

Ancient Cultures

These enjoyable, straightforward surveys of key themes in ancient culture are ideal for anyone new to the study of the ancient world. Each book reveals the excitement of discovering the diverse lifestyles, ideals, and beliefs of ancient peoples.

Published

Food in the Ancient World
John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill

Greek Political Thought
Ryan K. Balot

Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture
Marilyn B. Skinner

Theories of Mythology
Eric Csapo

In preparation

Medicine in the Ancient World
Markham J. Geller

Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World
Donald G. Kyle

Ethnicity and Identity in the Ancient World
Kathryn Lomas

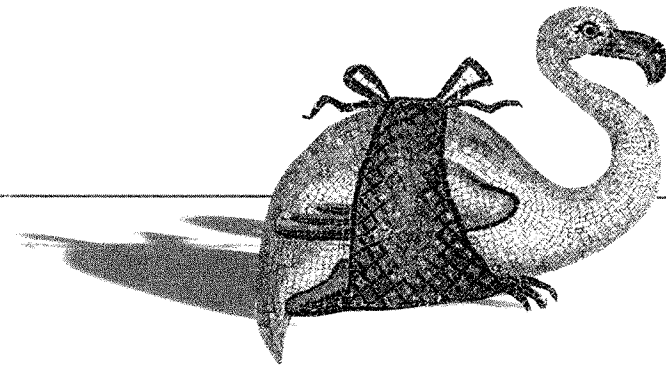
Roman Law and Society
Thomas McGinn

Economies of the Greek and Roman World
Jeremy Paterson

The City of Rome
John Patterson

Food in the Ancient World

John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill



© 2006 by John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill to be identified as the Authors of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2006 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2006

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilkins, John, 1954–

Food in the ancient world / John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill.

p. cm. — (Ancient cultures)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-631-23550-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-631-23550-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-631-23551-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-631-23551-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Food habits—History—To 1500. 2. Food—History. 3. Civilization, Ancient. I. Hill, Shaun, 1947– II. Title. III. Series: Ancient cultures (Malden, Mass.)

TX353.W535 2006

394.1'2093—dc22

2005013069

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12.5pt Rotation

by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Printed and bound in the UK

by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on

Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:

www.blackwellpublishing.com

Contents

John Wilkins is responsible for the chapters and Shaun Hill for the Introductions and recipes

<i>Figures</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Timeline</i>	xii
<i>Map of the Mediterranean</i>	xiv
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 An Overview of Food in Antiquity	4
<i>Introduction</i>	39
2 The Social Context of Eating	41
<i>Introduction</i>	79
3 Food and Ancient Religion	81
<i>Introduction</i>	110
4 Staple Foods: Cereals and Pulses	112
<i>Introduction</i>	140
5 Meat and Fish	142
<i>Introduction</i>	164
6 Wine and Drinking	166
<i>Introduction</i>	185
7 Food in Ancient Thought	187

meals. The details pall after a while, unless they have the added spice of a satirical tone or some other narrative device. This is what Petronius aims for in the dinner of Trimalchio discussed in Chapter 9; a less than omniscient narrator adds further comedy to the absurdities of the host. Indeed there is a similar element in Hippolochus' own narrative, where he is not the omniscient narrator but is in need of the opinions of others (on the subject of the musicians' see-through clothes). But what details we are given! There are many courses of meat and fowls. This is not paralleled often in texts from the Greek cities in earlier periods, but is found in Roman meals, including the dinner of Trimalchio. There is a roast pig stuffed with birds, pulses and seafood. The stuffing of one animal with another also appears in Roman banquets. There is much reference to bread and cereal products. Perhaps because the meal of Caranus is a wedding, there are many gifts for the guests. This is clearly marked and extensive. It is underlined by a number of references to the wealth on display and on offer. This is a distributive meal which requires further discussion, since the distribution of food, whether by the city state or individual benefactor, was at many periods a form of self-definition and political influence. Then there is much emphasis on the furniture and table furniture, the size of dishes and the metal from which they were made. The room in which the meal takes place is specially contrived to reveal features previously hidden by fabrics. In the Roman period, mechanical versions of this contrivance were a regular feature of lavish meals, as reported by Seneca and Petronius, and as used by Nero in his Golden House. This too requires further analysis. There is much entertainment during the meal. There are comparisons with the frugality of Athens. There are several new beginnings, when water and garlands are brought in. This too I discuss below. Then, most significantly, the guests are given wine as soon as they arrive. This parallels Homeric practice, but it is conventionally thought that drinking (at the symposium) followed the food part of the Greek meal, or the *deipnon*. I discuss below the probable ordering of food and drink at the Greek meal. At all events, the Macedonian practice parallels Roman practice, and that followed by Athenaeus at the meals for his wise diners in the *Deipnosophistae*. Athenaeus does not explicitly say that Roman dining practices were strongly influenced by the Macedonians rather than the smaller Greek states, but he perhaps implies as much by placing the meal of Caranus at the head of his book on meals (book 4). The cook of the *Deipnosophistae* also serves a stuffed pig very similar to the one served by Caranus (9.376c-d, noted by

Dalby 1988), though there is a possibility that this may be a literary allusion by Athenaeus rather than a reflection of Roman practice.

Athenaeus also draws attention, as we have seen, to the contrast with Athens and compares the influence of Macedon on the competing kings of the Hellenistic world, many of whom had been Macedonian generals and were the successors to the power of Alexander the Great. The final striking feature of the meal of Caranus is the trumpet blast at the conclusion of the meal, which Hippolochus notes is a Macedonian practice at large meals (there are twenty diners at this meal). There is a similar use of the trumpet at the meal of Trimalchio, and the practice is attested elsewhere in Roman culture, particularly in a military context. We noted at the beginning of the chapter the unparalleled sumptuousness of the meal of Hippolochus. That sumptuousness (*poluteleia*) is precisely the distinctive feature of the meals offered by Larensis, the Roman host of the *Deipnosophists* at Athenaeus' fictional meals at the end of our period. On these issues in Athenaeus see further pp. 27 and 274-5, and Dalby 1996: 152-83.

The Eating and Diet of the Majority of the Population

The demographic structures of ancient cities and rural areas are varied, complex and changed over time. For the purposes of this book they are best reviewed in the essays collected in Garnsey (1998), with the accompanying bibliography. Ancient texts often divide populations comparatively, into the richer and poorer or better or worse members of society. In this book, when reference is made to urban elites, what is meant is less than 10 per cent of the population. As for the other 90 per cent+, some of this number lived in considerably better circumstances than others, in both town and country. It was generally the case that when food supplies to the population were threatened, which was not rare, as both Galen and Garnsey (1988, 1998) make clear, food shortages tended to hit the countryside before the town and the poorer before the richer. As far as the elites were concerned, the main dangers of food shortages were not to their food supplies but to political stability.

The majority of ancient populations lived the hard life of the subsistence farmer or landless labourer, which was insufficient to guarantee enough food for the family unit in all years. This majority of the population enjoyed food that was in modern terms 'organic' and 'pure',

but with the major downsides that supplies were not guaranteed and that quality might often be poor. Thus Galen tells us that peasants in Mysia sent their wheat to the cities while the farmers themselves ate the cheaper and inferior grains. Galen tells us furthermore that certain foods were avoided in general, and fed to animals. However, they became human food when shortages struck home. He thus draws important boundaries between human and animal foods. If the peasants sometimes ate animal food, did that make them closer to beasts themselves in the eyes of city dwellers? In some people's eyes this certainly was the case. These issues are explored in Chapters 4 and 7.

Poorer citizens in towns also ate less well than the rich. Distinctions were often pointed out, as Juvenal does in an extreme form in *Satire 5*. The poor were more likely to eat out in public places, or at least to buy take-away food. They were less able to buy slaves who might prepare the food and had less space in which to organize the cooking of food, particularly if they lived in Roman *insulae*, or apartments. There is plentiful evidence of bars for take-away food and drink in Pompeii and Athens, together with textual evidence for the bars sometimes combined with shops, or *kapeleia*, in Greek cities (Figure 2.1). These have been well discussed in Davidson 1997, though in Chapter 6 I challenge some of the conclusions he draws.

In Greek and Roman culture, the food of the rich was not utterly different from that of the poor, as is the case in a number of cultures. To be sure, some imports in the Roman Empire were likely to be restricted to the rich, such as Indian spices, exotic birds and expensive fish. But poor people had locally grown spices such as thyme and coriander, local birds such as thrushes and blackbirds and shoaling fish such as sardines and anchovies. A striking example of the rich eating superior versions of the diet of the poor is provided once again by the poem of Arcestratus. In fragment 5 Olson & Sens (2000), Arcestratus declares, on the subject of bread:

The best to get hold of and the finest of all, cleanly bolted from barley with a good grain, is in Lesbos, in the wave-surrounded breast of famous Eresos. It is whiter than snow from the sky; if the gods eat barley groats then Hermes must come and buy it for them from there. (trans. Wilkins)

Wheat is mentioned later in the fragment. But Galen and many ancient texts declare barley far inferior to wheat, principally because it

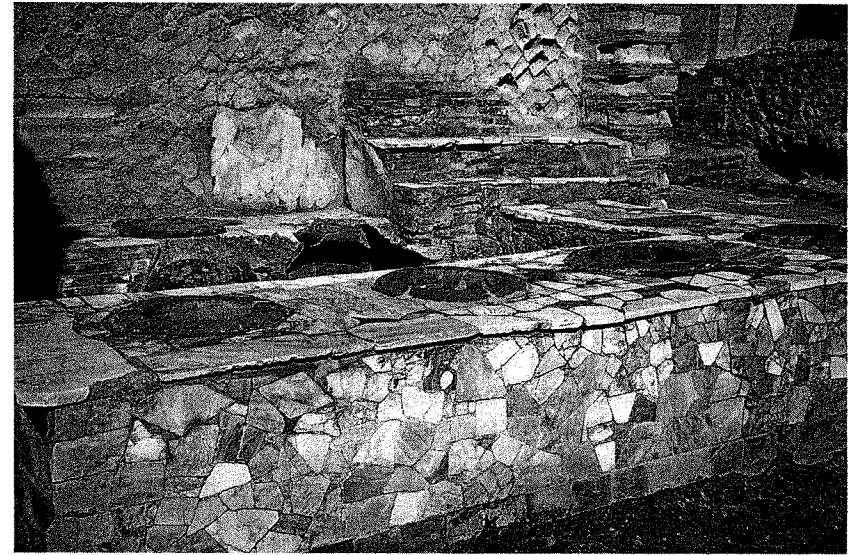


FIGURE 2.1 Bars on street corners are plentiful in the streets of Pompeii and Herculaneum and were doubtless also found in many other ancient towns. The pitchers built into the counters contained wine (hot and cold) and also food to be taken away. The choice of food on the premises or to take away is not exclusive to the modern world.

lacks gluten to allow the making of good bread. In fourth-century Greece, then, the rich were not urged merely to eat the superior grain, wheat, that the poor could not afford. They might also choose barley, which the poor enjoyed in mashes, porridges and flat cakes, but which the rich could enjoy for flavour, but in a highly refined and expensive version. The rich certainly did not want to avoid cereal products, as is clear at the meals of Caranus, Philoxenus and Matro; that is not to say that they did not wish to enjoy a superior version to which the poor could not aspire. Cereals are discussed further in Chapter 4. (For the meals of Philoxenus and Matro see Dalby 1987, Wilkins 2000, Olson & Sens 1998.)

A second example of the rich eating the same flavours as the poor is provided by imported silphium. Arcestratus (fragment 46.14) criticizes cooks who use silphium and cheese to flavour expensive fish. A poorer person might have a head of local garlic to flavour sardines

(Aristophanes *Wasps* 679). (For the flavours of Greco-Roman food see p. 3 and Wilkins & Hill 1992.)

Archestratus identified vegetables, chick peas, beans, apples and figs as signs of poverty. This is a somewhat extreme formulation. But there is some echo of this in a fragment from the play *The Olynthian Woman* of the fourth-century comic poet Alexis (167):

My husband is impoverished, I am an old woman, and we have a daughter, another child (a son) and this good girl here. Five of us altogether. If three of us have dinner, the other two must share with them a small barley-cake. We wail unmusical sounds whenever we have nothing. Our skin gets pale when we have no food. The portions and the whole of our life are: a broad bean, a lupin seed, some vegetable leaves, < . . . > a turnip, some *ochros* (a pulse), vetch, a Valonia acorn, a tassel-hyacinth bulb, a cicada, a chick-pea, a wild pear, and the 'mother's care', planted by a god, a dried fig I mean, invention of a fig tree in Phrygia. (trans. Wilkins)

Paupers are rare in comedy, though the food of the poor is sometimes referred to in passing, such as mallow in the *Wealth* of Aristophanes, for example (see pp. 136–7). But in that passage, there is a sharp reminder that the diet of beggars is under discussion rather than what a poorer citizen might expect.

Alexis here, however, coincides with the comments of Archestratus as far as the chick pea and fig are concerned. We may note that the impoverished family has no meat, no fish, and a high level of cereal and pulse, which is nutritious in modern terms, but lacks the status-quality of richer neighbours who might afford small fish and a little meat. The hungrier members of the family (and note there is no gender division here in the distribution of food) eat the staple barley-cake or *maza* in small quantities, while the other three have more varied nutrition. It coincides with the prescriptions of Galen six centuries later, as far as the vegetables and pulses consumed are concerned, and also in including the acorn and the locust or cicada. Pulses such as chick peas, chickling vetch and the other vetch known as *ochros* are part of the standard diet for Galen, while acorns are not. Like bitter vetch and tares, these are animal food. Acorns, says Galen, come in the category of famine food (2.38): 'once, when famine took hold of our land, and there was an abundance of mast and medlars, the country folk, who had stored them in pits, had them in place of cereals

for the whole winter and into early spring. Before that, mast like this was pig food, but on this occasion they gave up keeping the pigs through winter as they had been accustomed to doing previously. At the start of winter, they slaughtered the pigs first and ate them; after that they opened the pits and, having suitably prepared the mast in various ways, ate it (trans. Powell).' This passage is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Acorn-eating was an emergency measure, as discussed by Mason 1995 and others. Acorns came further down the list of emergency foods than some other nuts, such as the chestnuts widely used in Europe and mentioned in Chapters 1 and 4. In this respect the family of Alexis' play have been reduced to animal food. The cicada is an interesting further element. There is evidence that cicadas and locusts were eaten in Greece: Aristophanes mentions them in a fragment (fr. 53) and in his *Acharnians* alludes to their crunchy texture. Such references are rare, though Aristotle, rather in the style of Galen, notes the way that country people catch them for eating purposes. It seems likely that locusts were eaten but not seen as a delicacy. They were on the fringes of the diet like other items eaten by the poor. We might compare foods that were shared with animals, though we should bear in mind that there is much overlap between human and animal foods. Note that the Greek staple of barley was considered animal food by the Romans and by Galen. Also comparable are snails and wild greens, which the Greeks still eat and which were eaten by all classes in antiquity. Galen does not actually mention cicadas or locusts. He dismisses wood grubs and other insects eaten by the Egyptians, but his silence on locusts may indicate their lack of importance in the diet, or Galen's failure to notice them, or lack of interest on his part.

A hierarchy of foods clearly emerges from Galen's review of the diet, from the most refined foods of the urban elites to the foods normally reserved for animals, which the poor were forced to eat at times of shortage. Within these parameters there was much variation. Galen says that all the Greeks eat snails every day. The context is a comparison with the Egyptians who eat wood bugs, snakes and reptiles. Galen appears to be considering the Greek equivalent of unusual items in the diet. But he is also explicitly considering an item that is difficult to classify. It is, he says, neither winged nor aquatic, nor even obviously terrestrial. We might take this extraordinary statement about all the Greeks to mean that the snail was a staple of the mass of the population. Archaeological evidence for molluscs, both terrestrial and marine,

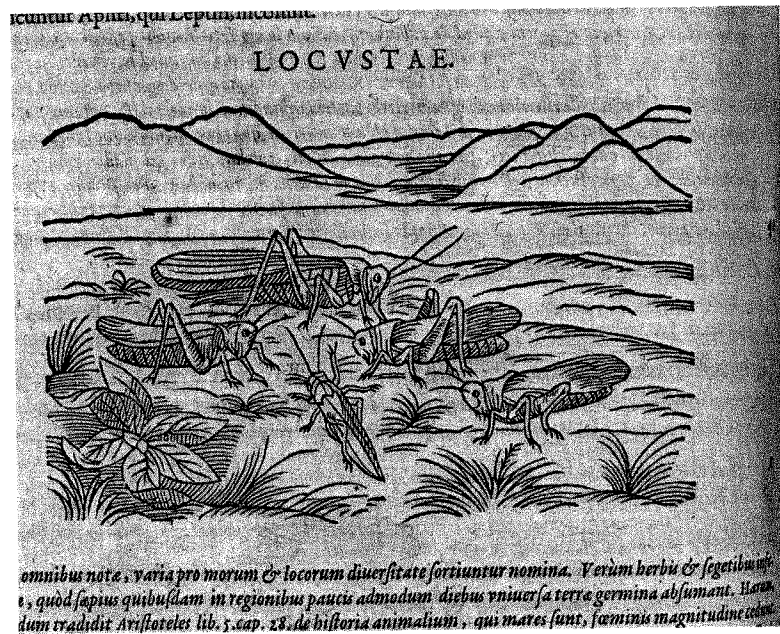


FIGURE 2.2 Although the locust was sometimes identified as the distinguishing food of distant peoples, Aristotle and others attest to the consumption of insects in Greece. Locusts were used in medicine, and, like the camel, indicate a wide dietary range in antiquity. Reproduced by permission of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral

suggests that they were also consumed on palace sites (Karali 2000). As with barley, we may safely assume that molluscs were eaten by all classes of people. They were, in the words of Richard Maybe, 'food for free', but special specimens might be collected and served to rich diners. Athenaeus preserves a story about Apicius sailing to Libya to try their prawns, only to discover the prawns of Minturnae back home were better. Patience Gray (1986) offers striking testimony on snails and on the diet of the poor in general in different parts of the Mediterranean in the modern period.

Meat consumption was certainly lower for poorer citizens, since the price of meat was of necessity higher than that of fruits, vegetables, grains and pulses because of the inefficient use of energy in raising animals. For the majority of citizens, life was a vegetarian life for much of the year, with meat provided by the city state on festival days, and

supplements from wealthy citizens when they wished to feed the populace for certain political ends. Aristophanes represents such feeding of citizens in his *Knights* as the corrupt feeding of a rather gullible child. It became rather more extensive in the Hellenistic period through public benefaction and the distribution of food by Hellenistic and Roman rulers. (See further Schmitt-Pantel 1992, Veyne 1976, Donahue 2005.)

It might be thought that the organic diet of fresh food for the majority of the ancient population was healthy if not of the highest quality. Quality counts for much, both in self-esteem and in health concerns, as Galen and Juvenal make clear. We might think that Juvenal is exaggerating in his contrast between the diet of the rich Roman patron and his poor client in *Satire 5*:

My lord will have his mullet, imported from Corsica or from the rocks below Taormina . . . But what's in store for you? An eel, perhaps (though it looks like a water snake), or a grey-mottled river-pike, born and bred in the Tiber, bloated with sewage. (trans. Green)

However, the broad picture of the poor fish of the Tiber is supported by Galen (Wilkins 2004). Juvenal highlights the low self-esteem of the client, Galen the damage to his digestion.

This theme is taken further in two striking passages in Galen's *On the Powers of Foods*. Everyone has a different constitution in Galen's system, but nevertheless he did manage to make some generalizations about the peasant diet. These should be compared with the overview of the human diet discussed in Chapter 8. First, the dangers of eating cheese with bread:

If one also adds cheese to the bread, as holiday-makers [viz people on feast days] among our country folk usually prepare it (which they themselves call unleavened), there is certain harm for everybody, even if some of them are very strong in body constitution, such as those who are by nature the best reapers and ditch-diggers. For these people are observed to concoct unleavened breads better than the strongest athletes (as they also do beef and the meat of he-goats). What further need is there to mention sheep and female goats as well as these? In Alexandria, they eat donkey meat as well, and there are also some people who eat camel. For while custom contributes to their concoction, of no less importance is the small amount taken and the depletion of the body as a whole that necessarily accompanies those who toil throughout the day at their proper activities. For the depleted flesh snatches up from the stomach not only half-concocted but even, when they work after a meal,

sometimes absolutely unconcocted chyme. This is why these people later suffer very troublesome illnesses and die before they reach old age. Ignorant of this, most people who see them eating and concocting what none of us can tackle and concoct, congratulate them on their bodily strength. Also, since very deep sleep occurs in those who undertake much hard labour, and this helps them with concoction to a greater degree, they are consequently less injured by harmful foods. But if you were to force them to stay awake for more nights in succession, they would immediately become ill. So these people have but this one advantage in the concoction of harmful foods. (Galen 1.2, trans. Powell)

This valuable passage demonstrates the difference between the labourer's constitution and that of his rich counterpart; the apparent strength of his digestion, but the cost in disease and early death, and in the dangers of country food after cooking. It is not merely a matter of poor ingredients but unwise combinations. On the positive side, though, we might note that Galen attests to their meat-eating, though not to its frequency. Galen has more to say on the hazards of country cooking in a passage on wheats boiled in water (1.7):

But once when walking in the country far from the city, with two lads of my own age, I myself actually came upon some rustics who had had their meal and whose womenfolk were about to make bread (for they were short of it). One of them put the wheat into the pot all at once and boiled it. Then they seasoned it with a moderate amount of salt and asked us to eat it. Reasonably enough, since we had been walking and were famished, we set to it with a will. We ate it with gusto, and felt a heaviness in the stomach, as though clay seemed to be pressing upon it. Throughout the next day we had no appetite because of indigestion, so that we could eat nothing, were full of wind and suffered from headaches and blurred vision. For there was not even any bowel action, which is the only remedy for indigestion. I therefore asked the rustics whether they themselves also ever ate boiled wheat and how they were affected. They said that they had often eaten it under the same necessity that we had experienced, and that wheat prepared in this way was a heavy food, difficult to concoct. (trans. Powell)

In this scene, the peasants have access to the premier cereal, wheat, but all the same are not able to prepare it in the ideal way. They therefore benefit less from it than if it were in the ideal form of leavened bread. Necessity forces them to refuel even before the fuel can be prepared as needed. Peasants are thus liable to suffer from

lower quality and less appropriate preparation. Compare Garnsey (1999). We might note, too, for the discussion of gender later in this chapter, that women bake the bread, but it is the men who talk to the three strangers when they appear in the fields, and who cook the emergency boiled wheat.

Galen's anecdotes offer valuable testimony to the eating practices of the poor. A final report from Galen will add a further dimension. In his discussion of milk (3.14), he illustrates the dangers of unwholesome milk:

In an infant, when the first nurse had died, and another who was full of unhealthy humour was providing the milk for him, his whole body was obviously infected with numerous ulcers. When famine had taken hold in the spring, the second nurse had lived on wild herbs in the field. So she and some others in the same country who had lived in the same way were filled with such ulcers. We observed this in many others who were living in a similar way in the area. (trans. Powell)

The wet-nurse, a poor woman who was feeding the baby of a wealthier mother, was suffering from malnutrition, the chronic state of the poor in many Mediterranean countries in the early spring before the new season's crops became available. Time and again Galen refers to the pressure, on the rural population in particular, when winter stores had run down and the poor were forced to turn to animal food. Garnsey (1999) comments on endemic food shortages in antiquity. This is paralleled in the modern period by Gray (1986), Camporesi (1993) and Helstosky (2004), among others. The last (p. 11) quotes a Neapolitan commentary of 1884 on the urban poor: 'One woman dispenses charity in a most ingenious fashion. She herself is poor and eats only boiled maccheroni seasoned with a little bit of sharp cheese, but her neighbor, who is very poor, has only a few morsels of dry, hard bread to eat. The woman who is less poor gives her neighbor the water in which her maccheroni was cooked, a whitish liquid that is spilled onto morsels of bread, making them softer and giving them at least a flavour of maccheroni.'

On eating out among the poor, Helstosky (2004: 16) quotes the same source, Matilde Serao, *Ventre di Napoli*: 'With one or two *soldi*, one could afford a piece of boiled octopus, or snails in broth, or hot foods like maccheroni, served at the numerous *osterie*: "in all the streets in the worker's neighborhoods there were *osterie* that have stoves set up

out-of-doors. Here the maccheroni is always boiling and there are pans containing tomato sauce and mountains of grated cheese . . . the portions are small and the buyer fights with the owner because he wants a little more sauce, a little more cheese, and a little more maccheroni". Food shortages were noted in Chapter 1 in the reign of Louis XIV in France. Food supplies could not be guaranteed to the whole population in countries such as Greece, Italy, France or Britain until the twentieth century. Note that the ulcerous nurse in Galen's story, whose condition is not easy to specify (see Powell 2003: 181), was one of a number of people observed. The cause of the problem was 'wild herbs', in other words plants not 'softened' or cultivated by the process of agriculture. To be sure, many ate raw or wild plants in antiquity, and rich people like Pliny and Musonius Rufus encouraged it, as we shall see. But these non-farmed products retained something of the rawness of nature noted in the Hippocratic text on the *Art of Medicine* (quoted in Chapter 1) and were risky for people with humoural imbalance (see further Chapter 8).

The endemic risk of food shortage in the spring prompted a form of literature little found in the modern world, namely fantastic products imagined to exist in the land of Cockaigne (as it was called in its mediaeval version). In this land, rivers flowed with wine, barley-cakes and sausages, and fish and birds begged to be eaten. Athenaeus discusses a number of comic examples in Book Three (267e–70a): see Wilkins (2000). Comedy is a significant genre, for this is dramatic literature presented to mass audiences, often of more than ten thousand people. It would be less likely to succeed in a society such as Western Europe or the United States, where there is a surfeit of food. The endless descriptions of a food paradise where there is no need for the hard labour of agriculture or for slaves (the food produces and serves itself) speak as loudly as Galen of a world in which the poor at least frequently go hungry. Comedy also provided descriptions and lists of rich men's feasts for audiences to hear with mouth-watering relish. How this may have been heard by less privileged theatre audiences is considered in Chapter 9.

The human life-cycle

Discussion of the rural poor, at the opposite pole of society from the urban elites, gives a gloomy picture of ancient eating. It is certainly a gloomier picture than the one currently held of the Mediterranean

world in northern Europe. We can lift the gloom somewhat by repeating that some of the population outside the elite did not survive merely at subsistence level. The standard protagonist in the plays of Aristophanes, for example, is a citizen of moderate means, and the antisocial farmer of Menander's comedy *Dyscolus* lives a Spartan life by choice. Cnemon fails to exploit the economic value of his farm. The pessimistic picture is also tempered by festivals in the religious year and by the key points of birth, marriage and death in the human life-cycle. Communal sacrifice to the gods often brought distribution of meat and other foods to all participants either at civic or at local level (see Chapter 3), and most families observed feasts for the birth of children or their integration into the community. Marriages were important occasions for feasting among the very rich, as shown in the Macedonian wedding quoted above, as also for much poorer families. A somewhat idealized rural marriage is described by Dio Chrysostom in his *Euboaeian Oration* (7.65–80). The family feasts, with the men reclining on a rustic couch (*stibas*), and the bride's mother sitting down. There is much detail about arrangements for the food, seating arrangements of the diners, and the roles of bride and groom. The status of these people is hard to judge, because the issue lies at the centre of Dio's speech. I discuss a marriage in Chapter 3 between a rich urban family and a comparatively wealthy farmer's daughter.

Special diets

Certain people required a special diet. Manual workers have already been mentioned. If they did not receive adequate calories, the work could not be done. Some slaves were in a similar position. In a well-known passage in his work *On Agriculture* (56: see Dalby 1998: 140–1), Cato the Elder stipulates that the working slaves should receive a greater ration than the overseer: the need for energy outweighs status. The diet of slaves in general varied greatly. Some dined with the rest of the family, as noted in Chapter 7, for example, in the albeit unusual case of Cato the Elder. Others ate 'slave *maza* (porridge)' in the phrase of Aeschylus or 'slave bread' in the phrase of the archaic poet Archilochus. The relative merits of these diets we are not able easily to evaluate, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Other categories in need of a high-calorie diet were soldiers and athletes. There is rich evidence on the military diet, much of it gathered in the excellent article of Davies (1971), who details all categories of

food and a wide range of primary sources and locations across the empire. He shows that the Roman army was well fed, that the logistics of provisioning were vast, and that a well-balanced diet was achieved. He particularly stresses the meat content of the diet, with fish and game also in settled conditions. Good generals and emperors ate the same food as their troops. Davies draws extensively on letters and graffiti from across the empire from Syria to Britain. He concludes (1971: 137–8), ‘perhaps the best tribute to the army of the Principate, on campaign or in peace-time or even during the rare mutinies, is that there is no recorded complaint about the Roman military diet’. Armies that were not well fed did not perform well; discontented armies might turn on the emperor in the imperial period. Where the citizen soldier in the Greek world was thought to have a Spartan regime in his three days’ rations (the regular, if misleading message from the plays of Aristophanes), Roman soldiers appear to have eaten better than average. Galen remarks that the Roman army did not recommend barley, because it provided inadequate energy in comparison with wheat (a claim not accepted by modern science: see Chapter 4). In the current British army, battlefield provisions of food are set at 4,000 calories a day, twice the standard male requirement. When Alexander’s army was on the march, great feasts were eaten on frequent occasions in great tented dining halls (Plutarch). We saw too, in Chapter 1, the retinue of cooks who followed the Persian king and his generals on campaign. An army of occupation also, such as soldiers in Britain, at Vindolanda on Hadrian’s wall, for example, enjoyed both local meat and some imported goods. Soldiers might therefore be the harbingers both of Roman government and other accompanying forms of civilization that spread to Britain in the wake of the armies. Olive oil and wine are two examples, but others include rabbits, rocket, and a wide range of fragrant plants. The same applies to other parts of the Roman Empire. We might compare the campaigns of Alexander which brought foods back to the Mediterranean from the East, and the campaigns of Romans in Asia Minor. We discussed Lucullus’ introduction of the cherry into Italy in Chapter 1.

Athletes too, again in the ancient world as in the modern, needed high-energy diets. The Hippocratic doctors recognized the high-protein diet needed by athletes, and frequently noted the instability of such a regime, which could easily crash into bad health (Jouanna 1999: 331–2). Galen, who began his medical career in a gladiatorial school, finds that the two ‘strongest’ foods, wheat and pork, are essential for the

athlete. An ordinary person, like Galen or his reader, could not possibly support the high-energy intake of the athlete, who is in a category apart, like the manual worker (*On the Powers of Foods* 1.2). These comments complement moral criticisms of athletes by the poets Xenophanes and Euripides, the latter calling an athlete the ‘slave of his jaw and the victim of his stomach’ (quoted by Athenaeus 10.413c–414c). The most famous athlete of antiquity, Milo of Croton, in anecdotes at least, lived up to the Galenic prescription (Athenaeus 10.412e–f): ‘Milo of Croton, as Theodorus of Hierapolis says in his work *On Athletic Contests*, used to eat twenty pounds of meat and as many of bread, and he drank three pitchers of wine. And at Olympia he put a four-year-old bull on his shoulders and carried it round the stadium, after which he cut it up and ate it all alone in a single day’ (trans. Gulick).

Eating alone

The key to ancient eating was commensality, sharing the table with others. Eating was not mere refuelling, it was an affirmation of family, kinship or civic and religious bonds. The spectre of the man who failed to eat with others was, like Milo of Croton, a grim reminder of social deviance. The tyrant was the example of the solitary eater: Xenophon’s Hiero, noted above, makes this very point. The tyrant has all pleasures available to him, and as in Athenaeus’ presentation of the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius II, enjoys both lavish banquets and as many virgins as he can abuse. Braund (1996) reviews the evidence. The tyrant is the bad ruler in ancient thought, with his appetites perhaps most powerfully presented in Plato’s *Republic*. We should bear in mind, though, that royal courts, whatever their political deficiencies, were also generators of innovation. This is seen in the Persian king and elsewhere. The Sicilian courts seem to have developed Greek cooking and cookery books. Furthermore, Hellenistic courts promoted scientific and medical research, partly through fears of poisoning, and so stimulated, directly or not, the search for new products that might save the life of the monarch, but might also become the sensational new foodstuff. The diffusion of the citron might be an example of a food which spread westwards under such stimuli. On the similar transfer from the new world of tomatoes, chocolate and the potato to European courts, initially for their medical and other qualities and only much later as foodstuffs, and then foods for the masses, see Chapter 1.

Public and Private Space

In ancient cities from early times, the marketplace, or *agora* in Greek, *forum* in Latin, was the focus for political gatherings, and also for the exchange or purchase of goods, including foods. The marketplace in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC sold many different foods, as did markets and fairs throughout the Greek and Roman worlds (Fraysn 1993, Thompson & Wycherley 1972, Wilkins 2000). A city's ability to attract many goods for sale was a sign of prosperity particularly noted for Athens by Thucydides and Xenophon, and for Rome by Aelius Aristeides, though other authors deplored commercial activity (as discussed in Chapter 7). There were specialist meat markets, fish markets, and markets for other categories of product.

Also in public areas were civic buildings in which dining took place, both daily dining for state officials, such as the tholos, thesmotheteion and many other offices in Athens, and buildings for honorific dining. In Greek cities such buildings were the prytaneia, which contained the sacred hearth of the city and in some ways represented the city's identity (Miller 1978). Honorific dining in the prytaneion of Athens, for example, was reserved for the descendants of the tyrant-killers, Olympic victors, and other distinguished citizens, along with foreign guests. Athenaeus tells us (4.149d–e) that in his native city of Naucratis in Egypt, on the authority of Hermeias in book 2 of *On the Gryneian Apollo*, there were special regulations for eating. The meal in the prytaneion on the feast day of Hestia prytanis and at the Dionysia, following appropriate prayers and libations, was served to diners on couches and consisted of wine, two types of bread, pork, a vegetable, eggs, cheese, dried figs, a flat cake and a garland. There were fines if the meal was more extensive than this; extra food could not be brought in; leftovers were fed to the slaves of those present. On other days, fish was allowed in the prytaneion. No women were allowed, except a piper.

Much eating in antiquity took place in the private space of the home, whether royal palace or more modest dwelling. Some homes had sufficient space to dedicate a room to dining, but others, the vast majority, did not. Larger homes with more slaves might have kitchens. Roman aristocrats, from the emperor down, had extensive kitchens; many smaller homes had none (Ellis 2000: 27–8, 158–9). Greek and Roman ovens, for example, might be built into a kitchen but more often were a portable item that could be set up outside when weather

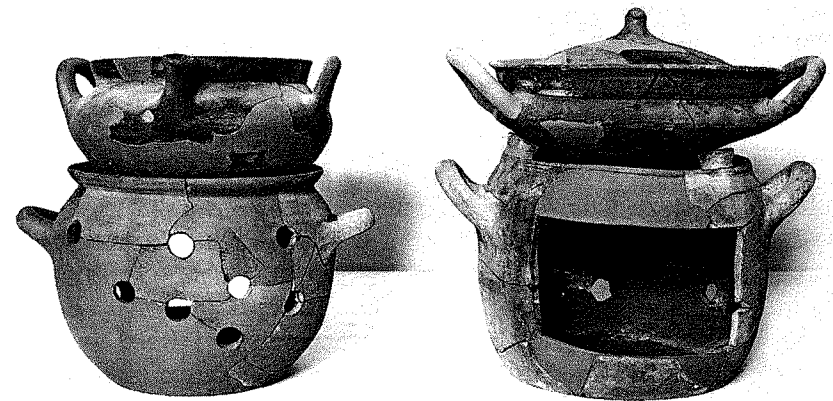


FIGURE 2.3 Most Greeks and Romans did not have dedicated kitchens. If they cooked at home, they used small portable stoves and pans, like these from the Athenian market area, which could be taken outside where possible. The small size of the utensils and absence of gas and electricity does not necessarily imply less sophisticated cooking than in a modern kitchen. Reproduced by kind permission of the American School of Classical Studies: Agora Excavations

permitted (Sparkes 1962, Liversidge in Flower & Rosenbaum 1958: 29–38). Even where families were wealthy enough to hire cooks, the cook often expected to bring his own slaves and his own utensils. There seems to have been much variation in this regard. In Menander's *Dyscolus*, for example, the cook brings furniture but needs to borrow cooking pots. Special arrangements had to be made for the reception of guests who were not kin, especially in cities like Classical Athens where the segregation of women was practised. Such segregation could be achieved in a number of ways. If it was a large house, a special room, or *andron*, might be provided. Meals could also be provided alfresco (see below). In Menander's *Dyscolus*, segregation is achieved in the open air. Eating also took place in public areas, in state buildings and religious precincts. Religious festivals were probably the main focus for such eating. Public occasions could also be celebrated in the home: the Rural Dionysia in Attica appears to be an example, where the community celebrated the festival, but each family used their own home to do so (Parker 1987). There were also many different kinds of meal to be catered for. The inscriptions of Asia Minor and Rome

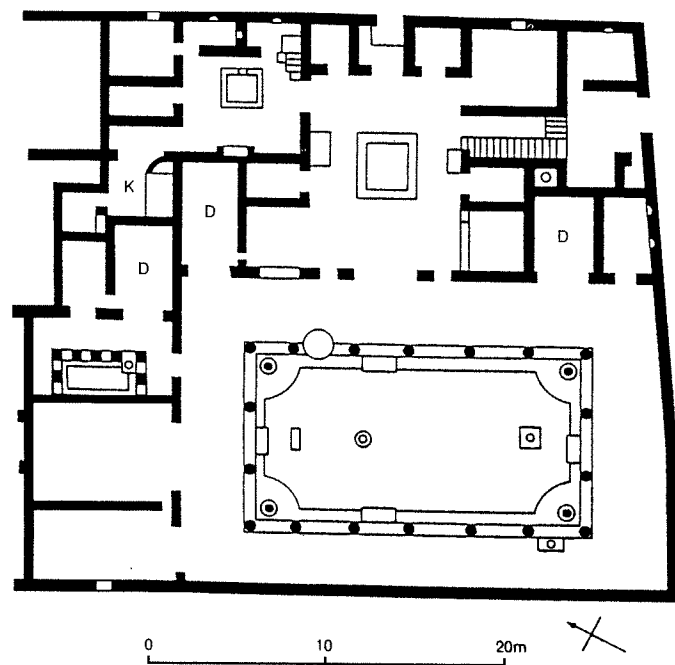


FIGURE 2.4 In classical Athens, many homes seem to have been small. In later centuries, richer citizens throughout the Roman empire built large town and country houses which had indoor and outdoor dining facilities. Often, as here in the House of the Vetii at Pompeii, more than one dining room appears to have been needed. D = dining room, K = kitchen

studied by Schmitt-Pantel 1992 and Donahue 2005 record an enormous variety of meals and entertainment offered by politicians and individual benefactors. These might include a little sweet wine and light entertainment, religious feasts or political rallies. Such public feasting constituted a major form of patronage and redistribution. Variety is seen too in the supreme example of the Roman emperor. Suetonius describes the eating habits of the emperor Augustus at private dinners (*Aug.* 70), at political meals (74), at festivals such as the Saturnalia, and finally in the informal eating that he enjoyed when alone. In the last instance, he snacked on the hoof, very much in the modern fashion (see pp. 271–2). Almost all free people in antiquity ate sometimes more formally than on other occasions, perhaps once or twice a year, perhaps daily if they were rich and powerful.

There were also shops and bars which offered food and drink on a commercial basis, either to eat in or take away. These *kapeleia*, *popinae* or *tabernae* were often viewed with grave suspicion by the rich: Theopompus denounces the demagogic bars of Byzantium; Juvenal sneers at the bars of Rome. Elsewhere, bars are often identified with prostitution. Galen suggests human flesh was served at certain inns (*On the Powers of Food* 3.1). On the other hand, Varro in his work on agriculture identifies a wayside inn as a desirable commercial option for the farmer if the farm lay beside a busy road. Many of these distinctions probably looked different from the perspective of citizens outside the elite. There is plentiful evidence for bars and taverns in Pompeii and Herculaneum (Laurence 1994). They are to be found on many street corners. They seem to have been important for the provision of food and drink (hot or cold in both cases), and for providing flexible modes of eating, whether indoors or outside. Travellers as well as local citizens needed food and sometimes accommodation at the larger-scale inns. We should imagine a wide range from the large inn to the small take-away stall. (See further Kleberg 1957.)

In addition to the built environment, open spaces also provided many opportunities for eating *al fresco*. Notable examples are described in many different texts. Tents were set up at the Thesmophoria festival to provide shelter for an all-women celebration of Demeter and Persephone. Characters in a comedy of Aristophanes, the *Women Celebrating the Thesmophoria*, speak of being tent-mates, the women living and eating together rather than in their own homes and families (see further Chapter 3). Tents with impressive designs on the fabric are set up for a special communal feast at Delphi in the *Ion* of Euripides (see Schmitt-Pantel 1992). The Persian kings travelled round their empire in tented cities, and Alexander had vast tented dining rooms during his invasion of the East. The Greco-Roman adoption of tents seems to be related to these models, which were created by the original nomadic lifestyles of the Near-Eastern kingdoms, and the demands of military campaigns.

The Romans also had a liking for dining in the garden. Examples are to be found among the rich citizens of Pompeii, and emperors too had numerous possibilities for *al fresco* dining. These combined with the decoration of rooms inside, which gave impressions of the natural world, with vistas, sea-scapes and still-life frescos. Claridge (1998: 290–2) describes Nero's fantastic Golden House. A mosaic at Palestrina illustrates an open-air meal in the Nile Delta.

Furniture

At all periods, furniture and the tableware and equipment associated with eating are of the greatest importance. Later authors noticed that the Homeric heroes sat on chairs at mealtimes, and did not recline. The couches on which diners reclined appear to have come into the Greek world in the archaic period, and are certainly attested on Corinthian vases from the sixth century onwards (Murray 1990).

Dining on couches raises issues of central importance to our study of ancient dining. This is one of those practices (mentioned in Chapter 1) that moved eastwards across the Mediterranean. The Assyrians, the Persians and other eastern peoples seem to have developed reclining at table as part of royal and aristocratic dining that possibly derived from their nomadic lifestyle. The Assyrian King Ashurbanipal is pictured on a famous relief, now in the British Museum, reclining at dinner with the head of an enemy displayed in a nearby tree. Several passages in the Old Testament confirm the evidence of Greek authors and reliefs that the Persians reclined at mealtimes. In Esther 1, for example, we read of the great feast of the Persian king at which couches (or beds) were provided in a great courtyard in the garden for a range of his subjects. The Greeks picked up the practice either directly from the Assyrians or indirectly diffusion by through the world of the Persian Empire. This was dining in style, and many elites in the Mediterranean strove to imitate it in order to display their international networking to the peoples at home in the Greek cities or elsewhere. Some texts, which we shall see in Chapter 7 and which I discussed in Wilkins (2000), portrayed the Persians as supremely luxurious and effeminate. But the Greeks and later the Etruscans and Romans were deeply influenced by the practices of the most powerful empire in the archaic and Classical Mediterranean. Other practices derived from the Persians included representations of meals. The Persian king is rarely shown eating. Drinking, certainly, sometimes with food to hand. But rarely eating. Much of Greco-Roman art and literature similarly privileges drinking wine over eating food, as if food were too gross a material to weigh down the royal or aristocratic representation. Contradictory representations of the Persians as the Greek world absorbed these influences into their own are not just ambiguities or ambivalent responses to a powerful neighbour, but derive from the place of eating and drinking within Greco-Roman and wider Mediterranean culture. Questions attached to the Great King of Persia are no different from

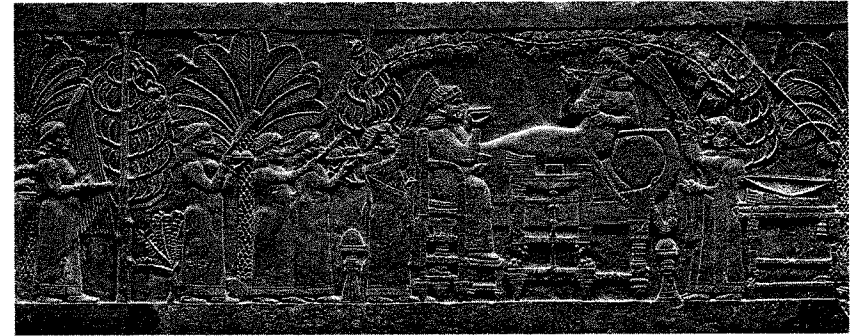


FIGURE 2.5 Ashurbanipal, the King of Assyria, feasts with his queen. He is reclining in the manner that was adopted by the Greeks, Etruscans, Romans and other Mediterranean peoples. His wife sits with him but does not recline. He is represented on a higher plane than his courtiers, indicating that a hierarchical principle predominates over the theoretically equitable arrangement of the Greek (but not the Roman) symposium. The head of an enemy is displayed in a tree. Copyright of the Trustees of the British Museum

ambiguities around the Hellenistic courts or at the court of the Roman Emperors. Should the Augustus represent all the wealth and diversity of Empire, or should 'tradition', simplicity and restraint prevail? The question is still alive today.

The couches appear to have been part of the oriental influence on archaic elites, who competed to show off themselves dining in this new style. As time progressed the style filtered down through the classes, so that by the late fifth century it was well known in the Greek cities. I argue in Wilkins (2000) for familiarity with reclining at symposia. It seems to me that the furniture and dining styles were subject to aristocratic refinement but that reclining and the sharing of wine mixed with water was widespread through all classes. All classes of men of status, that is. Women of status are not believed to have reclined, certainly not in the presence of men, at least, unless the occasion demanded it – such as a wedding – and segregated reclining was possible. Representations from funerary reliefs, where men are reclining at mealtimes in death, show the mourning widow sitting beside the couch. Courtesans sometimes reclined; women of status did not. Poorer people were liable to recline on a straw mattress or equivalent, called a *stibas*, which



FIGURE 2.6 The Costume Banquet, from El-Jem (ancient Thysdrus) c.200–220 (mosaic) Musee National du Bardo, Le Bardo, Tunisia Lauros/Giraudon. The mosaic represents a group of diners in an amphitheatre. They chat in colloquial terms, like the freedmen in the *Satyricon* of Petronius. These lower-class drinkers contrast with many of the mosaic images found in rich villas. Photo: www.bridgeman.co.uk

is attested in all periods. In the fourth century BC, Plato mentions it in his ideal *Republic* (p. 195), and Menander mentions one at a rural sacrificial picnic in *Dyscolus* (quoted in Chapter 3). It is found in Dio Chrysostom's description of a rural wedding in the second century AD

(Oration 7), and in mosaic representations of dining from North Africa.

We are sometimes given details of how many couches were to be found in a room. Archestratus says that three to five diners suffice, but elsewhere we have much higher figures. Athenaeus mentions the matter at *Deipnosophistae* 2.47f, quoting for example a seven-couch room from comedy by the Attic fifth-century poet Phrynichus, and Xenophon has a similar room for his *Symposium* set at the house of the aristocratic Callias. In the wedding feast of the Macedonian Caranus quoted above, there is textual uncertainty over whether there were 20 or 120 diners on couches. We have also seen figures of 30 couches to a room for Dionysius II and of 1,000–1,500 triclinia in Hellenistic Antioch.

Similar developments are seen in Italy, with reclining being introduced to the Etruscans and other Italic peoples, including the Latins and Romans (see Rathje 1990). In descriptions of Greek and other Eastern influences on the Romans as they absorbed the Eastern Mediterranean in the third and later centuries BC, furniture as much as new foods seems to have made an impact along with works of art and other booty captured in war. Such imports marked out successful competition among the Roman elite, just as it had done for their Greek counterparts in the archaic period.

As far as tableware is concerned, vases made of pottery made a huge impact, together with associated plates and dishes which show that food as well as wine was served on decorated tableware. Metalware made an even bigger impact. We can see this in the Corinthian ware and gold and silverware used by Caranus in the Macedonian meal described above, and in many Greek and Roman examples, not least the meal of Trimalchio. He too is proud of the weight of his Corinthian bronze.

With this furniture went the larger architecture of the dining room. First its characteristic shape to house the couches, either in Greece or Rome. Then wall decorations such as frescos, special shapes for *cottabos* (the wine-flicking game), and floor mosaics, which in the Hellenistic and Roman periods became common in wealthy dining rooms and enabled the decorators to echo the events on and around the table. Hippolochus emphasized the wealth of the meal of Caranus. This could also be brought out in later periods in themes in mosaics, whether the wealth of the Nile or the wealth of the sea. The connection between the sea and wealth is seen particularly memorably in the mosaics of Roman villas in North Africa (modern Tunisia), which, though miles from the sea, have rich images of seafood on the floor.

Private eating

Most eating in antiquity took place on private occasions. Feast days organized by the city or by wealthy individuals were special occasions, which contrasted with private occasions. Private meals took on different forms, according to occasion and time of day. The number of meals per day varied but there is much evidence for light meals eaten at breakfast and/or lunch times, with one larger meal later in the day. This was the meal to which outsiders might be invited and which was the occasion for more ambitious eating. This is also the meal that was likely to be recorded in literary sources. As we have seen, Suetonius records that Augustus entertained formally on such occasions, in contrast to his private eating arrangements when he was alone, at which he often ate in transit and with much informality. Similarly, Plutarch records that Cato the Elder often ate with his slaves when at home, and drank the same wine as they did. The biographers remark on the preference for simplicity in these powerful leaders, partly because they consider it unusual and partly because they believe it reveals a tough moral character. But these and other leaders ate with all the standard trappings of rank and hierarchy when they thought it right. Such occasions were likely to be special versions of the main meal of the day.

We would thus expect relatively unspectacular eating in the private meals (breakfast and/or lunch) and higher-status foods and tableware – and if appropriate the presence of guests – at the *deipnon* or *cena*. The Hippocratic author of *Regimen III* (68) dispenses with the minor meals altogether and recommends only one meal a day. Diocles of Carystus, writing in the fourth century BC, allows lunch and dinner (fr. 182.5–7 van der Eijk 2000), with meat and fish reserved for the latter occasion. Mealtimes give shape to the day just as religious festivals give shape to the year. The prescriptions of doctors are unlikely to apply to the mass of the population. Galen, for example, describes a *deipnon* he shared with farm workers which consisted of wheat that was boiled because the bread had run out (see p. 58). The meal is prepared on the spot, and its other components (if any) are not mentioned. This is a meal of the most basic kind; Galen ate it because he was travelling and hungry. A richer picture of village life in Asia Minor may be found in Mitchell (1993).

Richer people were more likely to invite guests more often, poorer people much less frequently and possibly only on special occasions such as marriages and family gatherings. Our sources assure us that

different conditions obtained for Greek and for Roman formal dining. Among the Greeks, equality obtained across all the diners, while the Roman *cena* or *convivium* was hierarchically organized to emphasize the patronage that the rich man was dispensing. It is also said that there were clear gender differences, with women of status present at Roman dinners, but not at Greek. These claims deserve some investigation, not least because a number of our sources, among them Athenaeus, operate in a fusion of Greco-Roman practice.

Food and Social Status

The principle of equality at the Greek dinner was not as strictly observed as might be supposed. Where Roman society had its clients attached to an influential patron, Greek cities had the institution of the parasite or flatterer. These were people at table who were not present as of right, but had as it were to sing for their supper. Xenophon portrays one such in his *Symposium*, in which Philip arrives hungry and uninvited and expects to earn his meal by telling jokes. When his witticisms appear to be unappreciated he falls silent, since the strategy appears to have failed. If he can't entertain, then he does not eat. Later in the proceedings, he does a grotesque parody of a dance performed by one of the female entertainers. Our best commentators on everyday life in fourth-century Athens, the comic poets, abound in parasites who abased themselves in various shameless ways in order to earn their meal. Athenaeus collects many examples in book 6 of his *Deipnosophistae*. The comic poet Eupolis also wrote a play entitled *Flatterers* for the fifth-century stage, in which a group of idle people were portrayed as scroungers from the tables of the rich Callias. This form of patronage is portrayed in a more positive light in Plato's *Protagoras* and Xenophon's *Symposium*, in both of which Callias entertains Socrates and other philosophers at home. Parasites were indeed present in a sense in the *Odyssey*. The suitors of Penelope were men of status and not parasites. But they were eating the cattle of King Odysseus on a non-reciprocal basis in which they repaid the meals with nothing. They also maltreated a social level below that of parasite, the beggars, who had a right to beg for food from the tables, even though they could not sit at table as of right. The suitors abused both the household of the absent Odysseus with their non-reciprocal consumption of animals and the beggars, in attempting to deny them food that was not even their own.

There were other ways in which elite status could be displayed, most notably the sponsoring of sacrifices and distributions of food to the population. This is a feature of the Hellenistic Greek cities, and is widespread in Republican and Imperial Rome, as Donahue (2005) has documented (see pp. 65–6). In Rome, meals both public and private were often organized on a severely hierarchical basis. This is clear in distributions of food by the emperor in big arenas, where different categories of citizen received different portions, and in the entertaining of poorer clients by rich patrons. I quoted above (p. 57) a particularly graphic example of this in the fifth satire of Juvenal. A host might also display his wealth and beneficence by entertaining vast numbers, as many Roman emperors did, and as we saw above from Dionysius II of Syracuse and Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Antioch. Such lavishness was not necessarily a good idea, Plutarch advises, in *Table-Talk* 5.5. In this regard, we should bear in mind that entertaining on such a vast scale was always the exception rather than the rule, and that even among the elite, such scenes as Pliny dining with his wife (see below) were more normal than the great feast of beneficence.

Food and Gender

Women of status were present at the Roman dinner, especially at court and other state occasions, but they do not seem to have been as numerous at the dinner as men. A clear distinction between Greek and Roman practice is made by the Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos (preface 6–7):

for which Roman is ashamed to bring his wife to the formal meal (*convivium*)? Or whose female head of the family does not hold first place in the house and move about in public? Greek practice is very different. For a Greek woman is not admitted to the *convivium* unless it is a family meal, nor does she take her seat unless it be in the inner part of the house.

This statement appears to hold good for the Greek evidence. Fragment 186 of Menander describes a family meal: ‘it’s a job to be plunged into a family dinner-party, where father will have the cup and lead the talk; and after words of advice to the young man is in a jocose mood; then comes mother after him; then the old aunt mutters some nonsense aside, and a hoarse-voiced old man, the aunt’s father; and after him an old woman who calls the youngster dearest while he nods assent

to them all’ (trans. Gulick). Comic texts from the fifth and fourth centuries attest a shared occasion but different arrangements for male and female guests at weddings (Euangelus fragment 1): ‘I told you, four [. . .] tables of women and six of men, a full dinner and lacking in nothing . . .’ (see Wilkins 2000: 60). Similar arrangements are described by Dio Chrysostom at the wedding in Euboea in the second century AD (mentioned p. 61). Weddings are semi-public occasions for which evidence is available. I am not aware of any evidence for private meals that contradicts the statement of Nepos, who speaks of women of status, of course, and not slave women and *hetaerae*, who were present at the Greek symposium, as discussed in Chapter 6. Four hundred years earlier, Herodotus appears to anticipate the evidence of Nepos. At 5.18.2–3, Herodotus has some Persian envoys ask Amyntas the Macedonian to bring wives and concubines to join the meal, as is the Persian custom. They are told that that is not the custom in Macedonia (and by implication in Greece). Plutarch (*Table-Talk* 1.1 = 613a) reports Persian practice differently, claiming that concubines but not wives were present at their symposia.

The Roman evidence for women at meal times is comparatively plentiful. Valerius Maximus gives an idealized account (2.1) of women seated at the *cena* beside their husbands who reclined. Juno and Jupiter were imagined to dine likewise. But human beings no longer followed the practice in his own day, Valerius implies. In the past too, women drank no wine. This picture of Republican virtue may be no more than a pious generalization that fits the moralizing discourse of the period. Quiet virtue was also possible under the emperors. Pliny the Younger describes an evening at home with his wife and friends (*Letter* 9.36):

if I am dining alone with my wife or with a few friends, a book is read aloud during the meal and afterwards we listen to a comedy or some music. (trans. Radice)

The love poets attest women at dinners, who might be seduced from their husbands (McKeown 1987). This evidence is difficult to read since the genre seeks to destabilize accepted patterns of behaviour, and it is often unclear quite what the status of the poet’s girlfriend might be. Satire too has women at dinners, in a hostile presentation in Juvenal *Satire* 6; and in a less venomous description in Petronius, *Dinner with Trimalchio*. At the highest social level, emperors’ wives and senators’ wives dined at the imperial court (Suetonius *Caligula*).

We might expect some help in this regard from Plutarch and Athenaeus, the writers of the second century AD who fused many

aspects of Greco-Roman behaviour in their intellectual world. But on the subject of women at formal meals in their own period, they have little to offer. There are no female *Deipnosophistae*.

It is worth making some general points. Much of the Greek evidence comes from Classical Athens, which appears to have had stricter sexual segregation than many other cities, with the possible exception of Miletus. There is little evidence that such strict segregation applied to all classes of free women. There were female bread-sellers and fish-sellers in the market, for example (see Wilkins 2000). But there are few counterexamples either (see, for example, Galen's anecdote about peasants boiling wheat above). Women could eat and drink with each other. Some comic evidence is gathered in Wilkins (2000). When we read in Plato's *Symposium* that the piper is not needed, and can be sent to entertain the women if needed, we have no idea of the circumstances or manner of eating of such women and their friends. The women we do know about are the companions or *hetaerae*, the escorts at symposia who figure widely in comedies, vase paintings and in the pages of Athenaeus. The latter records many witty sayings of these women in book 13 of the *Deipnosophistae*. The ubiquity of the courtesan at the Greek table only serves to emphasize the absence of the woman of status. Yet all such women ate every day, with their families, friends and kinsmen.

Other approaches may be helpful. Dalby (1993: 176–81) has suggested, using the comparative evidence of the Sarakatsani shepherds of north-western Greece, that women tended to feed their men first, and themselves afterwards, on less good food. This is a useful way forward but there is little ancient evidence to support it. Dalby's attempt to use a scene in Aristophanes' *Wasps* is not convincing. Archaeological evidence, however, appears to suggest that in Mycenae and Bronze Age Crete, on the basis of chemical deposits in bones, men ate more fish and meat respectively than women (Tzedakis and Martlew 2002). Garnsey (1999) also surveys a different range of archaeological data and concludes that women, especially those of childbearing age, were more likely to suffer malnutrition than men. In a rare comment, Galen says women and children eat jujubes, a bad food in his view.

We have discussed so far women as consumers of food and drink. As far as the preparation of food is concerned, it is certain that women prepared food more often than men, unless the household could afford slaves. There is a good deal of literary and visual evidence for this, some of which is collected in Wilkins (2000a). Pherecrates, the comic poet, in fragment 10 of his *Savages*, has a character imagine a world in

which there are no slaves. So it is the women who have to get up early and grind the corn for the day, just as 600 years later it is the women in Galen's anecdote who bake the daily bread. Such activity confirms the general picture of men out in the world working either as manual workers or in more refined activities, and women at home in charge of the household stores. This is the message of the sober *Oeconomicus* of Xenophon, and also of the playful comedies of Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousai* and *Frogs*.

Order of the meal

It is often said that the Greek *deipnon*-symposium was divided into the food part of the meal (the *deipnon*) and the drinking part, the symposium. This is broadly true in Greece, and much less the case in Roman dining. Two texts from about 400 BC shed some light on the issue. A gastronomic poem, the *Deipnon* or *Dinner* of Philoxenus, describes an elaborate meal which concludes with the phrase, 'when they had had their fill of food and drink'. The tables are then changed, and the symposium or drinking session begins. Evidently, the guests drank as necessary during the meal, but there was a clear division before the symposium started, with clean floors, new tables, new garlands, prayers and libations. A new start, but there had been wine before, and more food would follow during the symposium, when the second tables or dessert courses were routinely served. In Rome, drinking begins the meal (this can be seen clearly in Trimalchio's dinner and in the meal of the *Deipnosophistae*), and follows at the end. The two qualifications that need to be made to the Greek pattern is that no one was likely to eat a large meal without the possibility of liquid refreshment if needed; and secondly that a number of texts make clear that wine was drunk at an earlier stage. At the beginning of *Odyssey* Book Three, Telemachus and the disguised Athena are given innards of sacrificial animals and wine when they arrive, and then more meat and the glorious feast a little later. In Book Four, they are welcomed by Menelaus and have their fill of food and drink, and then have a drinking session to follow. In *Iliad* 9, the embassy to Achilles eats and drinks. Wine is the first consideration, then food, the chine of a hog, then 'when their thirst and hunger were satisfied', they drink toasts and continue. We should thus think not so much of an exclusive division between the eating and drinking parts of the meal (and indeed in many sources, from Xenophon onwards, the terms *deipnon* and symposium cover both parts of the event). Rather, there was a new start at the

beginning of the symposium, with new garlands, new tables, new prayers and a new start to the mixing bowl or crater. This picture is, however, contradicted by Plutarch in his *Table-Talk* (8.9 = 733f–734a). He claims that the order of the meal had changed from earlier times, with oysters, sea urchins and raw vegetables served at the beginning rather than at the end of the meal. He claims also that current drinking at the beginning of the meal was unknown in earlier times, where nothing was drunk before the dessert course. Plutarch may be right, but I doubt that no drinking took place at an earlier stage. A case in Galen supports this. Watching a man eat a standard meal, he tries to work out why apples and pears upset him (*On the Powers of Foods* 2.21). The man has a bath, drinks some water, and eats fenugreek and radish with normal starters; drinks some sweet wine; eats mallow with oil, *garum* and wine, with fish, pork and chicken; drinks a cup or two of wine, and then eats two sharp pears.

It is often difficult to define the precise order of a formal meal, and given the variety of cities, eating practices and time scale under review in this book, nothing definitive is likely to emerge. Certain points can, however, be made. There were differences over time, as Athenaeus notes (confirming Plutarch) at 3.101b: ‘All the ancients however did not serve before the *deipnon* either sow’s wombs or lettuce or anything else of that kind, as now happens. Archestratus the inventive chef at least speaks of them after the meal and the toasts and the anointing with myrrh’ (trans. Wilkins). Athenaeus then quotes Archestratus fr. 60 Olson & Sens (2000), which is a very good survey of second tables. Athenaeus remarks further that in the dinner given by the courtesan Lamia to Demetrius Poliorcetes in Athens, fish and meat were served first, as was the case with the dinners of King Antigonos and Ptolemy II also mentioned on p. 44. It is difficult to say what was served first in Archestratus, given the fragmentary nature of the poem and disputes among the editors over the ordering of fragments within the poem. He announces in fragment 9 Olson & Sens: ‘Bulbs. I bid farewell to vinegardishes of bulbs and plant stalks, and to all the other side dishes.’ There could, however, be some similarity between the appetisers and the ‘second tables’ that were served during the Greek symposium. So too at the meal of Trimalchio, small fish items come at the beginning and end of the meal. Athenaeus presents a number of foods that seem to have moved their customary place between the beginning and end of the meal or vice versa. These comments of Athenaeus and Plutarch exhibit a desire to reconcile ancient and contradictory evidence.

3

Introduction

The constraints imposed on diet by religion are similar to those imposed by military and social bodies. They seem to be an exercise in cementing the ranks of the believers, providing a sense of group cohesion and belonging rather than anything remotely connected with core beliefs and philosophy. Even so, as symbols of the religion, they acquire a significance beyond what may appear necessary or sensible. Perhaps it is easier to demonstrate devotion through such obvious means as, say, avoiding non-kosher or halal food or forgoing meat during Lent, than it may be to comply with strictures on the brotherhood of man or turning the other cheek. More likely, though, is the attraction of a communal show of unity and brotherhood in the face of outsiders.

It is generally abstinence that is called for, fasting as part of some regime of mortifying the flesh, and the objectives are self-discipline and self-control. The appeal for societies dependent on military strength or concerned about continuing separate identity is not hard to see, for the interests of god and state are rarely at odds with each other.

The followers of Pythagoras comply with these rules in that they are bound together by the avoidance of flesh and, a touch more bizarrely, the bean family. Vegetarianism, though, has in common with Buddhism, and for the same reasons, the notion that life is sacred of itself rather than submissive to the state’s or society’s greater need. This would have been more contentious than any dietary regime and the offering of anything less than animal life at the altar of the gods would have seemed inferior and absurd. In times of danger a bunch of celery will never have quite the impact of slain goat.

The ritual slaughter of animals, their cooking and distribution was in Greece closely connected with religious ceremony and would again be