

Bring on the feast!

What type of food did the Ancient Romans eat? What ingredients did they use? What were the Ancient Roman dessert recipes like? When I started to look at some Roman recipes on the internet, I realised that most dishes had sweet-sour flavour combinations, an abundant use of fresh herbs and fragrant spices which I like. And since I am passionate about ancient history and I enjoy cooking (not surprising for a frenchie!), I suddenly had the desire to try and prepare foods in the Roman style.

Apicius, a popular Roman chef, produced an ancient cookbook which can still be used today, allowing us to throw together a meal very much like what the ordinary people or the plebeians of Rome ate.

Two months ago I started to collect Roman pottery and tableware. So far the two recipes I have tried (Psoai / Pork in Sweet Wine and Fig Sauce and Libum / Sweet Cheesecake cooked on the occasion of Hadrian's birthday) turned out well.



*My Collection of Roman pottery/tableware replica*

© Carole Raddato



*Dies Natalis Divi Hadriani Augusti! (Libum made on 24 January 2013)*

© Carole Raddato

Yesterday, I choose to cook a Minutal ex Praecoquis (Pork and Fruit Ragout). The recipe is taken from Apicius' De Re Coquinaria. It is a traditional ancient Roman dish of cooked pork with apricots and figs in a pepper, cumin, mint, dill, honey, liquamen, passum and vinegar sauce.

The recipe in Latin:

Minutal ex praecoquis: adicies in caccabum oleum, liquamen, vinum, concides cepam ascaloniam

aridam, spatulam porcinam coctam tessellatim concides. his omnibus coctis teres piper, cuminum, mentam siccam, anethum, suffundis mel, liquamen, passum, acetum modice, ius de suo sibi, temperabis, praecoqua enucleata mittis, facies ut ferveant, donec percoquantur. tractam confringes, ex ea obligas. piper aspargis et inferes. *Apicius*, 3.6

Translation:

Apricot Ragout: Put in the saucepan oil, liquamen (fish sauce), wine, chop in dry shallot, add diced shoulder of pork cooked previously. When all this is cooked pound pepper, cumin, dried mint, and dill, moisten with honey, liquamen (fish sauce), passum (raisin wine), a little vinegar, and some cooking-liquor; mix well. Add the stoned apricots. Bring to the boil, and let it boil until done. Crumble pastry to bind sprinkle with pepper and serve.

Like all Roman recipes, no measurement of any ingredient is offered and no cooking time stated so here is my own adaptation.

### **Ingredients:**

- 500g of pork cubed (the original recipe called for pork shoulders)
- olive oil
- 2 tbsp fish sauce (*liquamen*)
- 1 onion
- Spring Onions

For the Sauce:

- 375ml White Wine
- 300ml Water
- 1/2 tsp Black Peppercorns
- 1 tsp Cumin Seeds
- 1 sprig of fresh mint
- 1 sprig of fresh dill
- 1 tbsp honey
- 4 tbsp fish sauce

- 1 tsp white wine vinegar
- 1 tsp red wine vinegar
- Dried apricots
- Dried figs



*Minutal ex Praecoquis (Pork and Fruit Ragout) – ingredients*

© Carole Raddato

Method:

Cut the pork in cubes. In a frying pan, heat the olive oil and sauté the meat and chopped onions over high heat until golden. Lower the heat, add 1 tblsp of fish sauce and cook for a few minutes. Remove the meat and set aside.

In a saucepan add the water, wine, fish sauce, and olive oil, then bring to the boil. In the meantime crush together the black pepper, cumin, fresh mint and dill in a mortar then moisten in the honey, fish sauce, a little white wine vinegar and red wine vinegar. Add to the saucepan.

Add the sauce to the the pork and onions, reduce heat and simmer. Five minutes before you are ready to serve, add the apricots and figs roughly chopped to the casserole. Serve hot.



*Minutal ex Praecoquis*

© Carole Raddato

Now the original recipe suggests we add a tracta (a kind of pastry) to thicken the *minutal*. Some modern adaptations suggest crumbled bread crumbs or cornflour instead. As I was satisfied with the texture of the dish I choose to go without the tracta.

Also I did not use Passum which was a raisin wine (wine from semi-dried grapes) apparently developed in ancient Carthage and transmitted from there to Italy, where it was popular in the Roman Empire. Nowadays it can be replaced with a sweet dessert wine.

The results were amazing and my partner liked it too! We loved all the flavours of this dish: the acid coming from the vinegar, the sweetness from the wine and the dried fruits and the cumin. However, I could not really taste the mint nor the dill as most of the flavours came from the cumin. I may have added too much of it. Next time I will reduce the quantity of cumin.

Unfortunately due to lack of natural light in my kitchen, the dishes do not look great on my photos. They definitely taste better than they look on the images above.

If you happen to try this dish, I would love to know what you think of it. I will definitely serve this dish again!

Bonum appetitionem!



*A richly decorated triclinium (officer's dining room), the most complete Roman wall-painting of all the limes, found in the Limes fort at Echzell, Saalburg Roman Fort, Limes Germanicus, Germania (Germany)*

© Carole Raddato

Share this: