



MARCUS GAVIUS APICIUS, *DE RE COQUINARIA* 2.1.7

COOKING APICIUS: WINE

Wine was by far the most prestigious of drinks in Roman culture. It was drunk straight, mixed with water and flavoured with spices, herbs, fruits, and honey, such as the famous *mulsum* and *conditum*. But wine was also an important cooking ingredient and seasoning. It was used in sauces, stews, marinades, casseroles, and dressings for savoury and sweet dishes. Usually the wine or wine must was reduced to a syrupy sweet liquid that was called *defrutum*, *sapa* or *caroenum* dependent on the degree of reduction.

This recipe for flavoured and stuffed faggots from the cookbook of Apicius is a nice starter for a Roman meal. Pork was eaten the most in the Roman period and it gives the meatballs the fattiness they need. Adding bread soaked in wine takes care of the tender structure. Myrtle berries are very hard to find. You can replace them with juniper or – the best outcome of my experiments – with dried mulberries.

Apicius says:

Forcemeat faggots: you pound chopped meat with fresh white bread crumbs soaked in wine, with pepper and liquamen; if you wish, you pound crushed myrtle berries with them. You shape the faggots with pine nuts and pepper placed inside. Wrap them in caul fat and roast them with caroenum.

- ▶ 500g | 1 lb minced pork (preferably organic)
- ▶ 2 slices of bread without crust
- ▶ 50ml | 3 tbsp white wine
- ▶ 100g | 3/4 cup mulberries
- ▶ 50g | 1/3 cup pine nuts
- ▶ 1 tbsp *garum* (fermented fish sauce)
- ▶ 1.5 tsp coarsely ground black pepper
- ▶ 600ml | 2 1/2 cups red grape juice

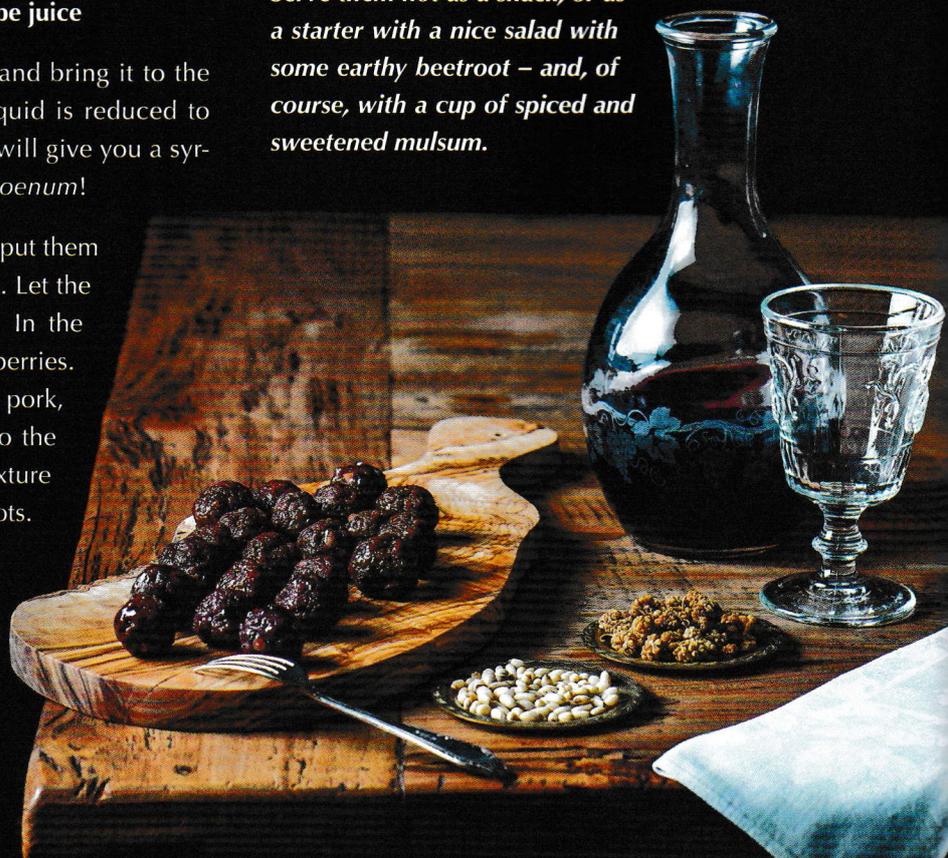
Put the grape juice into a pan and bring it to the boil. Let it simmer until the liquid is reduced to 1/3 of its original volume. This will give you a syrupy sweet liquid: your own *caroenum*!

Break the bread into pieces and put them into a bowl with the white wine. Let the bread soak until it is softened. In the meantime, finely chop the mulberries. Add the mulberries, minced pork, pine nuts, *garum*, and pepper to the soaked bread. Knead the mixture well and shape it into little faggots.

Put your *caroenum* into a frying pan and bring it to the boil. Lower the heat and put in the faggots. Let them simmer for

about 15 minutes until they are cooked. Then turn up the heat. The liquid is going to boil hard now. Keep the faggots moving in the pan with a spoon. Keep doing this until all the liquid is evaporated. The balls will now have a beautiful deep red colour and the typical Roman sweet-savoury taste.

Serve them hot as a snack, or as a starter with a nice salad with some earthy beetroot – and, of course, with a cup of spiced and sweetened mulsum.



MARCUS GAVIUS APICIUS, *DE RE COQUINARIA* 6.2.20

COOKING APICIUS: OLIVES

Olives were a staple in ancient Greece and Rome. It is remarkable that there are almost no recipes using olives in Greek and Roman sources. Olive oil, on the other hand, is used generously in ancient cookery. It served several food purposes: it was used to marinate, to cook with, to dress vegetables and cooked food with, and in conserves.

The Apicius cookbook gives us a recipe for a bird stuffed with olives. Although it says that you should boil the bird, I highly recommend that you roast it. It gives much more flavour to the bird as well as the olives! *To take the cooked olives out* does not necessarily imply that you must throw them away. That is not very economical or sensible. I think that the olives were used in some kind of sauce or side dish to accompany the bird.

Apicius says:

Another recipe for bird: stuff its cavity with broken fresh olives, sew it up and boil it. Then take the cooked olives out.

- ▶ 1 whole chicken without intestines (preferably organic)
- ▶ 100g | 2/3 cup stoned green olives
- ▶ 100g | 2/3 cup stoned black olives
- ▶ 2 tbsp olive oil
- ▶ Black pepper and salt
- ▶ 2 tbsp white wine vinegar
- ▶ 2 tbsp honey
- ▶ 1 tsp coarsely ground black pepper
- ▶ 1 tsp cumin
- ▶ 2 tbsp chopped fresh mint

Preheat your oven to 200 degrees. Wash your chicken, inside and outside. Dry it well with kitchen paper. Rub the chicken on the outside with the olive oil, and sprinkle the inside and outside with some pepper and salt. Crush the green and black olives together a little and put them into the cavity of the chicken. Put the bird in a casserole. If you have one, put a meat thermometer into the thigh of the chicken. Put it in the oven and roast

it until the thermometer registers 75 degrees or the liquid that comes out of the chicken when you put a knife in the flesh is clear. This will take about 1.5 hours, dependent on the size of the bird.

Take out the olives; they will be thoroughly cooked now. Chop them finely and mix in the white wine vinegar, honey, pepper, cumin, and mint.

Serve the chicken hot accompanied by the olive sauce. It goes nicely with lentils or carrots and a cup of Falernum.



COOKING APICIUS: GRAINS

Along with legumes, grains were the most important ingredients in ancient history. Their nutritional content is very high, and if you eat just a small bowl of *puls* (a grain stew) you feel well fed. Barley and wheat were staple foods. They were both grown in Italy during the Roman period. Barley was of distinctly lower status than wheat. It was the main food source for common people and for soldiers on a punishment ration. Barley was mostly used for making pancakes and cakes, because it does not rise well. Wheat was the preferred grain for raised breads. There was also durum wheat, which was mainly used for cakes and flat breads. In the northern provinces rye and spelt were the most common grains.

There are not many recipes for desserts in Apicius or other ancient sources, but there are some delicious baking recipes that make a nice last dish of our Roman meal. In Apicius' Book Seven he gives us some 'homemade sweets'. I experimented a bit with them and serve you this recipe of some kind of sweet fritters. They are very easy to make. You can vary the coating a bit: I used pepper and poppy seeds, but you can also use sesame and all sorts of ground nuts.

Apicius says:

Another sweet recipe: take coarse wheat flour, cook in hot water in such a way that you make a very thick porridge, then spread it out in a dish. When it has cooled down, cut it up like sweets and fry in best-quality oil; take them out, pour on honey, sprinkle with pepper and serve. A better result is obtained if you use milk instead of water.

- ▶ 150ml | 2/3 cup water
- ▶ 50g | 1/2 cup wheat flour
- ▶ Olive oil for frying
- ▶ 3 tbsp honey
- ▶ 1 tbsp poppy seeds
- ▶ 1 tsp coarsely ground black pepper

Put the water in a pan and bring it to the boil. Sift the flour and put it all at once into the boiling water. Stir it in and let it cook for a few minutes. Then spread the mixture onto a sheet of baking paper and let it cool. Cut the mixture into pieces. Warm the olive oil in a frying pan. Make sure that you have 1cm of oil in the pan. Fry the pieces in the oil, turning them halfway through, until they are golden brown. Drain the excess oil on kitchen paper. Warm the honey in a small pan and toss the fritters in it. Sprinkle them immediately with the pepper and poppy seeds.

You can serve the fritters hot or cold. A nice conditum would be the perfect companion!

