungent and unusual spice it will prove acceptable. Even without it the sauce is very effective.

1 tsp dill seed  
a pinch of asafoetida powder or resin (optional)  
2 heaped tsp fresh chopped mint  
2 tbsp white wine vinegar  
2 tbsp date syrup  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
1 tbsp olive oil  
1 dessert spoon whole-grain mustard  
defrutum (see p. 30) to taste  
a whole roast or poached chicken, jointed

Dry-roast the dill (and the asafoetida if used) in a frying-pan and grind to a fine powder. Chop the mint and combine with the spice in a bowl and add the other ingredients. Mix well and allow to stand to combine the flavours. Taste. If it is too sweet add a little more fish sauce, too vinegary a little defrutum. Serve with cooked chicken pieces.

## Roast chicken in a honey and dill glaze, Apicius 6.8.2

The sweet and sour sauce on the previous page is transformed in the very next recipe in the Apicius manuscript into a honey glaze. It is particularly effective with poussin or a larger organic corn-fed bird. Try it with a guinea-fowl, as its flavour is probably closer to an ancient chicken than the rather bland meat of modern commerce.

1 batch of the sweet and sour sauce on the previous page  
1 heaped tbsp set honey  
1tbsp fish sauce  
1 guinea-fowl or small organic chicken or 2 poussin

Combine the ingredients and stir until smooth. Prepare the chicken for cooking by removing excess skin and fat etc. Parboil the bird in water for a maximum of three-quarters of an hour (depending on the age and size of the bird in question). Pre-heat the oven to 375°F, 190°C, gas mark 5. Drain the bird from the water and wipe dry with a clean cloth. Arrange in a roasting dish and make deep cuts in the breast meat from front to back, 2 cuts on each side of the breast. Cut deeply into the leg just once at its thickest point. Pour the sauce over the chicken and baste so that the sauce penetrates into every cut. Roast for a further 30 minutes to 1 hour until the juices run clear. Every 10 minutes take the bird out of the oven and baste again. As the sauce reduces in the heat, it will become thick and sticky at the bottom of the pan. Add a very little water if it gets too thick and proves difficult to baste with. You can either serve the chicken whole, sprinkled with freshly ground pepper, for your guests to pull apart or, as an alternative, use boned chicken breast and thigh cut into strips and marinated in the sauce for a few hours before flash roasting them and serving hot as before.

## Duck with turnip, Apicius 6.2.3

There is a traditional French duck recipe very similar to this save that the sauce is made with sherry instead of defrutum and the turnips are cooked separately. Otherwise, the recipe seems not to have changed much in 2,000 years.

1 small duck with giblets  
300 g baby turnips, trimmed  
3 tbsp olive oil  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
200 ml white wine  
½ small leek  
small handful fresh coriander

90 ml defrutum (see p. 30)

For the sauce:

2 tsp cumin

4 tsp coriander seeds

a large pinch of ground asafoetida, or ½ tsp of the powder  
(optional)

1 tsp black peppercorns

2 tbsp white wine vinegar

400 ml cooking liquor as stock

cornflour to thicken

defrutum/vinegar/fish sauce to taste

Trim the duck and remove the wings. Place in a large pan of water and bring to the boil. Trim the turnips, peel if necessary, and bring them to the boil in a separate pan of salted water. Drain, refresh under cold running water, and reserve. Simmer the duck for 1 hour and then remove and dry the bird. Put the giblets (not the liver) and the wings into the pan of duck stock and continue to cook. (If you like, add a chicken leg to improve the flavour.) Strain and reserve 400 ml of stock for making the sauce.

Put the duck in a large casserole and add the olive oil, fish sauce and the wine. Cut the leek down the middle and tie the pieces back together with the coriander in the middle. Add to the casserole along with the turnips. Cover and put in a hot oven (400°F, 200°C, gas 6). Bake for a further 45 minutes and then remove the lid. Pour the defrutum over the duck and continue to roast, basting frequently until the skin is crisp and the juices from the leg run clear. If the juices in the casserole seem to reduce too much, add a little of the stock.

While it is cooking, make the sauce. Dry-roast the cumin, coriander and asafoetida until they give off their flavour and spit a little. Grind into a fine powder with the pepper. Blend with the vinegar and put in a small saucepan.

When the duck is very crisp and the legs pull easily from the carcass, remove from the oven and keep warm on a serving dish with the turnips. Deglaze the casserole with the reserved stock. Tip into a jug and allow to stand until the fat settles on the surface. Scoop most of the fat off with a ladle and remove the remainder with kitchen paper. Add to the saucepan with the spices and blend together. Bring to heat and thicken with a little cornflour; taste. Adjust the sweet/ sour/salt balance with more defrutum/vinegar/fish sauce as required. Pour over the duck and serve.

## Sauce for cooked meats, Apicius 6.2.7

Another dipping sauce designed for cooked meats. Akin to mint sauce but with a more piquant flavour that cuts through fatty meats, it is not only good with lamb but also suitable for pork.

½ tsp lovage seed  
1 level tsp celery seed  
generous freshly ground pepper  
3 heaped tsp chopped fresh mint  
½ tsp ground myrtle berry  
2 tbsp honey  
2 tbsp wine  
1 tbsp vinegar  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
1 tbsp olive oil

Roast and grind the first two spices, mix with the pepper and combine with the herbs in a bowl. Add the other liquids and whisk together. If necessary, warm the honey a little to ensure it blends fully with the other ingredients.

## Parthian chicken, Apicius 6.8.3

This is a dish that uses asafoetida as the main seasoning. The spice represents Eastern influences and exotic tastes. Used boldly, it is very good and, just like my first attempt at cooking chicken with 30 cloves of garlic, the flavour is not as intrusive when fully cooked out as I imagined it would be.

1 medium chicken  
½ tsp lovage seed  
1 tsp caraway seed  
½–¾ tsp asafoetida powder or a lump of resin  
about the size of a bean  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
250 ml medium sweet white wine  
1 tbsp olive oil  
3 tbsp fish sauce

Prepare the chicken and place it in an oven dish. Dry-roast the seeds and the asafoetida until they give off their aroma. Grind them all to a powder with the pepper. Add the wine, a little olive oil and the fish sauce, and pour over the chicken. Put in the oven and roast as normal until crispy and well done. Baste the chicken often during the cooking.

## Chicken or guinea-fowl in the style of Vardanus, Apicius 6.8.11

This is an unusual Roman recipe in that it contains no spices apart from pepper. It is subtle in flavour, creamy and quite delicious. The sauce is very rich and even contains egg white, which inevitably causes the sauce to split, but don't see this as a problem. The original Apician recipe uses chicken but it must be remembered that early chickens were likely to be much tastier than our modern breeds. An organic corn-fed chicken is suitable for a spicy Roman dish but a dish like this requires a more robust taste. The guinea-fowl is of African origin and it became popular in Roman kitchens in the Empire. It is missing from Apicius but the guinea-fowl is so similar in shape and texture to chicken that it was almost certainly used in those recipes that are grouped together under the collective title pullum 'chicken'. Its meat is darker and has a gamy hint. The dish is best served with a starch component such as rice or cracked wheat.

1 guinea-fowl  
500 ml medium sweet wine  
40 ml olive oil  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
1 leek  
20 stalks with leaf of fresh coriander  
3 sprigs summer or winter savory or, if  
unavailable, thyme  
generous freshly ground pepper  
75 g pine kernels  
60 ml goats', sheep's or cows' milk  
1 raw egg white  
300 ml cooking liquor



Trim and joint the guinea-fowl into 8 pieces: 4 pieces of breast, 2 thighs and 2 drumsticks. Place the wine, olive oil, and fish sauce in a pan or casserole and put in the guinea-fowl pieces. Make sure the pan is big enough to allow all the joints to be covered by the liquid. Add water if necessary.

Trim the green from the leek and cut the white part in half and down the middle into 4 even pieces. Put 2 of the pieces on a board with a long piece of kitchen string underneath. Fold the coriander so it is the same length as the leek, lay the savory on the top and lay the other 2 pieces of leek on top of that and then bind them securely across their length. Place the bundle in the pan (also covered by the liquid), allowing some string to hang over the edge of the pan.

Bring this all to a gentle simmer, cover at all times and cook for roughly 1½ hours until the meat easily pulls away from the bone. Remove the meat and keep warm.

Reduce the cooking liquor by boiling hard until you are left with 300 ml. If you are in a hurry, you can simply measure out this quantity and discard the remainder.

Ideally you will need a pestle and mortar for the next stage, but a food processor will suffice. Grind the pepper and pine kernels to a fine paste. If you have used a processor the texture will remain grainy for some time. Add the milk slowly to form a soft paste. Then add the egg white, stirring gently (do not incorporate air). Place the cool cooking liquor in a small pan and add the pine nut mixture. Place on a gentle heat, stirring all the time, until the required thickness is achieved. Pour over the guinea-fowl. Sprinkle with ground black pepper and some fresh coriander leaves.

## Cold sauce for pork, Apicius 8.7.15

This cold sauce is reminiscent of modern-day sweet pickles. It is rich and piquant and goes especially well with pork. The recipe was originally conceived for boiled pork but roasting gives a better texture to any meat. It can be used as a dip or spooned onto the meat before serving. It is ideally made in a wide, deep mortar but a hand blender is also effective.

2 level tsp caraway seeds

60 g pine kernels

1 tsp green dill

½ tsp oregano  
2 tbs vinegar  
1 tbs fish sauce  
2 dessert spoons date syrup  
2 dessert spoons honey  
40 g whole grain mustard  
generous freshly ground black pepper

Roast and grind the seeds. Place in a blender jug and add the pine kernels, mustard and all the other ingredients. Blend until a coarse but uniform texture is achieved. If you are using a mortar, grind the pine kernels into a paste before blending with the thicker liquids (date syrup, honey), then the thin liquids (vinegar, fish sauce), and the seasonings.

## Toasted pine kernel sauce for roast wild boar or pork, Apicius 8.1.4

A stunning mixture, reminiscent of a satay sauce, with a wonderful toasted pine nut flavour and intense combination of spices that is typical of many of the Roman dipping sauces. Use it as a dip for roasted pork or (if you can get it) wild boar.

100 g pine kernels  
1 heaped tsp cumin seeds  
1 level tsp celery seed  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 tsp dried mint or 2 tsp fresh mint  
½ tsp dried thyme  
½ tsp dried or fresh savory (or 1 tsp thyme if no  
savory)  
a good pinch of saffron strands  
1 tbs honey  
2 tbs olive oil  
1 tbs fish sauce  
2 tbs white wine vinegar  
60 ml white wine

Place the pine kernels in a dry frying-pan and put on a medium heat. Toss and shake the pan regularly until they are an even light brown. Do not burn them as they will taste bitter. Reserve and cool. In the same pan put the cumin and celery seed and roast them until they give off their flavour. Grind in a mortar or coffee grinder with plenty of pepper. Put the herbs, saffron and the pine kernels in the mortar and pound or process the mixture to a fine texture. Add the honey and the oil and pulse or grind again. Tip into a small pan and add the vinegar and fish sauce. Blend smooth and heat. Assess the consistency and add wine to achieve a clinging texture. Taste. Adjust the seasoning if necessary: it should be neither too sweet nor too sour. Serve hot with roasted meat in chunks on cocktail sticks.

## Ofellae Ostian style, Apicius, 7.4.1

In this recipe ofellae are highly-seasoned meat pieces taken from salted belly pork. A modern day equivalent might be 'spare-ribs' as the dish seems to have been quite common and may even have been a kind of fast food. The pork is scored, marinated and cooked as a whole joint, before chunks of meat are cut off and served with a sauce. Sometimes, as the next recipe but one suggests, the cooked meat is heated up and finished off in an oenogarum. This recipe, however, calls for the belly pork to be marinated for 3 days in a blend of spices including asafoetida and then roasted whole. Asafoetida resin was known for its tenderizing qualities and you will find that the long marinating process will render the meat very tender. It is particularly good as a party dish, as we have found, but make sure there is some left over for the cook. The joint can also be served whole and, if your guests are adventurous, they can pull off the pieces with their fingers.

1 tsp lovage seed  
2 tsp dill seed  
2 tsp cumin seed  
a generous pinch of asafoetida resin or powder  
2 bay berries or a large fresh bay leaf  
1 tsp black peppercorns  
3 tbsps fish sauce  
750 g kg piece of belly pork or diced pork

For the sauce:

generous freshly ground pepper

½ level tsp ground lovage seed

2 tbsp fish sauce

50 ml passum (see p. 32)

a little starch or cornflour to thicken

Put all the seeds and the asafoetida together in a small frying-pan and dry-roast them until they give off their aroma. Grind them, with the peppercorns, to a fine powder and add the fish sauce (and the bay leaf if bay berries are unavailable). If you are using whole belly, lay it skin-side downwards on the worktop and trim any loose flaps of meat. Using a very sharp knife, cut through the meat down to the skin in strips 3 cm wide. Then turn the meat and cut the opposite way, creating cubes that are still attached to the skin, which should not be cut at all. Then rub the spice and fish sauce mixture all over the meat, pressing it into all the crevices. Turn the meat over onto a tray, cover and put in a fridge for up to 3 days. Twenty-four hours will suffice, but the longer period will ensure best results.

If you have used diced pork rather than whole belly, add the marinade and mix it thoroughly to ensure the meat is well coated.

At the moment of cooking, put the whole joint (meat uppermost, skin down) in a roasting tin along with any remaining marinade, add a little olive oil and roast in a medium oven (375°F, 190°C, gas 5) until well done and the meat comes away from the skin relatively easily. If you are using diced pork, scatter the pieces in a roasting tin, with the marinade, and cook in a similar oven until well done.

Serve the joint with a sharp knife so that your guests can cut off their own chunks, or turn out the diced meat into a bowl. The sauce will be served separately. For this, bring all the ingredients for the sauce to a gentle heat and simmer to blend together. Thicken with the cornflour or starch and serve as a dipping sauce with the meat.

## Ofellae Apician style, Apicius 7.4.2

This version of ofellae is associated with the gourmet Marcus Gavius Apicius himself and may have been a favourite of his. The belly pork is roasted and finished in a sweet oenogarum flavoured with pepper, lovage and a root known as 'sweet rush' (*Cyperus esculentus*). I have been unable to find this root in spice merchants, although it is available in France under the name amande de terre (and known in English as chufa or tiger nut). I have experimented with ginger as well as sweet galingale, which is closely related to *Cyperus* and has a bitter-sweet taste, and have found them both quite successful.

1 kg slab of belly pork, boned  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
2 tsp cumin seeds  
½ tsp lovage seeds  
1 level tsp ground ginger or galingale  
150 ml passum or half plain wine and half raisin  
wine (see p. 32)  
60 ml fish sauce  
1 tbsp olive oil

To prepare the belly pork, trim any loose flaps of meat. Score it into cubes 3 cm square, still attached to the skin, in the manner described in the previous recipe.

Turn the meat into a roasting tin and sprinkle it with olive oil. Roast in a medium oven (375°F, 190°C, gas 5) until well done and coming away from the skin relatively easily. Roast and grind the spices and put in a small saucepan with the passum (or wines) and fish sauce. Add a little oil and heat. Take the meat from the oven and cut the individual chunks from the slab. Drop them in the sauce. Cut down to the skin and take the fat layers too as they are very tasty. Bring the meat to the boil in the sauce and simmer gently for 10–15 minutes or until most of the sauce has evaporated. Spoon out the meat and serve sprinkled with black pepper.

## Terentine minutal, Apicius 4.3.2

This recipe for a minutal, a basic stew, is made with mince (Latin *isicia*) which was certainly an everyday ingredient. Other minutals are often made

with cooked meat (see the next recipe). It is a creamy and soft pottage, a true 'comfort food' in texture, while also having the subtle tang of celery and lovage. It is thickened with a special dried pastry known as tracta (see page 37) which means it's a meal in itself: starch and meat combined. Tracta has often been regarded as a form of pasta, but the distinction between the two is clear. The pieces of tracta are quite fine and release their starch slowly into the sauce, while pasta has no thickening qualities. The original isicia recipe calls for a specific Terentine flavouring which we are never told about. I have devised a seasoning to go with the mince which complements the rest of the dish. You could use any favourite spice to flavour the mince – feel free to experiment.

300 g minced lamb  
2 tsp dried mint  
1 level tsp celery seed  
generous freshly ground pepper  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
20 g soft bread crumbs

For the sauce:

500 ml lamb stock (cube or fresh)  
1 tbsp fish sauce (and more, perhaps, at the end)  
40 ml olive oil  
1 small leek, chopped  
½ tsp lovage seed  
½ tsp dried oregano or 1 tsp fresh oregano  
50 ml passum (see p. 32)  
100 ml wine  
2–3 discs of tracta (see p. 37) or cornflour to thicken

Place the mince, mint, roasted and ground celery seed, pepper, fish sauce and bread crumbs in a food processor and grind together as finely as possible. The appearance should be that of pâté. Put the stock, olive oil and 1 tbsp fish sauce in a separate pan and add the chopped leek. Bring to a simmer for 5 minutes. Ladle some of the stock into the food processor with the meat and blend it smooth, add a second ladle-full and blend again. When it is smooth and fine enough to pour from the bowl, add it to the rest of the stock in the pan. Blend the two together carefully. The meat should not

clump together. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 15–20 minutes. Dry-roast the lovage and grind and add it along with the oregano. Add the passum and wine. In a mortar or food processor pound the tracta to a coarse grain. Add them to the pan gradually by sprinkling the grains into the meat sauce and stirring each time. The starch will be released slowly into the sauce and it will take time to thicken completely. Finish cooking the sauce. You will not necessarily use all the tracta. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more fish sauce if necessary and add plenty of freshly ground black pepper.

## Pork and apricot minutal, Apicius 4.3.6

This minutal is made with diced cooked meat rather than mince as in the previous recipe. The stew has a distinct texture due to the fact that the meat was pre-cooked. Though it is quite possible to use raw pork and cook it in the stock, it would not produce an authentic minutal. Minutals tend to be sweet and sour in flavour and cumin is a common seasoning.

500 g pork joint  
300 ml sweet white wine  
300 ml stock/water  
300 ml olive oil  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
2 medium onions or, if available, large bulbed  
spring or young onions  
    in the green  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
½ tsp black peppercorns  
1 tsp dill weed, chopped  
1 dessert spoon set honey  
1 tbsp passum (see p. 32)  
2 tbsp vinegar  
80 g fresh or semi dried apricots  
3 discs of tracta (see p. 37) or cornflour to thicken

Rub olive oil and salt into the skin of the pork and roast in a hot oven until the skin is crisp and the meat is well done. Allow to cool and dice the meat

into chunks. Place the wine, stock, olive oil, fish sauce and the chopped onion in a saucepan, bring to a gentle simmer and continue until the onion is cooked. Add the diced pork along with any meat juices (skimmed of fat) and cook together. Roast the cumin and grind with the pepper and add along with the dill, honey, passum, vinegar and the apricots. Continue to cook together. Grind the tracta into a coarse grain and add to the pan, stirring all the time. The starch will be released slowly into the sauce and it will take time to thicken completely. You may not need to use all the tracta. Finish cooking and taste. Adjust the seasoning with more fish sauce if necessary.



## Stuffed hare, Apicius 8.8.3

Hare has a rich, gamy flavour and is ideally suited to one of the spicier sauces in Apicius. For once, the meat can compete with the sauce: we might even say that the meat fights back. A nutty stuffing gives texture to the pieces of hare and the caul fat ensures the parcels don't dry out too much. Hare can be obtained from a good independent butcher. They are generally vacuum-packed with most of the blood still retained. It is a messy business preparing them, but well worth it.

1 skinned and gutted hare  
150 g whole mixed nuts (hazel, pine, almond, walnut)  
1 dessert spoon whole black peppercorns  
1 egg  
1 pack caul fat (see stuffed kidneys, p. 48)  
1 pinch of asafoetida powder  
a splash of fish sauce

For the sauce:



½ medium onion  
1 heaped tsp chopped fresh rue  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 level tsp fresh savory or thyme  
2 tbsp date syrup  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
100 ml sweet wine

Prepare the hare: cut the back legs off at the body. If they are large, cut them in half with a cleaver and trim neatly. You may find the legs have splintered and you should remove all loose bone. Cut the front legs off, including the shoulder-blades, and trim all the meat from these smaller legs. Chop it all into small pieces. This leaves the loin which needs its rib cage removing: trim it at each end and then cut into 2–3 even pieces. You should have 6–7 neat pieces put to one side. Take the whole nuts (without the pine kernels) and process or chop by hand into a very coarse kibble. Put the trimmings of the hare meat in the processor and grind to a fine mince. Add the whole peppercorns and the nuts together with the egg and pulse briefly to bind. Add the whole pine kernels and pulse again briefly. Stuff the loin by placing the mixture on the underside on the bone and folding the skin flap over. Stuff the legs by cutting deeply into the meat and pushing in the stuffing. Take the caul fat and stretch a piece out on your board as large as it will go. Place a piece of hare on the fat and cut around it at least twice as wide and deep. Wrap the hare in the fat and pull it tightly across to seal in the loose stuffing. Roast in a medium oven (375°F, 190°C, gas 5) for 1¼–1½ hours until the meat is well done. Remove and sprinkle a little fish sauce and a pinch of asafoetida powder into the roasting tin, shake to combine, then keep warm.

To make the sauce: dice the onion finely and fry in olive oil in a small pan until transparent. Add the rue, pepper, thyme and date syrup, fish sauce and the sweet wine and bring to heat. Take the hare from the roasting tin and soak up any clear fat with kitchen paper. Pour the hot sauce into the tin and allow all the dried residue to float free. Put a little heat under the tin and make sure all the potential flavour is released. Pour it all back into a saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer for 10 minutes or so until it begins to thicken a little. Taste. Add more fish sauce if necessary to balance the sweetness. Serve the hare with the sauce poured over.

## Roast lamb with coriander, Apicius 8.6.8

This is a simple yet delicious way to serve lamb. It is ideal on the barbecue and has been a fail-safe dish at our Roman shows. For those awkward souls who don't like the taste of fish sauce it is also one of the few dishes that doesn't use it.

40 g coriander seed  
generous freshly ground black pepper and sea salt  
olive oil  
4 double-loin lamb steaks or lamb chops or diced  
leg meat

You will ideally need a spice grinder for this as you cannot roast the coriander first as usual. Grinding it cold in a mortar can take some time and effort. However, I am sorry to say that using ready-ground coriander is not acceptable either.

Grind the coriander to a medium grain texture, neither too fine nor too coarse. It should be like bread crumbs in texture. Season with the salt and pepper. Brush the lamb with olive oil and press the steaks into the coriander on all sides as if it were bread crumbs. If you wish, dice the meat first then thread on to a skewer and barbecue not too close to the fire until crusty and well done. Alternatively, grill or roast in an oven. Serve with a sweet oenogarum (see page 33) as a dipping sauce.

## Boned and roast shoulder of lamb in a date sauce, Apicius 8.6.7

As described in the original manuscript, this recipe involved boning and stuffing a whole lamb and serving it with a thick creamy sauce made with milk, honey and dates. It works just as well with a smaller quantity of meat. The sauce is not at all spicy and is therefore suited to an inexperienced palate. The sauce recipe is actually recorded with the precise quantities in the Latin text; they work very well and I see no reason to alter them.

1 boned shoulder of lamb

1 large onion, 2 large carrots, 1 large parsnip,  
peeled, cleaned and  
sliced  
12 g whole black peppercorns  
300 ml goats', sheep's or cows' milk  
110 g honey  
a pinch of asafoetida powder or resin to your taste  
a little salt  
4 softened or fresh dates, stoned  
70 ml fish sauce  
70 ml olive oil  
150 ml medium white wine  
cornflour to thicken

Ask your butcher to bone the shoulder. Sprinkle a little fish sauce over the inside surface of the meat and bind it up with kitchen string into a neat roll. Place on a bed of vegetables such as onion, parsnip, or carrot. Cover with tin foil and roast slowly in a medium oven (350°F, 180°C, gas 4) for at least 3 hours. Take the foil off for the last hour and turn the heat up a little. Remove the meat and vegetables; reserve while the sauce is finished. Retain all the juices and drain off the fat. Grind a quarter of the pepper and put both the ground and the whole pepper into a pan with the milk, 40 g honey, the pounded asafoetida and the salt. Bring it to a gentle heat. In a mortar or food processor grind the softened dates with 70 g honey, fish sauce and oil into a smooth sauce. Transfer to a saucepan and add the wine and the meat juices. Strain the milk/honey/asafoetida/pepper mixture into the sauce and blend the two together. Bring it all to a gentle heat and thicken with a little cornflour. Reheat the meat if necessary; carve thick slices; pour the sauce over them.



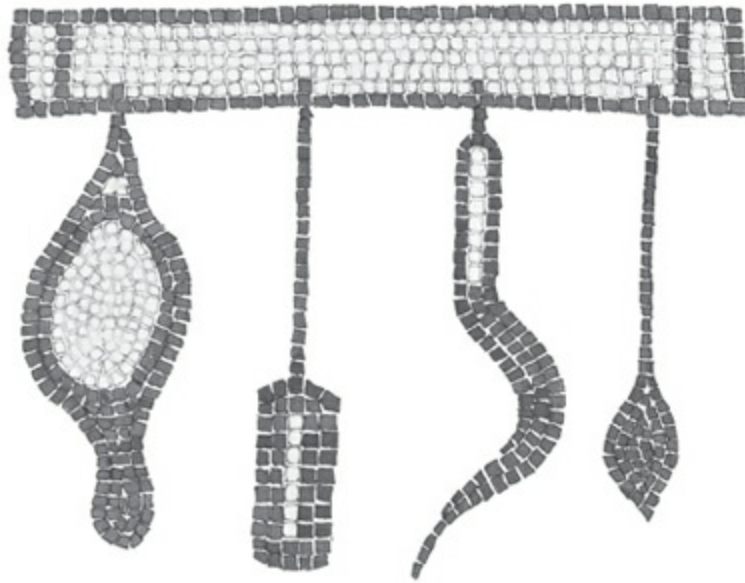
## Roast lamb with asafoetida, Apicius 8.6.4

It was very common for asafoetida to be used as a basic seasoning with many kinds of meat. On its own and in larger quantities, this spice can be very successful and even I, who don't find asafoetida particularly to my taste, like it in this way. Try this simple marinade and basting mixture with loin or chops or leg steaks of lamb. It works well as a barbecue sauce if that is your preferred method of cooking.

2 tbsp fish sauce  
2 tbsp olive oil  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 level tsp asafoetida powder or a piece of resin  
the size of a pea  
6 lamb chops or 4 loin steaks

Combine all the ingredients save the meat. If using asafoetida resin, crush it into fine powder first. Turn the lamb over in the mixture and leave for a few hours or overnight. Cover the dish with cling-film so that the asafoetida does not taint the other food in the fridge. Take the meat out of the marinade and roast, grill or griddle the meat, basting it often with the marinade until well done and crisp.

# Vegetable side-dishes



## Lentil pottage, Apicius 5.2.3

This is another very popular dish at my demonstrations. The sweet and spicy blend of seasonings is a perfect complement to the lentils.

Lentils of different types were quite common in Roman Italy but we know of only one type in Britain from this period. An archaeological dig in London revealed the remains of burnt red lentil: in this case red lentils with their brown skins.

- 250 g brown lentils
- 3 medium-sized leeks
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- 1 heaped tbsp set honey
- 1 tbsp defrutum (see p. 30)
- 20 g coriander seed
- pinch of asafoetida resin or  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp asafoetida powder (optional)
- 3 tsp chopped fresh mint or 2 tsp dried mint
- 3 tbsp fish sauce

large handful green coriander (½ bunch), chopped  
1 tsp chopped fresh or dried rue  
cornflour to thicken  
generous freshly ground pepper

Soak lentils in water overnight, drain and cover with fresh water, or you can use white wine instead for a richer mix. Bring to the boil and simmer till just beginning to soften. Add the cleaned and sliced leeks and continue cooking. Add the olive oil, vinegar, honey and defrutum. Dry-roast the coriander seeds and asafoetida, grind to a fairly coarse powder, add to the pan. Add the dried mint (if using instead of fresh green leaves). When fully cooked, add the fish sauce and the fresh coriander, rue and mint. Bring back to heat, thicken with a little cornflour, sprinkle with freshly ground pepper and serve.

## Spicy mushy peas, Apicius 5.3.6

250 g dried marrowfat peas (soaked overnight)  
250 ml white wine  
2 tbsps olive oil  
40 ml white dessert wine (Sauternes)  
1 heaped tbsps set honey  
1½ tsp cumin seed  
1½ tsp celery seed  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 tsp chopped fresh rue or lovage leaves  
1–2 tbsps fish sauce

Strain the peas and place in a pan with the white wine and sufficient water to cover. Bring to the boil and skim any foam from the surface of the water. Simmer for 30–45 minutes or until just soft and most of the liquid has evaporated. Add the olive oil, dessert wine, and honey and continue to cook gently while you dry-roast the seeds. Grind to a fine powder in a mortar and add to the pan with the pepper and chopped herb. Finally, add the fish sauce 1 tablespoon at a time and taste for sweet/salt balance. The consistency should be that of mushy peas. Serve with isicia – meatballs (see pages 43, 46, 47).

## Spring cabbage with cumin, Apicius 3.9.1 & 3

Remarkably, this recipe for simply-cooked cabbage has no fish sauce but requires salt instead. At 3.9.3 the same recipe (with a few added garnishes) is repeated but this time with fish sauce. From these two variations, we can see how effective the use of fish sauce can be but also see that some Romans clearly didn't use it as much as we imagine. This is an exceptionally good and simple dish that refutes the accusation that the Romans abused their food with spices.

500 g spring cabbage  
2 tbsp olive oil  
2 tsp roasted and ground cumin seeds  
2 tbsp sweet wine  
salt to taste or 1–2 tbsp fish sauce  
1 small leek, thinly sliced and briefly steamed or boiled  
a handful of coriander leaves, chopped  
freshly ground black pepper

Prepare the cabbage by cutting off the thicker stalks and trimming any discoloured leaves. Coarsely shred it and wash in cold water. Put the olive oil in a large, deep lidded pan and heat. Lift the cabbage from the water into a colander and shake off the majority of the water. Place in the hot pan. Cover it and leave for a few minutes to heat and then stir briskly. Cover again and steam the leaves briefly until just cooked. Keep some crispness to the leaves and remove the lid so that any remaining water can evaporate. Add the ground cumin and a splash or two of the wine. Heat through over a hot flame or ring and divide into two portions if required. Flavour one with a little fish sauce, the other with salt. Serve with the hot steamed leek and chopped coriander sprinkled over the top. Finish with freshly ground pepper.

## Carrots or parsnips in a cumin honey glaze, Apicius 3.21.3

Carrots in the Roman world were an early, primitive form that were pale yellow or purple and quite thin and coarse compared to the juicy orange



varieties we know today. Vegetable growers and seed catalogues now offer these specialist carrots and it may be possible to obtain them. If they are unavailable, modern varieties will work just as well.

250 g peeled carrots or parsnips or a mixture of both  
2 tbsp olive oil  
2 tsp cumin seed (roasted and ground)  
1 level dessert spoon honey  
1 tbsp sweet wine  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1–2 tbsp fish sauce

Cut the vegetables into discs and chunks. Bring to the boil in water and immediately drain them. Allow to dry off a little. Place the olive oil in an ovenproof dish, add the vegetables and sprinkle cumin, honey, wine and pepper over them. Shake the pan and ensure that all the vegetables are covered with the seasoning. Roast in a hot oven (400°F, 200°C, gas 6) until the vegetables are crisp and the honey has boiled to a sticky syrup. Add the fish sauce to deglaze the sticky honey. Return to the oven for a few minutes to reheat, then serve.

## Spring cabbage and chicken patina, Apicius 4.2.7

Many commentators have had problems interpreting this particular recipe in the original manuscript. The issues it raises are complex and it is discussed in detail in our own edition of Apicius. The main problem stems from the assumption that green vegetables of all kinds ought to be cooked before they can be combined with egg and turned into a patina. The recipe for patina of asparagus on page 52 (Apicius 4.2.5 & 6), which precedes this one in the original text, does not require that the asparagus be cooked, but simply pounded in its raw state and soaked in wine before straining out the green matter. The fresh green liquor produces a delicious fresh-tasting patina that resembles a soufflé. This recipe says that wild herbs, black briony, mustard greens, cucumber or spring greens can be cooked in the same way. Some commentators have assumed this to be mistaken and that some cooking process was omitted from the instructions which survive. We cannot know

exactly what happened here but, if the non-cooked version tastes particularly good, then it seems unnecessary to alter the recipe. I have made this patina with spring cabbage and even parsley and spinach and the results are simply outstanding.

Were you to follow the recommendation of the original manuscript and try this recipe using cucumbers, you should note that ancient cucumbers were closer to a melon or gourd in texture. Modern varieties are too watery to be successful. I would counsel buying a gourd or squash from a shop which supplies Indian or Asian customers.

300 g spring cabbage, flat-leaf parsley, or spinach  
300 ml white wine  
½ medium-sized onion  
2 tbsp olive oil  
small handful fresh coriander (a quarter-bunch)  
½ tsp dried savory or thyme  
½ tsp lovage seed  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
4 eggs  
1 chicken breast cooked and sliced

Chop the green leaves fairly small and then place them in a food processor to grind them as small as possible. Add the wine and continue to pulse for a few seconds. If cabbage is used, the smell will be rather off-putting at this stage – it will appear that you have been boiling cabbage in your house for ever – but it will dissipate! Leave the cabbage and wine to marinate for a few hours. Pass the mixture through a fine sieve to press out all the liquor, which you save for the next stage.

Peel and chop the onion finely and fry in a little oil until transparent. Purée the onion in a mortar, a small food processor or a hand blender, then add the rest of the oil, coriander, savory, lovage, pepper and fish sauce. Continue to pound or process to a coarse texture. Combine the retained vegetable liquor, the sauce and 4 eggs and beat smooth. Grease a small ceramic dish with oil and place a layer of chicken breast on the bottom. Pour the mixture on top and place the vessel inside another larger dish and fill this with water. Bake in a cool oven (300°F, 150°C, gas 2) for roughly 30 minutes until just set. The onion and herbs will settle on the surface in a separate

layer unless you stir at the last moment. Cool and serve either as a side-dish with the main course or as a starter. Alternatively, bake in individual ramekins. Sprinkle with freshly ground black pepper.

## Spinach or nettle patina, Apicius 4.2.36

This is a very simple green-leaf frittata that demonstrates effectively the unique qualities of fish sauce. Springtime nettle tops are not quite so daunting a prospect as you imagine. All you need is gloves to pick them (and you should also wear thin plastic gloves to wash and cut them up). Once they are cooked, any sting is lost and the flavour is quite superb. This recipe will work just as well with spinach or any green leaf such as spring dandelions, alexanders, any of the *Chenopodiums* such as Good King Henry, and fat hen.

250 g spring nettle tops or spinach  
5 g black peppercorns  
40 ml fish sauce  
80 ml olive oil  
4 eggs beaten  
25 g grated hard sheep's cheese (optional)

Wash and trim the leaves and drain in a colander. Coarsely chop and put to one side. Grind the pepper to a very fine powder, mix with the fish sauce and olive oil and place in a saucepan. Bring to a gentle simmer and add the leaves. Stir and cover and leave for a few minutes to cook. Strain into a sieve and discard the cooking liquor. Place the cooked leaves in a nonstick frying-pan or dish and add the beaten eggs. Combine the leaves and egg to make a uniform colour. Cook on a hob like an omelette or place the whole dish in a medium oven (375°F, 190°C, gas 5) until set. Optional: add the grated cheese to the frittata just before it is cooked. Cut into wedges and serve with salad and bread.

## Mushroom patina, Apicius 7.13.6

This is not named as a patina in the original manuscript but it may have been considered as one. Egg, along with a vegetable, fish sauce and other seasonings are standard ingredients. It has no liquid apart from oil, fish sauce

and honey and this is unusual. In a similar recipe with small-fry or whitebait (see page 111) the fish is mixed with egg and then simmered, literally 'fried', in a mixture of oil, wine and fish sauce until it sets. In this instance, I have combined all the ingredients and cooked it as an omelette.

300 g black mushrooms  
2 tbsp olive oil  
¼ tsp lovage seed  
1 dessert spoon of honey, and a little more for finishing  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
4 eggs  
1 tbsp fish sauce

Peel and chop the mushrooms and fry them off in the oil. Roast and grind the lovage and add this to the pan along with the honey and pepper. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs with the fish sauce, pour them into the mushroom pan and cook as an omelette. Do not turn, but finish cooking the top under a grill. Turn out onto a large dish and cut into wedges. Brush a little honey over the slices and sprinkle with pepper.

## Boiled or fried vegetables in simple oenogarum, Apicius

### 3.10.1

Any and all vegetables can be served this way – in a simple oenogarum consisting of equal quantities of oil, wine and fish sauce. Leek, cabbage, spinach (including all the Cheonopodiums), alexanders, carrots, turnips, mushrooms et al. are fine. If you have ensured your fish sauce has the correct level of salt (see p. 29), then the effect of this sauce will be to enhance the natural flavour of the vegetables rather than to overpower them with the fish sauce. The wine should be medium-dry to provide a sharpness to the oenogarum.

500g of your chosen vegetable  
salt  
1 tbsp fish sauce

1 tbsp oil  
1 tbsp white wine  
generous freshly ground black pepper

Lightly boil green vegetables with a little salt until al dente; roast or fry root vegetables and mushrooms in oil. You might even combine a selection of root or green varieties in the one dish. Combine the liquids in a small pan and season well with pepper. Heat gently to a simmer while whisking and pour over the hot vegetables just before serving. Do not boil the oenogarum for any length of time as it will concentrate the salt too much.

## Leek and beets with oenogarum, Apicius 3.2.1

This sweet oenogarum has cumin and raisin wine in a more intense combination of flavours that goes well with beetroot and leek.

250 g raw beetroot  
250 g trimmed leek  
1 tbsp dark passum (see p. 32)  
1 dessert spoon fish sauce  
1 level tsp ground cumin  
generous freshly ground pepper

Scrub the beetroots and trim them top and bottom without cutting through into the body of the root. Boil them in water until tender and then cool sufficiently to peel and chop them into chunks. Trim the leeks and slice into a similar size. Steam or boil the leeks until cooked, reheat the beets and combine the two at the last minute. Blend the passum and fish sauce and add the roasted and ground cumin and pepper. Pour over the vegetables at the last minute and serve.

## Sauce for fried gourd or marrow, Apicius 3.4.7

This is a basic oenogarum but with more spices than usual. It was designed for cucurbits, the original gourd-like plants which were native to Italy and which we might equate with any of the firm-fleshed gourds or squashes. Marrows and courgettes were not available in the ancient Mediterranean

world, they are New World varieties brought back by the successors of Columbus. If you want to use them in this recipe, a large and aged marrow is better than a softer courgette.

½ level tsp lovage seed  
1 level tsp cumin seed  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 level tsp dried oregano or a little more fresh  
50 ml white wine  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
2 tbsp olive oil  
750 g gourd, winter squash or marrow

Roast and grind the whole spices, mix with the pepper and combine with the wine, herbs and fish sauce in a small saucepan. Bring it to a simmer. Peel, seed and dice the gourd or marrow and fry in olive oil until it is cooked and has taken on some colour. Pour on the sauce and boil fiercely to combine. Serve.

## Beans in mustard sauce, Apicius 5.6.3

It is not clear what type of bean the 'Baian bean' specified in the original manuscript might have been. The recipe works best with a broad (fava) or butter bean, but cannellini, haricot, black-eyed beans and other sorts may also be used with profit. The flavour is rich, intense and immediate from the pine kernels and cumin, and given a sweet and sour richness by the honey and vinegar. Your guests will not want to eat much at once. I have added a little wine to the recipe in order to make the sauce thinner than the original allows. You will need a mortar for this dish, or a small food processor: the large bowls attached to a standard machine will not be able to purée the pine kernels effectively.

150 g dried broad beans or butter beans  
60 g pine kernels  
1 tbsp honey  
20 g whole grain mustard  
1 tsp chopped fresh or dried rue

2 tsp cumin  
2 tbsp vinegar  
50 ml white wine  
freshly ground black pepper

Soak the beans overnight or for at least 4 hours. Boil in fresh salted water until they are soft but still hold their shape. Drain, refresh and keep to one side. If you are preparing the sauce in a mortar, pound the pine kernels until you have a paste. Alternatively, place them in a small processor and grind as fine as possible. Add the honey, mustard, rue, roasted and ground cumin and the vinegar and blend into a smooth emulsion. Flush out the bowl or mortar with the wine, pour into a saucepan with all the other sauce components and bring to a simmer. Stir into the hot beans and serve sprinkled with freshly ground black pepper.

## Vitellian peas, Apicius 5.3.5

This is one of the original recipes from The Classical Cook Book that we have cooked many times at Roman festivals. It has been adapted a little from my original. Lovage seed replaces the plant leaf (it is quite bitter) and I have increased the number of egg yolks to make it creamier.

250 g dried marrowfat peas  
150 ml white wine  
2 tbsp honey  
2 tbsp vinegar  
2 tbsp olive oil  
½ tsp lovage seed  
freshly ground black pepper  
2 tsp ground ginger  
4 cooked egg yolks  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
a little fresh coriander, chopped

Soak the peas overnight in cold water. Rinse and barely cover in fresh water and bring to the boil. Simmer until the peas are soft and begin to easily purée on the spoon. As the water reduces, replace it with the wine. Add the honey, vinegar and olive oil and continue to cook until the mixture is the texture of

mushy peas. The next stage is best done in a mortar. Roast and grind the lovage seed with a generous amount of freshly ground black pepper. Add the ginger and the cooked egg yolks and pound into a paste. Add to the peas and blend. Add the fish sauce a spoonful at a time and taste: the honey and vinegar should balance and their effect should be tamed by the fish sauce. For the sake of colour, stir a little fresh coriander through the mixture and sprinkle it on the surface of the dish along with some more freshly ground black pepper.

## Mushrooms in caroenum, Apicius 7.13.4

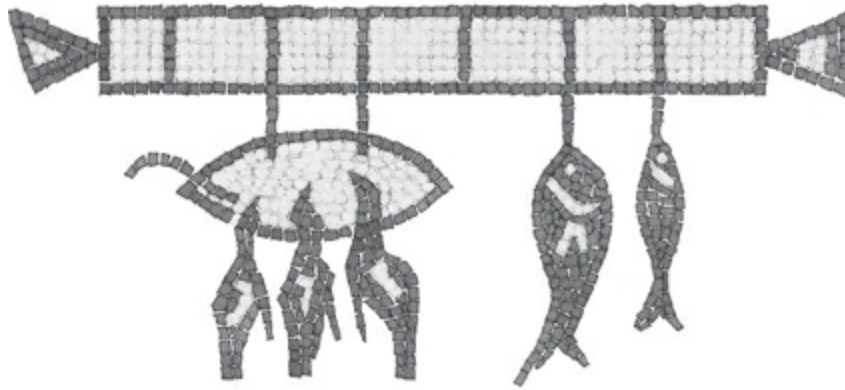
A simple and delicate way to serve mushrooms. The recipe includes no fish sauce or salt and I prefer to add one or the other as well as pepper to finish the dish properly.

250 g open field mushrooms  
100 ml caroenum (see p. 31)  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
a small handful of coriander sprigs  
salt or a splash of fish sauce

Peel large mushrooms and cut into thick slices. Put in a pan with the grape syrup and pepper. Cut the leaves from the coriander and fold the stalks into a bundle and tie with kitchen string. Put in the pan with the mushrooms and bring to heat and simmer until the mushrooms have lost their firmness and shed all their fluid. Remove the bundle and add a little fish sauce, a dessert spoon or so, to season them. Chop the coriander leaf and sprinkle over the mushrooms to serve.



# Fish



## Sauce for baked bream, Apicius 10.2.14

1 fresh bream  
bay leaf, onion and peppercorns for court bouillon  
½ tsp black peppercorns  
½ tsp lovage seed  
1 tsp caraway seed  
4 myrtle berries (optional)  
2 rue berries (optional)  
½ tsp dried oregano (1 tsp if fresh)  
½ tsp dried mint (1 tsp if fresh)  
4 cooked egg yolks  
2 tbsp olive oil  
3 tbsp honey  
1 tbsp white wine vinegar  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
50 ml sweet white wine

Clean and scale the fish and arrange in a baking dish. Half cover with water and add a bay leaf and a few slices of onion and some pepper-corns to the water. Cover the dish and bake in a preheated moderate oven (375°F, 190°C, gas 5) for 20–30 minutes. While it is cooking, dry-roast the seeds and berries in a frying-pan until they spit and give off their aroma. Grind them in a mortar together with the herbs until all is a fine powder. Add the cooked egg yolks

and continue to pound until you have a smooth paste. Add the olive oil and the honey and remix until smooth. Add the vinegar and fish sauce; when smooth again pour into a pan. Put on a gentle heat and add half the sweet wine and bring to a gentle simmer. The finished sauce should be a smooth, pouring consistency. Add more wine if necessary to achieve the desired consistency. Check the bream is cooked by parting the flesh from the bone. Serve it whole, with the sauce separately.

## Stuffed mackerel, Apicius 9.10.1

This recipe calls for bonito, which is a Mediterranean fish similar to mackerel. The fish is wrapped in papyrus and baked in the sealed packets. This is an ideal way to cook fish as it seals in flavour and juices. Papyrus can be bought from art-suppliers for an authentic experience; alternatively, use a heavy (160 g) paper.

2 medium-sized fresh mackerel  
50 g fresh hazelnuts  
10 turns of the pepper mill  
1 tbsp honey  
2 tsp dried mint or 3 heaped tsp fresh mint  
2 A4 sheets of paper or, if available, papyrus

Scale, clean and remove the heads from the fish. Using a sharp heavy knife, cut through the backbone in a number of places and lift out all the pieces. Remove all the small bones. Cut the fish into two or three sections depending on their size. Place the hazelnuts in boiling water and simmer for five minutes, strain and refresh with cold water. Using a clean towel, rub the nuts to remove the skins. Place them in a food processor and add the pepper, honey, and mint. Grind to a fine crunchy texture. Taste: the pepper should give a slight bite and the mint should be prominent. Divide the mixture into the required number of sections of fish and place inside each. Wrap loosely in papyrus or paper, tucking the ends of the paper underneath the parcel. Place in a covered casserole dish and bake in a moderate oven (350°F, 180°C, gas 4) for 20–25 minutes. Remove and serve in the paper, drizzled with a sweet oenogarum (page 33).

## Sauce for lobster or king prawns, Apicius 9.1.6

½ tsp lovage seed  
1 tsp cumin  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
2 heaped tsp chopped fresh mint or 1 tsp dried  
mint  
1 heaped tsp chopped fresh rue  
50 g pine kernels  
1 dessert spoon honey  
1 tbsp vinegar  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
30 ml white wine

Roast and grind the two spices, add the pepper and combine with the herbs. You will need a mortar at this stage to make a paste of the pine kernels. A food processor will not necessarily be able to produce a smooth enough paste. Grind the pine kernels into a smooth paste with the spices and herbs and then add the honey and the other liquids. Beat to combine well and turn into a dish. Serve with cooked king prawns or pieces of lobster.

## Whitebait patina, Apicius 4.2.20

This patina is basically a whitebait omelette. It may seem a little strange to modern British tastes but it is really rather good, looks interesting and is easy to make. It is 'fried' in a mixture of oil, wine and fish sauce: a basic oenogarum, which is another slightly strange ancient concept. This combination will of course spit fiercely when it is heated – be prepared. The concept of frying in water-based liquids and oil occurs frequently in Apicius and is based on Greek ideas that equated frying and boiling as wet forms of cooking, regardless of the volume of liquid, opposed to grilling and roasting, which were dry.

250 g frozen whitebait  
4 eggs  
generous freshly ground black pepper

1 tbsp olive oil  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
1 tbsp wine

Defrost the fish, rinse in cold water and drain. Beat the eggs together and season well with pepper. Add the fish to the eggs and combine well. Put the oil, fish sauce and wine in a frying-pan and heat. It will begin to spit a little. Briskly pour in the egg and fish and put on a medium heat to cook. Pull and push some of the mixture to bring the liquid egg in contact with the heat as it cooks. You can flash the omelette under the grill to cook the top, or do as the original recipe suggests and flip it over like a giant pancake! This is not easy and I find it less hazardous to turn it onto a plate and slide it back into the pan. Serve cut into wedges.

## Fish patina, Apicius 4.2.12

This patina uses any white fish set with egg in a simple fish frittata. Unusually, the original recipe has sea-anemones (*Anemonia sulcata*) gently placed on the top so that they don't sink into the mass of the dish and then it is cooked slowly over charcoal until it sets. The sea-anemones are supposed to dry out and cook on the surface. I have used bream for the white fish and replaced the sea-anemones with scallops and it was especially good.

1 small bream or sole, mullet, bass, plaice  
100 g queen scallops, cleaned and prepared  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 level tsp chopped fresh rue  
4 eggs

Scale and gut the fish. Place in a ovenproof dish and half cover with water. Bake in a medium oven (350°F, 180°C, gas 4) for 20 minutes until the flesh is just coming away from the bone. Remove from the water and cool completely. Remove the flesh from the bone, taking care to leave every bone behind. Brush olive oil over the surface of a round ceramic flan dish and put in the flaked fish. Add the oil, fish sauce, pepper and chopped rue and stir it all together so it is evenly flavoured. Beat 4 eggs together and add to the dish.

Stir until the whole is evenly mixed. Slice the scallops so that some white and some pink flesh is on every slice if possible. Arrange over the surface carefully so that they don't sink in. Place the dish in a larger roasting pan filled with water at least half way up the dish. Bake in a medium oven (350°F, 180°C, gas 4) until the egg has set and the scallops are cooked. Serve either straight from the oven or at room temperature; in each instance sprinkled with pepper.

## Sauce for tuna or mackerel, Apicius 9.10.5

This sauce can be used as a marinade, then the fish can be cooked in it and finally a little can be poured over the tuna. The recipe suggests that the sauce is also suitable for bonito, which might be replaced by mackerel.

1/3 tsp lovage seeds  
1/2 tsp celery seed  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 tsp dried mint or 2 tsp fresh mint  
1 tsp fresh or dried rue  
1 tbs date syrup  
1 tbs honey  
2 tbs vinegar  
2 tbs olive oil  
50 ml sweet white wine  
4 small tuna steaks or mackerel fillets

Roast and grind the two spices, add the pepper and combine in a bowl with the liquids and herbs. Beat smooth and pour it over the fish and marinate for 2–3 hours. Lift the fish out of the marinade and roast in a medium oven (350°F, 180°C, gas 4) for 15 minutes or cook on a hot griddle for 2–3 minutes each side. Heat a little of the marinade, now the sauce, and pour over the fish on the plate.

## Simple oenogarum for fish, Apicius 10.2.17

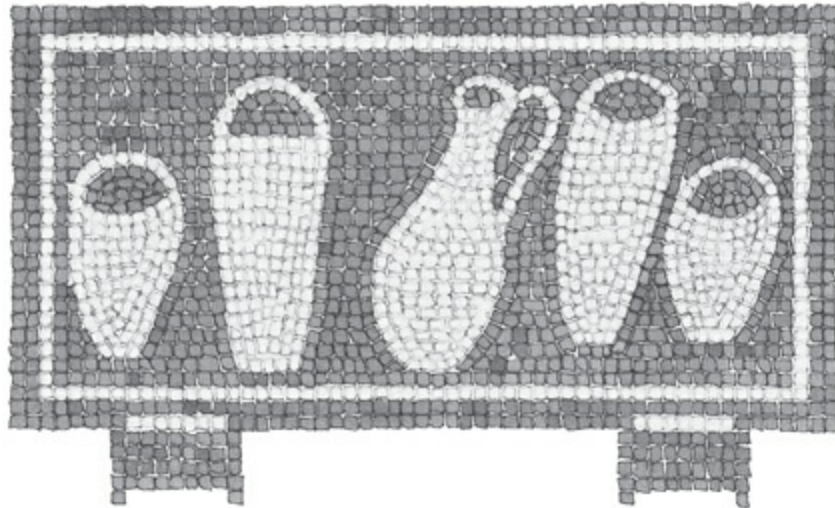
The simplest and undoubtedly the most common way to serve fresh fish in the Roman world was to grill or fry it in a little oil and send it forth, perhaps

with some fish sauce. No more, no less. Very rich sauces are not always the best way to taste fish at its best. In Apicius a simple oenogarum of wine, sweet wine and fish sauce with pepper and rue is recommended for fish. This accompaniment suits many sorts of fish, though the firm flesh of the bream we tried seemed particularly apposite.

generous freshly ground black pepper  
1 tsp chopped fresh rue  
1 level dessert spoon honey  
1 tbsp passum (see p. 32)  
1 tbsp caroenum (see p. 31)  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
bream fillets

Combine all the ingredients save the fish and heat gently. Prepare the bream: fillet and take out the bones and remove the skin. Grill on a high heat for no more than 5–8 minutes until it has taken on a little colour. Serve immediately with a little of the oenogarum poured over the flesh.

# Desserts



## Almond and semolina pudding, Apicius 2.2.10

25 g whole unpeeled almonds  
250 ml fresh goats', sheep's or cows' milk  
2 heaped tbsp semolina  
25 g pine kernels  
50 g raisins  
2 tbsp runny honey  
freshly ground black pepper

Place the almonds in a small pan and bring to the boil and cook for 10 minutes. Strain, cool and skin them. The skins will come off easily at this stage if you rub the nuts in a dry towel. Put the milk in a pan and bring to a gentle heat. Sprinkle the semolina over the milk and stir continuously until the mixture thickens. Add the nuts and raisins and continue to cook gently while stirring. Add honey. Transfer to 6 individual ramekins and level off the mixture. Melt a little more honey in a pan and pour a little over each dish to give a thin film. Cool and grind a little black pepper over the honey and serve.

Pear patina, Apicius 4, 2, 35

This patina is a fruit-based egg custard flavoured with cumin. An odd combination, you may think, but it works very well and has been one of my more popular dishes at dinner parties and at re-enactment demonstrations – where the addition of fish sauce to a dessert always causes consternation until it is tasted. Anyone who saw the television series *What the Romans did for us* with Adam Hart-Davies may possibly remember it was called a ‘fishy custard’. They gave it this name because they couldn’t get past the fish sauce and see how delicious the other ingredients (honey, raisin wine) could be.

1½ lb Conference pears  
200 ml red wine  
50 ml passum (see p. 32)  
2 tbsp clear honey  
1 tbsp olive oil  
1–2 tbsp fish sauce  
4 eggs  
1 tsp cumin  
generous freshly ground black pepper

Peel and core the pears and chop them roughly. Cook them till soft in the wine and passum. Pass the whole mixture through a sieve or process it until smooth. Add the honey, olive oil, fish sauce and 4 eggs and beat smooth again. Dry-roast the cumin and grind to a fine powder. Add it to the custard, then season with black pepper. Pour into a greased casserole dish and bake for 20 minutes, or until it sets, in a moderate oven (375°F, 190°C, mark 5). Serve warm with a final sprinkling of freshly ground black pepper.

## Peaches in a cumin sauce, Apicius 4.2.34

500 g firm/underripe peaches  
300 ml sweet white wine  
50 ml passum (see p. 32)  
2 tbsp defrutum (see p. 30)  
2 tbsp honey  
½ tsp cumin seed  
cornflour to thicken  
1 tbsp fish sauce



Cut the peaches in half, de-stone and cut in half again. Put the wines, syrups and honey in a saucepan and bring to a simmer. Poach the peaches in this liquor until they are just cooked and still holding their shape. Remove them with a slotted spoon and leave to one side in a bowl. Roast and grind the cumin and add to the pan, simmer the cooking liquor and reduce by about one-third. Thicken this with a very small amount of cornflour (1–1½ tsp) so that you have a slightly viscous liquid. Flavour with the fish sauce, ½ tbs at a time, until the sweetness recedes a little. While boiling, pour over the peaches then leave to cool. Serve with one of the desserts below, such as the fritters or pine kernel and honey pudding.

## Deep-fried honey fritters, Apicius 7.11.6

These are quite delicious but it took a little adaptation to make the recipe work. In Apicius we are told to make a thick porridge with water or milk and flour, then allow it to go cold, cut it into sweets and deep-fry them in oil with honey and pepper. Couldn't be simpler, but a thick porridge of flour and milk clumps into a thick glue and doesn't set sufficiently well to be cut cleanly.

The recipe is in fact reminiscent of choux pastry without the egg. With this in mind, I considered adding a little oil to the milk to correspond to the margarine or butter used for choux pastry. This allows the flour and milk to form a roux rather than a glue! The thick porridge now sets into a firm paste that can be cut into cubes. The resulting crisp texture is quite amazing and it holds its crispness even as the fritters cool in the honey.

400 ml goats' or sheep's milk

2

tbsp olive oil

100 g plain white flour

100 g wholemeal flour (sieved to remove the largest flakes)

250 ml olive oil for frying

100 g runny honey

generous freshly ground black pepper

Put the milk and oil in a pan to heat. Sieve the two flours together and add all together to the milk and begin to beat briskly until it forms a mass. Beat

continuously and cook out for a few minutes. Turn out onto a plate, spread it out into a disc and allow to cool completely. Cut into approximately 2 cm squares. Put the frying oil in a small pan and heat gently. Put one square fritter into the oil and when it takes on colour, the oil is ready. Keep the flame or temperature medium to low at all times. Put in a few fritters at a time, depending on the size of the pan. When they have acquired the right colour – golden brown – release them from the bottom of the pan (they will stick) and allow a minute or two for them to cook further before taking them out with a slotted spoon. Drain on kitchen paper and then put in a serving bowl. Pour honey on them while they are still hot and stir them into the honey so they are well covered. Season with black pepper and serve immediately.



## Honey nut omelette or patina, Apicius 4.2.16

In the original recipe, this patina is turned out of its ceramic dish and served as a kind of omelette or frittata. It can be baked in the oven in a dish or

cooked in an omelette pan. The finished patina can then be cut into wedges, smothered in honey and eaten with the fingers. Fish sauce is used here, just as in the pear patina above, and it is particularly successful. A salted or unflavoured version is simply not as good. Trials conducted with the public while we have been doing re-enactment demonstrations resulted in all the tasters selecting the fish sauce-flavoured patina – but many changed their minds when they realized it contained fish sauce. It just goes to show that what we consider ‘good food’ is based on a state of mind as well as the actual taste.

30 g flaked almonds  
30 g walnuts or hazelnuts  
30 g pine kernels  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
40 ml goats’, sheep’s or cows’ milk  
40 ml white wine  
1 tbsp honey, and more for finishing  
1 tbsp fish sauce  
4 eggs  
1 tbsp olive oil

Combine all the nuts and roast them in a medium oven until lightly coloured. Shake them a few times to ensure an even colour. Grind them or process until you have a coarse texture. Combine with the pepper, milk, wine, honey, fish sauce and the eggs and beat together. If you are baking the patina, grease a ceramic dish with the olive oil and pour the ingredients in. Bake in a medium oven (350°F, 180°C, gas 4) until firm to the touch. Take out and cool slightly before cutting into wedges. Serve with a little runny honey poured over them and sprinkled with freshly ground pepper. Alternatively, cook the mixture in an omelette pan and finish the process under a grill to set the top.

## Pine nut and honey pudding, Apicius 7.11.5

300 ml goats’, sheep’s or cows’ milk  
40 g pine kernels  
1 tsp freshly chopped rue  
1 tbsp passum (see p. 32)

1 dessert spoon honey  
generous freshly ground black pepper  
1½ discs of tracta (see p. 37)  
2 eggs

Put the milk on to heat and add the lightly pounded pine kernels, the rue, passum, honey and pepper. Crumble the tracta into very small pieces and sprinkle them into the hot milk while stirring. It will take time to thicken and you may not need to use all the crumbled tracta. Keep stirring to prevent it sticking. When it is the consistency of custard, tip it into a bowl and cool slightly. Beat the eggs and whisk them into the pudding once the intense heat has reduced. Pour into individual ramekins or one large dish and place this in a larger oven dish with water in it. Bake in a cool oven (300°F, 150°C, gas 2) until the mixture sets. Serve at room temperature. If you need to store them overnight in the fridge, bring them back to room temperature before bringing them to table.

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