

A “Certified” Roman Banquet for Saturnalia

In this lesson plan for grade six, students learn about the foods, clothing and dining customs of the Romans of the Republic, customs surrounding the Roman Festival of Saturnalia and how we can apply the best of those customs today. The feast provides a framework for presenting results of additional research.

An activity for grade six Social Studies

by Judith Geary

Learning outcomes

- * Students will discover that many of the foods we connect with modern Italy were not available in ancient times – and connect how exploration and trade has expanded our everyday life
- * Students will compare how dress is influenced by social class and social customs, both in ancient times and today
- * Students will discuss what holiday customs can teach us about cultural values, both in ancient times and today
- * Students will experience something of the life of people of the Roman Republic

Teacher planning

MATERIALS NEEDED

- *Handouts (provided)
- *A space large enough to set up three cots in an open “U” (See handout.)
- *Cots or substitutes (library tables perhaps)
- *Low tables for in front of the cots
- *Straight chairs
- *Napkins (linen, in a variety of designs preferred,. See handout.)
- *Small bowls for serving food
- *Spoons (but no forks or knives. See handout.)
- * “Roman” foods (See handout.)

TIME REQUIRED FOR LESSON

Several class periods – depending on the amount of independent research assigned and the amount of class time and support provided for that research.

Procedure

1. Conduct a discussion about ancient Rome and allow the students to discuss some of what they have learned. Use the first three pages of the handout as a guide to dining customs. Information about the December festival of Saturnalia is on handout “Saturnalia Fast Facts.”
2. Divide the students into teams to research self-selected aspects of Roman life. These may include foods, textiles, clothing, architecture and building materials, religion and gods, mythology, arts, technology, mathematics & measurement. Presentations can take the form of Power Point presentations, dramatizations or presentations with visual aids, and may be included in “entertainment” at the banquet.
3. Engage students in planning for the event. Discuss reasonable levels of “authenticity” in dress, table settings, foods, etc. Assign roles and discuss flexibility. (For example, students may take turns playing the roles of servant or diner and/or students may swap gender roles – sitting or reclining – during the banquet. Honoring Roman customs of the master serving the slave during one event at Saturnalia, involving adults such as the teacher(s) and/or principal in table service – particularly barefoot and wearing a tunic – may add interest

to the event.)

4. At the arranged date, time and place, gather materials (See handouts.) Schedule eating and presentation times. Be sure you have enough adult involvement to allow for fun, while maintaining sufficient order for safety.

5. Io Saturnalia!

Assessment:

Projects are products of the students' research and may be assessed using a teacher-made rubric.

Supplemental Information:

Handouts attached

North Carolina Curriculum Alignment

SOCIAL STUDIES (2003)

Grade 6

Goal 6: The learner will recognize the relationship between economic activity and quality of life in South America and Europe.

Objective 6.02: Describe different levels of economic development and assess their connection to standard of living indicators such as purchasing power, literacy rate and life expectancy.

Goal 8: The learner will assess the influence and contributions of individual and cultural groups in South America and Europe.

Objective 8.02: Describe the role of key groups and evaluate their impact on historical and contemporary societies in South America and Europe.

Goal 12: The learner will assess the influence of major religions, ethical beliefs and values on cultures in South America and Europe.

Objective 12.01: Examine the major belief systems in selected regions of South America and Europe, and analyze their impact on cultural values, practices and institutions.

EAT LIKE A ROMAN

Staging an “authentic” Roman Banquet

During the Republic (509 B.C.E. into the first century B.C.E.) Roman foods and customs were relatively rational and conservative. We find none of the stories that have come down to us of the Empire and the Emperors feasting on larks’ tongues and throwing slaves into the pools to feed eels. We will be patterning our banquet after a family dinner party of about the turn of the first century B.C.E.

We know something of Roman dining customs from wall paintings and the discoveries of archaeologists, as well as from letters that were preserved. Primarily, however, these are “best guesses.”

SETTING THE STAGE:

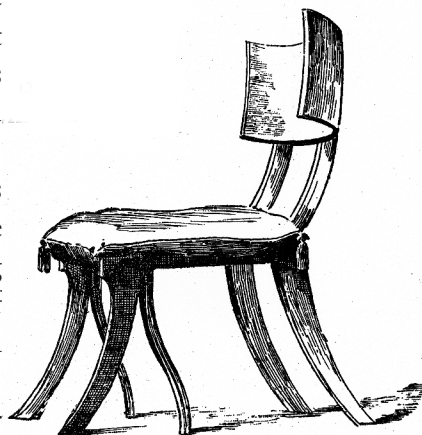
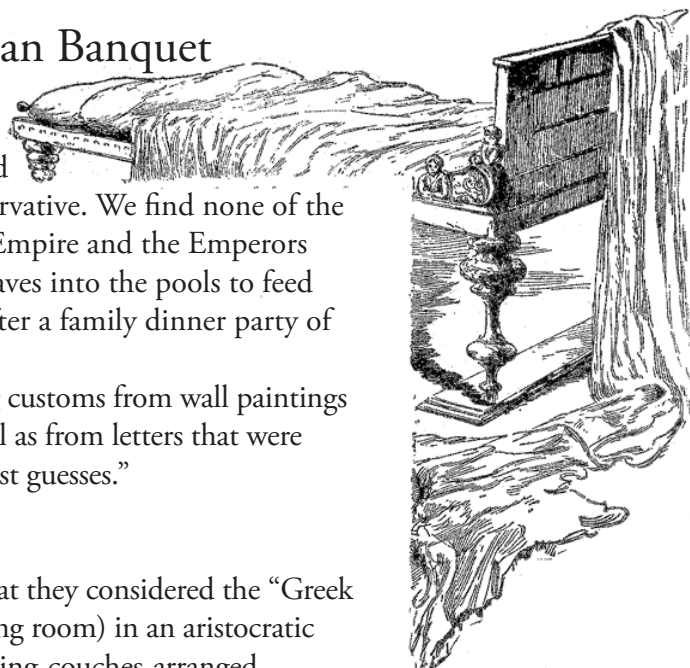
Romans ate lying down at banquets, in what they considered the “Greek fashion.” A fully furnished triclinium (dining room) in an aristocratic household would have room for three dining couches arranged in an open “U” shape with the opening facing the doors to the atrium. Each couch would be about four feet wide and at least twice that long with a raised head on one end. Narrow tables served each couch. Only men reclined to eat; the women sat on straight chairs across the table on the inside of the “U”.

Single beds or cots with a headboard would serve well as dining couches. Realize that the Romans would have lain three to a couch crosswise and side by side with their feet hanging off the back. The tables should be just lower than the height of the mattress. Long narrow coffee tables might serve, or a board across low supports. Straight wooden chairs with curved backs, similar to the common “bentwood” style are remarkably similar to what the Romans would have used.

TABLE SETTINGS:

Bare tables (without table cloths) were the custom. However, each diner would have two napkins, which he might have brought with him. As napkins with embroidered designs are mentioned in letters of the time as gifts brought back from Spain, the quality of one’s napkin might be point of pride. One napkin might be used at the diner’s place spread on the table, the other reserved for taking home leftovers. Bowls of water offered between courses served to clean the fingers.

There were no forks and foods were served cut to bite-size, so knives were not likely used by the diners. Spoons were available



of silver, bronze or bone for eating eggs and liquids, and had a pointed handle to extract snails or shellfish from their shells. Rather than plates at each place, the individual foods were served in bowls or footed dishes and may have been intended to be shared between two or more diners. The dishes might be silver or bronze, or even gold, or they might be red pottery from Spain, patterned pottery from Greece, or a rather delicate black china designed to mimic the designs of silver.



Wine was mixed with warm water or cool, flavored with honey or spices. A large two-handled vessel, sometimes called a “krater” was used for mixing the wine. It must have been then dipped out with a cup, as the filled krater is too heavy to accurately pour from and has no specific lip. An ice bucket of a similar design should serve well for a krater, with grape juice for wine.

Carved rock crystal cups were not unknown, but glass blowing was not invented until around 50 B.C.E. Handleless cups of pottery, bronze or silver would certainly be more common.

THE CAST AND CREW:

Roman banquets required many more “support personnel” than participants, the majority of whom were slaves, of course, but you can have volunteers stand in for some of these. Consider assigning roles by lot, without regard to gender, so that boys may be playing the role of girls and vice versa.

Saturnalia was the major Roman festival in December with many customs in common with our Christmas celebration. A notable one was a banquet in which the masters served the slaves. Including this custom at some point in your celebration could be a fun touch. You could stage the whole thing “straight,” then do “turnabout” and have those playing slaves take their places on the couches.

COSTUMES:

Romans did not dine in their togas. “Dining robes” might be provided by the host or brought by the guests. Silk was not unknown at this period, though it was still uncommon, as was cotton. Soft wool would be more likely. Colorful bathrobes, in fleece or a silky fabric, worn over a tunic, will suffice. Men’s feet are bare unless the weather is chilly, then soft boots may be worn. Sheepskin slippers are a reasonable approximation.

Women will wear their tunica. We’re supposing we all know each other, so a palla, the covering worn by respectable Roman matrons in public, is not necessary. Bright colors, particularly greens and mauves, and multiple layers of gauzy wool in different shades are authentic.

Servants and slaves wear tunics. Simple off-white wool is likely most authentic, but distinctive fibulae (pins) at the shoulders or a bright belt might mark the ones of the host’s household. Servants’ feet are bare. Guests might also bring a personal servant to attend to their needs.



THE MENU:

A Roman dinner party of the Republican Era would have at least three courses. The order will seem familiar: appetizers, main course, dessert. Accounts of the time record dinners where the dessert consisted of oysters, or creamy cheese, but fruit is just as authentic, and will likely be more appetizing to modern diners.

THE APPETIZER (GUSTATIO):

- *Bread rolls (Recipes included)
- *A salad of baby lettuce and chopped leeks, dressed with a bit of olive oil and red wine vinegar
- *Tuna steak, broiled, served with chopped boiled eggs and rue leaves (Rue is available as a medicinal herb, but you may choose to leave it out.)
- *Assorted raw vegetables including celery, cucumbers and broccoli (though not the fat heads we're familiar with today – more like broccoli rabe), with a cheese pate' for dipping.



THE MAIN COURSE (PRIMA MENSA):

- *Bread rolls
- *"Blackened" cabbage leaves roasted in olive oil and "served in the black dish" (Recipe included)
- *Pork sausage (broiled) served on top of buckwheat groats
- *Sweet and sour pork (Recipe included)
- *Rabbit with fruit sauce (Recipe included)



DESSERT (SECUNDA MENSA):

- *Fresh fruit
- *Soft cheese, perhaps sweetened with honey
- *Cookies (crackers – perhaps with the cheese and a fruit spread)

THE SCRIPT:

In the novel, *GETORIX: The Eagle and the Bull*, Getorix faces the Romans twice during meals with very unsatisfactory results. Another passage describes a Saturnalia banquet. Use these scenes as prompts to write your own scenes.

NOTABLE CUSTOMS AND ENTERTAINMENT:

The most common customs were seldom mentioned because everyone took them for granted. Again, these are best guesses from comments by sources at the time.

Women apparently drank only water at the table and left before any serious political discussions or entertainment began. It might be supposed that they retired to the sitting room of the hostess, perhaps for their own wine, dessert and entertainment, but we have to records to confirm that.

Servants were silent while serving the meal. We might suppose that they communicated by hand signals or whispered before they entered the room. A pleasant expression was considered a virtue. (Writers of the time commented on a host's "contented looking" slaves.)

Entertainment might include music (from a recorder-like pipe or stringed instruments) and a dancing girl. However, a reading, either from one of the guests or a trained slave, would likely be more common. The passage read might be poetry or prose from a well-known writer of the time, or something new by the host or one of the guests. Educated men and women of the time wrote poetry and epigrams and might share their efforts at a dinner party. You may share epigrams from the activity in this package on "Education, Literature and Poetry," or you may share what you've written yourself.

ROMAN RECIPES

compiled by Judith Geary

THE LIMITS OF RESEARCH:

Our knowledge of Romans' dieting habits comes from literary references, such as the letters Romans wrote to each other; archeological evidence, such as the discoveries of carbonized foods in Pompeii and Herculanium; and paintings. The only true literary source devoted to Roman food was a cookbook attributed to Marcus Gavius Apicius, who wrote in the 1st century C.E., and unfortunately, he doesn't give quantities or instructions for preparation.

BREAD AND GRAIN:

Romans baked on the hearth under a "baking brick," or testum, which was a terra cotta dome much like a casserole. Some found by archaeologists have a number of small holes in the top. Cooks baked by piling hot coals around the testum, creating a mini-oven on the hearth. For your testum, you can use a large oven proof casserole or even a large shallow flower pot. The drainage hole in the flower pot will provide for air circulation. If your "baking brick" does not have holes, prop one side up about an inch.

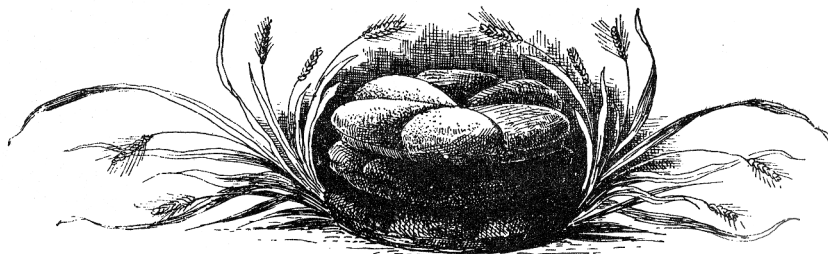
Baking in a hot oven using the "baking brick" will yield very good results. However, if you want to try it, and have the outdoor facilities, charcoal was the fuel used on Roman hearths. You can use a ceramic tile with a bit of olive oil and coarse ground buckwheat or barley to prevent sticking and oil the inside of your "baking brick." Remember that butter is northern European in origin and wasn't used in ancient Rome.

All ancient flour was whole grain. As the Romans certainly knew, some grains yield softer, lighter results, others make for crusty bread. Some, like barley, don't rise very much even when yeast is added. We know the reason is the amount and type of gluten in the flour. Whether the Romans had a name for it or not, they used different flours for different purposes, and mixed flours to get different results.

Spelt was apparently considered more pure or holy than other grains because it was used to bake the bread for religious ceremonies and the pontifex maximus (chief priest) could eat only spelt rather than wheat.

Barley is very low in gluten. Pure barley bread is flat and heavy with a dry crust and poor keeping qualities. Barley was considered a "lower class" grain, though its nutritional properties were apparently recognized as it was considered a basic food for gladiators.

Wheat was the "standard" grain for bread flour, though the emmer wheat that was common in the ancient world didn't have the level or quality of gluten of the wheat we use for bread flour today. You may add a bit of olive oil if you like to recipes and use olive oil to grease bowls.



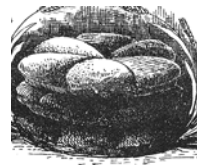
This page may be copied and distributed to the students

BARLEY ROLLS

The recipe below is from *The Classical Cookbook*, by Andrew Dalb and Sally Grainger (1996) (The explanation is modified.) You may want to try substituting 100% whole wheat flour to get a crustier bread for “Etruscan pizza”.

Leaven:

2 oz. (½ cup) barley flour
1 teaspoon fresh or ½ teaspoon dried yeast.



Ancient leavening was a sourdough culture saved from one baking to the next. If you have access to such a resource, use it. To create your own yeast culture: dissolve the yeast in 1 tablespoon warm water and use to form a dough with 2 oz. barley flour. Knead the dough briefly, mold into a pat, cross it lightly and put a thumb print in the center. Pour 2 teaspoons of warm water into the indentation. Place in a glass dish with a lid and leave to ferment in a warm place for at least 24 hours.

Dough

6 oz. (1 ½ cup) wholewheat flour
6 oz. (1 ½ cup) barley flour
leaven (from above)
1 teaspoon salt.

Sift wholewheat and barley flour together, add salt and the leaven. Add enough warm water to form a dough. Knead well and allow to rest and rise in a bowl covered with an oiled cloth (or plastic wrap), in a warm place until it has doubled in size. Divide the dough into 12 pieces for rolls and mold them with your hands into smooth balls. Leave them to rise in a warm place, covered with a cloth.

Heat the oven to 400 degrees and also heat a baking tray, or large ceramic tile and your “baking brick..” Brush the tray with a little olive oil and place the rolls in circles of 6, with the edges barely touching. Cover with “baking brick” and bake 15-20 minutes until lightly golden and hollow-sounding when tapped.

“Etruscan Pizza”

This dish is actually more like what we call focaccia. Using small handfuls of the dough recipe above, or modified to 100% whole wheat flour, flatten into rounds and spread with olive oil, chopped onions, black and green olives, and cheese. You can use mozzarella, feta or any white cheese except cheddar.

DAIRY – CHEESES:

Romans made and imported cheeses of many kinds, primarily from the milk of sheep and goats. Soft cheeses might be spiced and used as a pate or incorporated into what sounds surprisingly like a honey-flavored cheesecake. Cheese might be baked into a bread loaf to fortify it as food for hard-working laborers, slaves or soldiers. Butter was not used; it was a northern European, a Celtic product.

GARLIC AND HERB CHEESE PATE' (SERVES 8)

Four (4) garlic cloves (or more to taste), finely minced

1 ½ stalks celery, finely minced

1 small bunch coriander leaves, finely minced

Salt to taste

Soft cheese (Farmer cheese or pot cheese will work; feta gives a more savory, but drier, product.)

To be authentic, use a mortar and pestle to reduce your flavorings to a paste. Add the cheese and combine until smooth and creamy. You may also use a food processor. If you choose feta cheese, a bit of vinegar and oil may be necessary to make the pate' soft enough to spread easily. Combine all ingredients and allow to rest at least 15 minutes, preferably several hours, before serving.

**FRUITS, NUTS & VEGETABLES:**

Fruits were eaten raw, cooked, dried and preserved. They were used as sweeteners, added to breads dried or as jam-like paste and used in the cooking of meats. Common fruits included: apples, figs, grapes, melons, plums, pears, pomegranates and quinces. Oranges from Spain and cherries from China were perhaps known about at the beginning of the first century B.C.E., but were not commonly available. Berries were known, but do not appear in recipes or accounts of the time. Perhaps they were eaten by rural people.

Nuts were eaten raw, roasted and honeyed. Available were: almonds, chestnuts, filberts, and walnuts.

Vegetables were eaten boiled, roasted and as part of other dishes including soups. Many vegetables were available, either locally grown or imported. Available vegetables included: artichokes, asparagus, beans of several kinds, beets, broccoli, celery, cabbages, chickpeas, cucumbers, garlic, leeks, lentils, lettuces, mallow leaves, marrows, olives, onions, parsnips, peas, pumpkins, radishes and turnips.

**ROASTED CABBAGE "SERVED IN THE BLACK DISH"**

We have no specific recipe for this dish, just a reference to it in a dinner invitation, but the following is consistent with the way Romans prepared foods.

Outer leaves of a head of cabbage, cut into bite-sized pieces

Oil single-serving sized dishes with olive oil and place a loose handful of cabbage pieces in each

Drizzle with a bit more olive oil and bake in a hot oven until the edges brown.

According to the dinner invitation, this would have been served hot enough to burn the fingers, but you might want to be careful of that.

MEATS:

Meats were not part of every meal, or even every day's fare for the Romans. However, recipes for meats are the recipes modern cooks may find most fascinating. Pork, smoked or incorporated into sausage, were relatively common as were fish, of many varieties.

Note: Garum and liquamen were very popular sauces (at least as popular as ketchup and "A1" are today.) From the descriptions, they were both based on cured fish parts and spices. Garum seems to have been the "heavier" sauce -- liquamen the "lighter." Worcestershire sauce will suffice, as might some Asian sauces with cured fish stock bases.

These two recipes were adapted from *Apicius, Cookbook*.

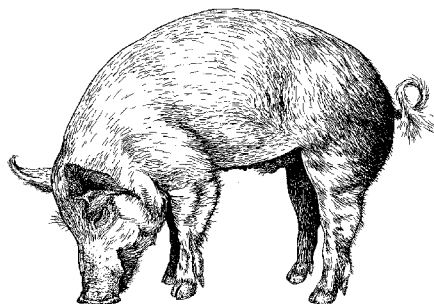
RABBIT WITH FRUIT SAUCE:

(Quantities may be adjusted according to the number of servings and to taste. Also, chicken thighs may be substituted for rabbit.)

Cook the rabbit in wine, liquamen and water, with a little bit of mustard, anise and a whole leek. When the rabbit is done, prepare this sauce: pepper, savory, onion, dates, two damson plums, wine, liquamen (Worcestershire sauce), and caroenum (a reduced wine—you may use concentrated, unsweetened grape juice) and a small amount of olive oil. Thicken with starch (flour) and allow the mixture to boil for a short time. (Cut the meat into bite-sized pieces.) Pour this fruit sauce over the rabbit in a serving dish.

SWEET AND SOUR PORK:

Put in a pot olive oil, liquamen (Worcestershire sauce) and wine. Add a chopped, dried shallot and diced, cooked pork shoulder. Cook this mixture until well heated. Grind together pepper, cumin, dried mint, and anise. Add to this mixture: honey, liquamen, passum (Sweet cooking wine or raisin wine. You may use concentrated grape juice.), a little vinegar and juice from the meat mixture. Combine the spice mixture with the meat. Add fruit from which the pits and seeds have been removed (Plums, or prunes—which are dried plums, and a little extra water – should work nicely.), bring the mixture to a boil, and heat thoroughly. Crumble pastry (flour with olive oil cut in until resembles coarse meal.) over the mixture to bind it. Sprinkle with pepper and serve.



"CERTIFIED SUBSTITUTES"

prepared by Judith Geary,

MANY SCHOOLS now are requiring that foods used in the classroom be prepared in a certified or commercial kitchen. This limits the food preparation the children can participate in, but it need not limit your experience. Credible substitutes can be purchased at many grocery stores or delis.

This is certainly not intended as an exhaustive list. I would love to hear from students or teachers who have found the treasure of an "authentic ancient Roman" food on grocers' shelves.

FOODS TO AVOID: Remember that many foods we today think of as "Italian" were not available in the first century B.C.E. Identifying the origins of some of these foods could be an extra project.

Corn (no polenta)

Potatoes (no gnocchi)

Tomatoes (no marinara)

Refined, high-gluten flour (no pasta or "Italian" bread)

Sugar, of the cane, beet, or corn syrup varieties (use all-fruit, like grape or apricot spreads, or honey for sweetening)



SO, WHAT DID THEY EAT THAT WE WOULD RECOGNIZE TODAY?

FOR THE FIRST COURSE, OR GUSTATIO:

Salad: Baby greens simply dressed with oil and vinegar, makes an authentic first course. Include radishes, perhaps cut as flowers, and pickled mushrooms and cucumbers. Tuna, which is available packaged, already marinated and grilled, on the grocery store aisle with canned tuna, can be included as a special treat if your budget allows (which would also have been true for the Romans.) Boiled eggs, either served by themselves or sliced and used as garnish for the tuna, should be included in your gustatio, as they were very popular.

PRIMA MENSA (FIRST TABLE):

Meats: Sweet & Sour sauces (vinegar based & fruit sweetened) were popular on meats in pieces of a convenient size to pick up. (Remember, no tableware other than spoons.)

CHICKEN: Barbequed chicken in a vinegar-based sauce works well. "Rotisserie" chicken cut in convenient pieces is a great starting point -- then add vinegar-based barbeque sauce from a bottle. All-fruit grape or apricot spreads can add sweetness. Garum, which the ancient Romans used like we use catsup -- on everything -- is perhaps most similar to certain tangy Thai sauces with a "fermented fish" base. However, Worcestershire Sauce works well and is likely very close. (Check the ingredients label for confirmation.)

PORK: Pork was a popular meat, and sweet and sour pork would have seemed familiar to the upper classes in ancient Rome. Prepared, microwaveable entrees from the Asian foods section of the grocery or carry-out from a Chinese restaurant will serve.

BREADS: Whole-grain “artisan” breads made with wheat, barley and/or spelt will be true to the time. Barley was considered “rough” but very nutritious, fed to gladiators and legionaries; it was the bread of the common people. Spelt had a certain mystique. It was the only grain the high priest was allowed, but could be eaten by others as well. Wheat was considered the grain for the upper classes. So, read the labels and choose your bread according to whom you’re feeding.

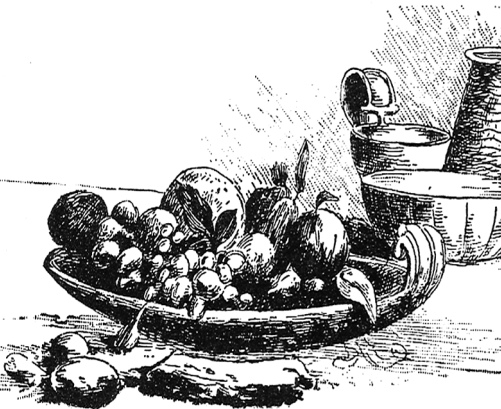
Focaccia (flat bread topped with olive oil and a variety of olives, onions, garlic and cheeses), is similar to a dish served from the open-air, corner tabernas. (Remember -- no tomatoes, not even the sun-dried variety.)



CHEESE: White cheeses in a number of varieties, both mild and sharp, would have been familiar to the Romans in ancient times. Creamy fresh cheeses are mentioned as part of their final course, our “dessert.” Many modern cream cheeses have a slightly gummy texture; the fresh creamy cheeses labeled as “hispanic” farmer cheeses are likely closer. Hard, or sharp, cheeses may have been more commonly used when traveling, when their “durability” was desirable. Modern mozzarella, provolone and ricotta cheeses will do nicely.

VEGETABLES AND FRUITS: The fruits and vegetables in the grocery store today are the products of many centuries of selective breeding and cross-pollination. Our transportation system makes it possible for us to eat fresh foods from all over the world whenever we want. The Romans traded extensively in the quarter of the globe that was their “known world,” so they also ate a variety of foods, but travel times and preservation methods made for differences.

APPLES: Smaller and less sweet than most grocery store varieties today. Those sold as “cooking apples” are likely closer to authentic.



GRAPES: “Table grapes” -- translucent globes as big as your thumb -- are modern developments. Look for smaller, darker varieties with thicker skins if you want to be more authentic.

PLUMS AND PEACHES: Though modern varieties are certainly larger, grocery store varieties are fine.

FIGS, DATES AND RAISINS would have been familiar. If you can get them “really dried” rather than in vacuum-sealed packets, they’ll be more authentic.

BROCCOLI: Modern myths surrounding broccoli abound (including that it was “created” by crossing kale and cauliflower.) However, writers in ancient Rome mention broccoli, though “broccoli rabe” is more likely similar to what they ate.

CABBAGE: Cabbage was a popular food for all classes. It was considered healthy, as well as nutritious, even a “digestive aide.” Cabbage was served raw, dressed with vinegar, or cooked, roasted or boiled. If you’re using a school cafeteria version, remember that a bit of vinegar and oil goes a long way in adding Roman flavor.

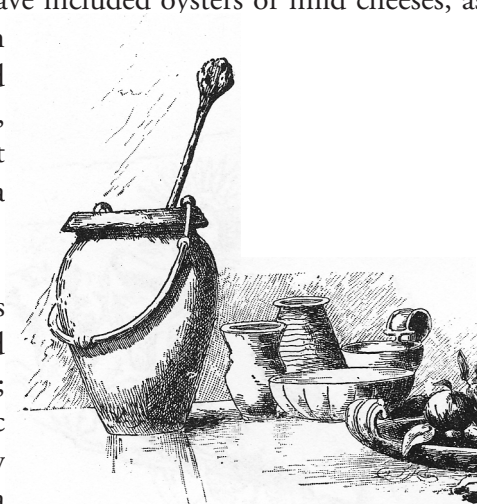
BEANS AND CHICK PEAS: Chick peas were so common that dried ones were said to have been used as ship's ballast. Various kinds of white beans (brown ones are more likely "new-world"), lupins and lentils were preserved dried and cooked in water, much as they are today, or pickled in brine or vinegar.

ROOT VEGETABLES: Parsnips, beets, carrots (though likely the varieties of carrots were white or purple rather than the orange ones of today),

SECUNDA MENSA (SECOND TABLE, OR DESSERT)

DESSERT: The final course in a Roman banquet might have included oysters or mild cheeses, as the Romans seemed more concerned with the texture than that it be something sweet. However, honey-sweetened baked custards or "cheesecake" would have been familiar, and modern versions will serve. Fruit, raw or stewed, might also be part of "dessert," perhaps topped with custard as a sauce.

SWEETS AND SNACKS: Dried fruits like raisins, currents, figs and dates; olives, both black and green (Those preserved in brine with the pits left in are much more authentic.); bread or rolls, cheese, and fresh fruit make great authentic snack foods. Nuts -- almonds, walnuts or hazelnuts -- raw or roasted without salt, are good. The closest thing to a "cookie" would be a cracker ("water biscuit") with all-fruit spread over, perhaps, creamy cheese. (See the note above on cream cheese.)



PASTRIES: Roman bakers made elaborately formed yeast-raised breads and "cakes". "Honey-buns" are perhaps most similar. An unsweetened swirl-shaped roll with honey drizzled over is closer to authentic than the packaged variety.

SAUSAGES, some similar to bratwurst, were sold on the streets, much as "hot dogs" are today. A bit of parchment (paper) would serve to hold it rather than a bun.

SOURCES: This information comes from a wide variety of print and internet sources, both based in ancient accounts and in archaeology. Where the information from one source seemed surprising, I've tried to validate it from several. Write me with questions, comments and challenges:
judithgeary@msn.com



BONA SATURNALIA!

SATURNALIA was a Roman festival in December, honoring the god Saturn, that shares many customs with our celebration of Christmas. Such customs included decorating with greenery and giving small gifts. Another custom was honoring those who provided the services that made the Romans' lives more comfortable. In ancient times, these were often slaves, but we can keep the best of the custom by remembering to be thankful to those who keep our school and home clean and comfortable and make sure we have food and clothing available. Those who perform the most humble services, are the special honorees at this time.

The Saturnalia holiday, and the customs surrounding it, play an important role in the novel, ***GETORIX: THE EAGLE AND THE BULL***, by Judith Geary.



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SATURNALIA was a Roman festival in December, honoring the god Saturn, that shares many customs with our celebration of Christmas. Such customs included decorating with greenery and giving small gifts. Another custom was honoring those who provided the services that made the Romans' lives more comfortable. In ancient times, these were often slaves, but we can keep the best of the custom by remembering to be thankful to those who keep our school and home clean and comfortable and make sure we have food and clothing available. Those who perform the most humble services, are the special honorees at this time.

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