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DON'T GET ME STARTED ABOUT THE WATER: FOODWAYS

AND POWER IN JUVENAL'S *SATIRE V*

by

Alex Reese

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Ancient Languages and Cultures

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2021

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ABSTRACT

Don't Get Me Started About the Water: Foodways and Power in Juvenal's *Satire V*

by

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Juvenal's fifth satire depicts a dinner in which the guest and host are served vastly different menus. This thesis situates the food in those menus in the context of Rome in the first and second centuries, analyzing the foodways and hierarchical subtext embedded in the dishes from their sourcing to how they are served. The host, Virro, makes it clear through the difference in taste and expense of the two menus that he deems his guest, Trebius, to be of a far lower status than him. However, from a nutritional standpoint neither meal is ideal and, in fact, each could be harmful to the diner in their own way. This, in conjunction with the morally and nutritionally superior meal Juvenal depicts in his eleventh satire, reveals that *Satire V* is making an argument akin to that found elsewhere in the satires—namely that the city of Rome itself is deadly to its occupants and the only way to survive is to leave.

(61 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Don't Get Me Started About the Water: Foodways

and Power in Juvenal's *Satire V*

Alex Reese

Don't Get Me Started About the Water analyzes the food in the dinner of Juvenal's fifth satire from the perspective of Roman foodways in the first and second centuries. This analysis provides a surprising conclusion: although the guest and host are served dishes differing vastly in quality, neither man gets a nutritious meal. This follows with arguments elsewhere in the *Satires*, namely that Rome itself kills its occupants and the best course of action is to abandon the city for the countryside.

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Alex Reese

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INTRODUCTION: *FUNDUS AD ALIENAM QUADRAM*¹

“You are what you eat” may be true in a broad sense, but on closer examination the situation is more complex than this proposition suggests. We have seen that you become what you eat literally and figuratively, because consumption practices construct identity; you eat what you already are owing to the fact that alimentation reflects self-concept (as in the expression ‘If you are what you eat, then I’m fast, cheap, and easy’); you are how you eat in regard to comportment and class; you often eat what others think you are, which is conveyed by what they serve you; those who prepare food for you to eat may do so on the basis of who they think you think they are; and you sometimes eat what you wish you were or want others to think you are but might not be.²

Since human existence relies on consumption, it should come as no surprise that food symbolism, imagery, and metaphor have been utilized widely throughout written tradition. In this thesis, I focus on the economic and social history of the foodways relevant to Juvenal’s *Satire V*, how his style and satire as a genre operate, and what the intersection of those two analyses demonstrates more broadly about foodways during the first and second centuries CE.³ This study will show that Virro, as a symbol of the wealthy upper classes, deprives Trebius, who represents free Romans beneath Virro’s

¹ “Food from another’s table,” the table being a small one not used for formal dining. This is a slight adaption that comes from the first sentence of Juvenal’s *Satire V*: “*Si te propositi nondum pudet atque eadem est mens, / ut bona summa putes aliena vivera quadra, / si potes illa pati quae nec Sarmentus iniquas / Caesaris ad mensas nec vilis Gabba tulisset, / quamvis iurato metuam tibi credere testi*” which translates to “If you are not yet ashamed of that proposed [by you] and your judgement is [still] the same, that you think the highest good [is] to live from another’s table, if you are able to suffer that which neither Sarmentus nor worthless Gabba would have borne at the unequal tables of Caesar, I would fear to trust your judgement even with you as a witness.”

² Jones, Michael Owen. “Food Choice, Symbolism, and Identity: Bread-and-Butter Issues for Folklorists and Nutrition Studies.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 120, no. 476 (Spring 2007): 151.

³ Juvenal the satirist was born around 60 CE and wrote most of his works in the first half of the second century. Gilbert Highet, a preeminent scholar on Juvenal, argues that all we can say for certain about the satirist’s life is summed up in four short points: “he had a good education; he hated Domitian; he had been in Egypt; he was a dependent on the rich” (*Juvenal the Satirist: A Study*, 40 - 41.)

class, not only of access to expression of identity, economic and trade networks, culture and luxury, but also of vital nutrients, thereby threatening bodily harm to the guest.⁴ However, my work has uncovered a surprising ramification of this conclusion: the nutritional damage is not, as one might think, one-sided. The overfed host suffers dietetically as much as his disparaged guest.

The juxtaposition of high-quality and low-quality foods serves not only as an indication of the types of food eaten by Romans of different social standing but also offers insights into the nature of Virro's and Trebius' relationship in which the host enjoys more than just bountiful food in front of his underfed guests. The low-quality food Trebius is fed, such as the halved egg where the host dines on fresh asparagus, symbolizes the general treatment of those considered beneath their host's caste. This analysis runs counter to the narrative that wealthy Romans were customarily obligated to be generous with their less well-off colleagues, a conceit which Juvenal viciously satirizes in this work, as evidenced by his description of the different side dishes, ingredients, and manners in which food is served. In essence, Juvenal, Trebius, Virro, and even Virro's household disagree about Trebius' identity, all of which is communicated through the narrative surrounding the food itself. At the end of the satire, Juvenal even aims barbed attacks at Trebius and insinuates that Virro does not care for the guest beyond using him as a foil to demonstrate the wealthy man's power. The satirist blames Trebius for his own mistreatment, a message grounded earlier in the serving of the meal. Thus to Juvenal, his compatriots in the sub-elite classes are fed what they deserve—

⁴ It should be noted that Trebius himself is relatively close in class to Virro. For a more nuanced and extensive discussion of Roman social class, see the section entitled "Social Class in Satire V" in the second chapter of this thesis.

Rome's refuse—and they have no right to complain about a situation to which they are as much a party as their wealthy tormentors. The only solution is to cut the knot and abandon urbanity. The country is the only solution to the city, and as it turns out, nutritionally he's right.

To articulate this point, in a later work, the eleventh satire, Juvenal describes another meal in a more positive light. Reclining at a rustic estate, guest and host dine modestly, consuming the same foods, and the focus of the dinner is on a comfortable hospitality. This meal is held up as the golden standard for dining. Moreover, the diet is far more nutritionally-balanced. Thus, it is clear that to Juvenal good dining in the truest sense involves balanced nutrition and moderation, a feat the writer implies is only possible in the countryside.

CHAPTER 1: BEFORE THE TABLE

A Survey of Roman Food Markets in the First and Second Centuries CE

When arriving at a meal, in addition to any gifts for the host, one of the most important things guests bring is their perception of themselves. A sense of conflict or community arises from how closely the host mirrors those guests' perception of themselves through the meal served to them. Using foodways, they engage in conversation about who they are as guest and host. In other words, how diners measure their identity and how others perceive it is communicated through the food itself or, more specifically, through the larger cultural context surrounding it. This complex perception is determined by how the food is produced, traded, processed, cooked, and served.

The first chapter of this thesis details the context for the foods Juvenal mentions in *Satire V* to provide a deeper understanding of his rhetorical strategies, which will be covered in the second chapter. Here, I will clarify the differences in the foods served to Virro and Trebius in terms of production, transportation, and preparation, not only how they differ from one another but also from other similar food items. This chapter will also aim to shed new light on the context of the cuisine in this satire by incorporating information from literary sources, as well as archeological data, scholarship on trade and economics, and research into modes of food production.

The satirist begins the tirade that is the fifth satire by doubting the credibility of anyone who prefers to live off another's leftovers or undesirable foods (*bona summa putes aliena vivere quadra*).⁵ The foods served at Virro's dinner are sourced in various

⁵ "You think the highest good to live off another table." *Quadra* is the word used to denote a square table of lesser status typically not used in formal dining but instead for casual household meals. Juvenal. *Satire V*. 2.

ways, such as through hunting, farming, and fishing, and procured in various locations, such as, Virro's olive oil which comes from the border of Latium and Campania or, in Trebius' case, from a more dubious source redolent of lamp oil. The degree of difficulty in attaining the ingredients served, along with the trade and production costs, signifies the level of respect the host has for the guest and the worthiness, or unworthiness, with which he holds his fellow diners.

Juvenal cites a diverse range of foods in the fifth satire, all of which are discussed to some extent in this chapter. Roman vineyards and fields are the birthplace of complex trade matrices that begin with grapes and grains and result in wines and breads. Meanwhile, the Roman gardens that range anywhere from humble and stoic to extravagant and performative enrich not only dishes but also our knowledge of them, here with the inclusion of apples, asparagus, cabbage, truffles, and mushrooms. The hunting and keeping of various animals to produce meat-based entrees produced foodstuffs based on goose, chicken, hare, and boar. Finally, Virro's menus showcase a variety of delicacies from the sea as well, including crustaceans, lobsters, eels, and red mullet. Juvenal even notes the distinction in water served to guest and host. Most likely to ease his stomach, Virro's water is served chilled, likely with imported snow and ice, an expensive delicacy he sequesters from his guests. Juvenal's extended metaphor of a host's mistreatment of a guest through food escalates as the poet unfolds the text through a widening gap in quality, which is used here to denote the taste, cost, and the implied status of these foods if not their nutritional value.

Historiography

I. Foodways as Scholarship

While dietary customs vary wildly and vastly across time and locale, eating is of course universal among humans. The myriad ways in which different people consume food speaks to differences in culture. Emily Gowers observes that the most influential scholarship on food demonstrates that “the classification of food, the rituals of cooking, and the arrangement of meals hold clues to notions of hierarchy, social grouping, purity and pollution, myths of creation and cosmogony, and the position of man in relation to the world.”⁶ As a result of this inherent potency for cultural analysis, food is especially powerful as a literary device. If one is aware of the culinary traditions of a specific time and place, the uses authors make of particular dishes reveal much about their arguments and themselves.

The distinguishing characteristic in the historiography of food in antiquity is how broad or narrow the focus of each work is. Some scholars have aimed to create rough sketches of the entire culinary history of the world and paint all of ancient eating customs with the same broad strokes. Others, much fewer in number, hone in on narrow subjects or time periods. Thus, the primary concern in scholarship addressing food or literature is scope, be it geographic, temporal, or genre-based, and how authors address the intersection of these subjects, if at all.

In *The Routledge Handbook of Diet and Nutrition in the Roman World*, Paul Erdkamp and Claire Holleran praise the field for dutifully detailing the foodways of

⁶ Gowers, Emily. *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. 5.

antiquity but bemoan the fact that so many works merely catalog ingredients and dishes. They argue there is an imperative to be multidisciplinary in this field.⁷ Thus, their work incorporates essays on sources for foodways and overviews of prominent food categories, as well as scholarship on food and identity, malnutrition, and the politics of food.

In contrast to the study of physical food, Emily Gowers' *The Loaded Table*, which centers very specifically on food as metaphor in literature, is one of the few works that approaches the culinary intersection of cultural history and literary analysis. In this seminal text, Gowers views the food cited in much of Roman literature as a microcosmic parody of Roman society. By highlighting the often-false dichotomy of food versus intellectual thought, she is able to demonstrate that various authors' use of food reflects their own perceptions of human nature. Gowers naturally dedicates an entire section of her work to the genre of satire where food is so often a focus. Overall, this influential work is one of the very few that pays close attention to the cultural interchange between food and literature.

Where Gowers demonstrates the benefits of a narrow focus, traditionally most of the works on food in antiquity either have explained cuisine with stifling brevity or serve primarily as catalogues of various dishes with little historical context. The two most prominent types of these works are books on daily life in ancient Rome—there is really no shortage of these—and books that discuss food in all of antiquity briefly before dedicating their attention to reconstruction of Roman recipes. For instance, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* by Florence Dupont dedicates a mere eighteen pages to a broad overview of dining. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook* by Brian K. Harvey is an extreme

⁷ Erdkamp, Paul and Calire Holleran. *The Routledge Handbook of Diet and Nutrition in the Roman World*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. 5 – 7.

example of this type of work inasmuch as it is essentially a compendium of ancient sources with little or no commentary on them.

The other prominent feature of these broad works, the history-and-cookbook hybrid, includes more information about food but usually aims to speak for all of antiquity. One such work is Patrick Faas' *Around the Roman Table* which surveys dining habits in Rome from its purported founding in 753 BCE until the period of the late empire.⁸ Faas describes his work as part history book, part cookbook. In the first half of the work, he provides a complex analysis of the culinary habits in Rome, though he does not focus on food as a literary device and instead argues that Romans viewed culinary preparation as an art in itself.⁹

Those works that narrow their foci do so in dramatically different ways. Some, like *The Roman Retail Revolution* by Steven J. R. Ellis, focus on the economic and trade history of food in a specific period. Ellis' work is heavily influenced by Ronald Syme's seminal study *The Roman Revolution*, both of which document the social transformations that took place during the Principate. Though Ellis is primarily concerned with interurban trade, his work thoroughly illuminates food trade and sourcing for city dwellers, while calling for more research on importation.

Michael Beer tightens the focus of his work by underscoring the importance of restriction in foodways. In contrast with many other scholars in the field, Beer's *Taste or*

⁸ Faas, though a great historian, may serve as a cautionary tale to scholars of Roman food. After attempting to recreate the classic Roman recipe of baked dormice, Faas was sued by the SPCA.

⁹ Other examples of this are *Roman Cookery* by Mark Grant and *A Taste of Ancient Rome* by Ilaria Gozzini Giacosa.

Taboo examines food in the ancient world through (self-)imposed constraint.¹⁰ He seeks to answer fundamental questions concerning our modern perspective on diet: “How did we come to this point where food may be viewed simultaneously as lover and mortal enemy?”¹¹ Beer argues that the ancient Greeks and Romans, much like us, prized a meager diet and condemned overindulgence and greed, which in some people brought on an intense anxiety concerning food and even cases of anorexia and bulimia. That said, like Gowers, Beer acknowledges that food in antiquity was a performative art, asserting that “an equally powerful case may be made for dietary restriction as a tool for defining self and acting as a badge of ethnic identity.”¹² This is seen in the satires of Juvenal too, for example in *Satire III* Jewish people are characterized by their baskets for boiled eggs (3.12-16). Beer, however, argues that there is a line between food as a literary device and cuisine in actual practice:

It is evident there existed two almost separate worlds, of actual practice and of the realm of literature. They occasionally intersect, but generally run parallel to each other. While I have noted how religious or cultural norms dictated the types of food which were shunned, and how on occasion abstinence was required by custom or law, my chief interest has been how literary texts used dietary restriction as fact or metaphor.¹³

His careful analysis of how food was perceived by the ancients as a representation of the self supports the assertion that food in literature often serves as a characterizing device.

Akin to Gowers and Beer, David Potter’s essay “The Scent of Roman Dining” reveals a performative element in Roman dining through the incorporation of olfaction

¹⁰ Beer’s work focuses not only on constraints diners imposed on themselves to as a way to self-select and identify (e.g. vegetarianism), but also on dietary restrictions placed on diners by others (e.g. dietary legislation of Jews and restrictions on alcohol).

¹¹ Beer, Michael. *Taste or Taboo: Dietary Choices in Antiquity*. Totnes: Prospect Books, 2010. 10.

¹² Beer, 27.

¹³ Beer, 122.

alone.¹⁴ Potter argues that the elites of the empire used smell to indicate their class and identify themselves to others. That said, Potter is distinct from Beer and Gowers in that he complicates their dichotomy between heavy restriction and overindulgence. Potter's argument is that the status of the provider of the food hinges on the sophistication and intricate preparation of their dishes, not the extravagance or cost of importation, an argument which would surely not sit well with Claudius and Nero, two of the most infamously extravagant diners in the ancient Roman world.

Aside from Gowers, very little of the historiographical tradition analyzes the combination of food and satire. Additionally, much of the scholarship focuses too broadly in time or space to enable a careful analysis of specific works of literature. To this end, works like that of Faas, provide varying aspects of research on food in antiquity, and though some are very useful in reconstructing ancient recipes, the broadness of scope overgeneralizes Roman cuisine to the point that a meticulous analysis of food as a literary device in individual works is not possible. Beer, Bradley, and Rosen demonstrate the potential for depth of analysis that a limited subject matter allows.

All in all, the field would benefit from an investigation of the connotations attached to foods contemporaneous with Juvenal, as well as a targeted study of his use of food as a literary device. While the hyperbole and litotes threaded through Juvenal's descriptions can distort the data, as scholars like Gowers and Faas note, there are also extremely useful in identifying general perceptions of foodways since they point to implicit cultural connotations. It is important to bear in mind that satire lends itself more to reality than other fictive literary genres since its main goal is to critique and ridicule

¹⁴ Potter, David. "The Scent of Roman Dining." In *Smell and the Ancient Senses*. Ed. by Mark Bradley. London: Routledge, 2014. 120.

the world at hand. Jokes based on things unrecognized by the satirist's readership would fall flat.

II. Foodways and Folklore

Any historiography on foodways in antiquity would be remiss to ignore one other very important relevant field — folklore. Scholars working in this discipline have provided valuable analysis, both direct and more broadly theoretical, of food in antiquity. Folkloric research on foodways most often expounds on the ways cuisine builds community, though some of it focuses on how power and social hierarchies are played out through dining. The latter are highly relevant to an analysis of Juvenal's tirade about dinner parties.

“Food Choice, Symbolism, and Identity” by Michael Owen Jones argues that foodways are more than just an important tool for determining how an individual identifies; rather, they uncover the nature of relationships between individuals on a small scale and entire groups in a much broader view. Owens expands the trope of ‘you are what you eat’ to encompass both literal and figurative embodiment anchored in one's past and one's goals for the future relative to social standing. Additionally, he deepens the potency of foodways analysis by arguing that the way one consumes and prepares food shows how people believe and want others to perceive them, whether these views are accurate or not.¹⁵ For example, in Juvenal's fourth satire a rich man named Crispinus purchases a very large fish, which represents how he self-identifies. It is a clear indication

¹⁵ Jones, Michael Owen. “Food Choice, Symbolism, and Identity: Bread-and-Butter Issues for Folklorists and Nutrition Studies.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 120, no. 476 (Spring 2007): 151.

that Crispinus is using foodways to demonstrate how he wishes to be seen, not how he actually is. Jones calls on folklorists to analyze these foodways with a more critical lens.

This call was answered in full by scholars Lucy M. Long and Amy Shuman.¹⁶ The latter focuses on apportionment of food specifically, or rather, the way hosts communicate to guests through serving them. Shuman also highlights the significance of foodstuffs and how a host may use a menu and its significance in communicating with guests, for instance, by attempting to neutralize or emphasize the built-in connotations. In contrast, Long's argument focuses on how individuals use the choice of cuisine to bolster their own identity and social standing, specifically through "culinary tourism."¹⁷ Her analysis is akin to others' work on tourism, demonstrating how this type of interaction may be used as a hegemonic act or to signal prosperity and power. Long herself chooses to argue that, although culinary tourism may be a manipulative act, it is most often a natural human impulse born of curiosity.

III. Archeology

Whereas work in folklore has educed many theoretical approaches, research in archeology has provided insight into ancient cuisine and culinary practice. This scholarship is also important in creating an understanding of foodways beyond what has been passed down in literature, a perspective heavily biased toward the values of elite

¹⁶ See "Culinary Tourism: A Folkloristic Perspective on Eating and Otherness" by Lucy M. Long and "The Rhetoric of Portions" by Amy Shuman.

¹⁷ Long defines culinary tourism as "the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an other—participation including the consumption, preparation, and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered to belong to a culinary system not one's own" (see page 21). As Long states, the concept of physical travel to "foreign" lands is not necessary to culinary tourism (see page 6). In this sense, even the treatment of food as entertainment can serve as a touristic food experience.

Roman men. Archeological evidence contributes much to our knowledge of foodways as they were experienced by less wealthy men, women, children, slaves, and others. In some cases, it also serves to check written sources for exaggeration or other types of mis- or disinformation. For instance, works like that of Carol A. Déry and Joan P. Alcock meticulously detail the production, packaging, and transporting of various fish and their byproducts.¹⁸ John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill are two notable scholars who have also contributed significantly to this field, though some of their works meet with some of the problems of scope mentioned above, such as discussing food in antiquity as far more static than it actually was.¹⁹

On the Foods

Of the foods listed in *Satire V* and eaten throughout the empire, bread, wine, and olive oil entail the largest production scale and trade networks. Although these three markets varied in accordance with the crop(s) each farmer chose to grow, the study of each presents the same difficulties. Farms producing these foodstuffs range drastically in size, yield, quality, method of trade, and profit.

Just as bread, wine, and olive oil arrived at the Roman table in similar ways, the meat and seafood markets resemble one another as well. The complication with these foods is that each had two distinct sub-markets in that they could be produced on farms or caught in the wild. Fowl came most commonly from farms as livestock. Boar did as well, though its wild form was sought after as a symbol of status by Roman elites. Seafood

¹⁸ See “Fish as Food and Symbol in Ancient Rome” by Carol A. Déry and “*Pisces in Britannia*. The Eating and Portrayal of Fish in Roman Britain” by Joan P. Alcock.

¹⁹ See *Food in the Ancient World* by John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill, in addition to Déry.

leaned toward the other end of the spectrum with most being wild-caught, though there were also villas with ponds where fish were raised for consumption.

While Romans had limited access to fruits and vegetables, especially in winter months, these foods were an essential part of the Roman diet from both the nutritional and culinary standpoint. Romans in rural areas and those living at villas typically had access to fresh fruits and vegetables from their own gardens, but poorer city dwellers had to purchase these goods from local retailers. Pickling and drying fruits was also an important part of this market and aided in nutrition during colder seasons.

As is to be expected from such a wide assortment of food types, the processes they underwent before ending up on the dinner table was equally varied. It is in the nuances of each food's journey that it is possible to see most clearly the difference between the foodways in the menu items served in *Satire V*—hence, the divisions used into the following sections: sourcing, transportation and trade, and retail. A number of the ingredients also required processing, but this came at different points in the journey to the table, so a description of processing is included in the corresponding section for each ingredient.

Sourcing

Despite the lack of concern Virro invests in Trebius' fare, even the worst foods served to a guest in ancient Rome required some amount of labor to produce. That said, Virro clearly attempts to serve Trebius food at the lowest cost possible. Though the dishes of host and guest would have been sourced through the similar methods, there are

marked distinctions in how each are procured. Juvenal is clearly critical of this discrepancy throughout his satire.

I. Potables

Part of the reason wine belonged to one of the most extensive markets was its value in Roman daily life. Wine is commonly held as a curative tonic and as a means by which one may make water potable, but the caloric value of wine is less often acknowledged. Wine was an essential source of calories in antiquity, sometimes providing up to a third of the minimum daily caloric intake for an adult.²⁰ Thus, as David Thurmond states, wine was likely a very important subsistence crop for farmers, seeing as even a very small plot of land (0.52ha) could easily have produced enough wine each year to provide 635 calories for ten people per day.²¹

Except for small pieces of land, relatively little else was needed for wine production. Unlike other alcohols, wine production is simple in that it requires relatively few additives due to the high sugar content in grapes.²² As Thurmond states, the land must be fertile, the vines good, and the weather conditions rather mild at harvest time. Besides that, all a Roman needed was some mechanism to tread or press grapes and containers for fermenting and aging.²³ While the list of necessary equipment given by

²⁰ Thurmond, David L. *From Vines to Wines in Classical Rome: A Handbook of Viticulture and Oenology in Rome and the Roman West*. Leiden: BRILL, 2016. 3.

²¹ Thurmond, 3, 4.

²² McGee, Harold. *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2004. 714.

²³ Thurmond, 50.

Cato is slightly longer and includes items for housing the guards, it is still brief, as few as twenty-eight items.²⁴

The ability to produce wine on such a small scale adds to the variation in farm size and thus makes this market difficult to assess. There are four types of farms most commonly found in Roman culture. Some peasants had their own small plots of land, which they farmed for subsistence, while others “no longer owned the land but continued on the ancestral plot as tenants to wealthy landlords (*coloni*) or as sharecroppers (*partiarum*).”²⁵ Beyond these smaller operations were commercial farms which ranged:

from a modest level, where the landlord was resident in the farmstead and supervised and perhaps worked along with the slave laborers, to the owners of huge plantations (*latifundia*) only periodically in residence if at all, such plantations being worked by large slave gangs overseen by *vilici*.²⁶

Due to this variation in everything from farm size to wealth of farmers, to crop yields and their purpose, the market itself is difficult to assess, especially given our limited data. Even so, it is clear that wine consumption was so commonplace among Romans that it was not wine itself which was elevated in status but instead the individual wine and how it was processed.

The processing of wine almost always took place on the same farms where grapes were grown, either on a small scale with minimal equipment, as mentioned above, or in on-location wineries. The smallest yields only required a few dedicated workers and most of the care involved the monitoring of the fermentation process. With large-scale operations, there was much more to be done in preparation. Even before the harvest

²⁴ Thurmond, 147. Note that guards were employed around the time of the harvest to prevent the theft of produce.

²⁵ Thurmond, 61.

²⁶ Thurmond, 61-62.

began, an increase in personnel both working and guarding the crop and readying the equipment was needed. Additionally, any “unripe grapes (*uvae miscellae*) may be gathered in advance to make a ‘sharp wine’ (*vinum praeliganeum*) for the farm workers to drink during the year.”²⁷ After harvesting the grapes, they were either sorted out to be eaten as is, or possibly dried as this was likely an essential part of year-round Roman nutrition.²⁸ The grapes designated for wine were then either loaded into some sort of press or treaded by workers. This process was often accompanied by music and even occasionally became a dance, as envisioned in the popular imagination.²⁹ The resulting fluid was then loaded into containers for fermentation, typically terracotta vessels (*dolia*) or wooden barrels (*cupae*), which were situated on or in cellar floors.³⁰ It was after the fermentation process that any modifications were made to the wine with the intent of increasing its quality, such as adding gypsum to decrease acidity.³¹ Then the new wine was loaded into amphorae for aging or transport to market.

One of the biggest factors contributing to the quality of wine, second only to the quality of the grapes used, was whether it was aged. It should be noted that plenty of wine was consumed shortly after fermentation without being aged at all, but as today, vintage wines were held in high esteem. This is evidenced by the fact that Romans commonly attempted to “age” their wines artificially by heating them in lofts above the kitchen hearths.³² In addition to variables in processing and sourcing that add to the

²⁷ Thurmond, 138.

²⁸ Brown, Madeline. “Grains, Pulses and Olives: An Attempt Toward a Quantitative Approach to Diet in Ancient Rome.” *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 97 (2011). 15.

²⁹ Thurmond, 151 – 152.

³⁰ Thurmond, 164 – 167.

³¹ Thurmond, 183, 185.

³² Thurmond, 194.

quality of a wine, there were countless other factors affecting the quality of a wine. Such variables ranged from the terroir in which the grapes were grown to additives in the actual wine like marble dust and honey.³³ As expected, better land provided higher quality grapes, and with more additives a wine became more valuable. The olive oil market is comparable to that of wine, due in part to the fact that grape vines were grown around olive trees to optimize arable land.³⁴

II. Grains

Like wine production, the ancient Roman grain market is remarkably difficult to assess because of the differences in size of farms tied to the wealth of their owners. Grain was produced in rural areas on farms, or *funda*, which ranged anywhere from 2.5ha to 1,600ha.³⁵ The status of the farmers also varied dramatically. Some were wealthy men from powerful families who owned many farms; others were peasants who were often unable even to feed themselves and their own families on their yields, requiring family members to supplement the household with wage labor.³⁶ The fact that grain packaging in antiquity, most often sacks and bags, leaves behind little archeological evidence adds to the complicated nature of understanding this market. In addition, both ancient Romans and modern scholars are imprecise in their language about which specific grain they are discussing.³⁷ All of these factors make this field of study difficult and complex.

³³ McGee, 726.

³⁴ This is clearly denoted in Cato's *De Agri Cultura*.

³⁵ Erdkamp, Paul. *The Grain Market in the Roman Empire: A Social, Political and Economic Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 19, 22.

³⁶ Erdkamp, 19, 49.

³⁷ Heinrich, Frits. "Cereals and Bread." in *The Routledge Handbook of Diet and Nutrition in the Roman World* eds. Paul Erdkamp and Claire Holleran (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 102.

As with wine, farms producing grain required more labor during the sowing and harvesting periods of the year, the demand fluctuating with the size of the harvest. If additional laborers were needed for these periods, they were hired in the same way as with wine production. After the harvest, grain was either milled or sold whole as a cereal which, along with pulses, constituted much of the Roman diet early in the day. In all, it was a huge sector of the market. Grain for bread was either milled on location, or more often sold to mills elsewhere.³⁸ In Roman comedy, it is common to find jokes about sending disobedient slaves to mills, since this work was apparently very arduous and the workers there were treated comparatively poorly. After milling, flour was either sold or processed in some way, typically air-aged, which gave it a lighter appearance.³⁹ Romans viewed whiter flour as more luxurious and highly prized. After milling and processing, grain products were sold and transported to bakers.

III. Produce

A small but important section of the Roman diet consisted of produce. Depending on seasonal availability and access to garden space, Romans, especially urban dwellers, had limited access to fresh produce. In Rome itself, fruits and vegetables were either grown in small gardens on private property or, like grain, wine, and olives, were imported from rural locations. In the countryside, farmers had much more space to plant various crops and orchards. Aside from the most common crops like grains, olives, grapes, and pulses, Roman farmers likely grew much cabbage, leafy greens, asparagus, fruit trees,

³⁸ Erdkamp, 135.

³⁹ McGee, 529.

and various herbs.⁴⁰ If these foods were not sold to merchants or taken to market fresh, they were preserved by pickling or occasionally drying for access in later seasons.⁴¹

Some urban-dwelling Romans were well-off enough to have in-home gardens where they could grow vegetables. Wealthy homes commonly incorporated peristyle gardens in the center of the domicile or toward the rear with an atrium in the front section.⁴² Some houses also had small atria and large gardens behind the house, a layout comparable to the modern backyard.⁴³ These plots functioned as both ornamental and vegetable gardens and were mainly used to feed the household. Farrar estimates that it is likely most of the produce grown there was limited to cabbage, leafy greens, and possibly asparagus.⁴⁴ As with grain, the ambiguity of terms makes it hard to say definitively which crops were grown this way.

IV. Seafood

Some Romans were well enough off to have ponds on their estates or in their gardens. These were often stocked with fish for both ornamental and food purposes. Extant sources describe the species of fish stocked in ponds, typically grey mullet and *murena*.⁴⁵ If the fish raised in these ponds were used for food, it was typically only for the household, since fish from ponds were considered lower-quality and not fit for sale at market.⁴⁶ Romans who did not have ponds used rainwater gathered in cisterns to water

⁴⁰ Heinrich, Frits and Annette M. Hansen. "Pulses" in *The Routledge Handbook of Diet and Nutrition in the Roman World* eds. Paul Erdkamp and Claire Holleran (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 120. Farrar, Linda. *Ancient Roman Gardens* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1998)

⁴¹ Farrar, 132.

⁴² Farrar, 17.

⁴³ Farrar, 17.

⁴⁴ Farrar, 132.

⁴⁵ Farrar, 65.

⁴⁶ Farrar, 64.

their garden and to raise fish for household use, though it is not clear how widely this method of stocking fish was employed.⁴⁷

While the grain, wine, and olive markets during the Principate industrialized and flourished, fishing began producing much smaller yields at higher cost. At this time, fish were caught mainly by one man using a hook and line or a scoop net or by several men using a beach seine. More productive modes of fishing like deep water drift nets were not known until half a millennium later.⁴⁸ The expensive nature of this foodstuff likely contributed to its popularity as a status symbol.

V. Fungi

A side benefit of owning livestock, particularly pigs, was sourcing truffles which were eaten much more commonly in antiquity than they are in modern times. Though there is not much known about how truffles were sourced in antiquity, they were likely found from one of three methods: trained pigs, trained dogs, or by looking for specific flies that would lay their eggs in truffles.⁴⁹ Truffles were traditionally foraged, growing them domestically was not possible in antiquity. Foraging required workers to follow the animal and gather the truffles it locates, thus increasing the cost of labor for whoever is sourcing the food. Since truffles were not cultivated like produce in gardens, acquiring them likely demanded more resources than growing vegetables. This would have

⁴⁷ Farrar 66.

⁴⁸ Alcock, Joan P. “*Pisces in Britannia*. The Eating and Portrayal of Fish in Roman Britain” *Fish: Food From the Waters*. 20 – 35. Totnes: Prospect Books, 1998. 24.

⁴⁹ Helttula, Anne. “Truffles in Ancient Greece and Rome.” *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica* 30 (1996), 33 – 34. McGee, 347.

increased the cost, even in the ancient world where truffles were easier to come by than today.⁵⁰

Though our knowledge about the preparation of this food product is sparse, the Romans likely boiled them and ate them whole.⁵¹ This method probably deprived the dish of much of the highly sought-after truffle flavor. Moreover, boiling foods tends to leech them of nutrients, but the simplicity of this method of preparation, no doubt, bestowed some advantages.⁵² For instance, boiled truffles are an easy dish for household cooks to prepare alongside other courses.

Transportation

Farmers who produced grain and wine that was not consumed on their premises typically took the yield directly to market or sold it to visiting traders.⁵³ Transportation presents another problem to mapping the ancient Roman grain market, since grain was regularly transported in sacks and bags which, unlike earthenware, readily biodegrade. At the same time, due to the government's role in the distribution of grain in the city of Rome via taxation, importation of this commodity into urban communities was not as big a factor for the average Roman as its actual processing. Put simply, as long as there was a supply of grain, most people of any status in Rome, even those as desperate as Trebius, had regular access to bread.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ This is most likely not because there were more truffles in antiquity, but less people. Helttula, 37.

⁵¹ Helttula, 37 – 38.

⁵² Helttula notes that Galen famously described truffles as a flavorless food (37).

⁵³ Erdkamp, 109. Thurmond, 208.

⁵⁴ Erdkamp, 326.

With wine, however, transportation was a greater issue. Scholars have noted that “the villa itself could be the site of markets (*nundinae*), though the owner needed Senatorial authorization for this, and we have a number of examples where this permission was granted.”⁵⁵ There also were wine-specific merchants, making this market easier to track than that of grain. As Thurmond explains, “the *négociant*, *negotiator vinariarius* ... or *negotiator vinarius* might distribute wine on a purely local level or risk disaster in exchange for the chance of fabulous profits and engage in the transmarine trade.”⁵⁶ All the same, the risky nature of this enterprise was somewhat offset by another critical part of wine transport—packaging.

Wine was packaged in amphorae (large vases), whose shape had pointed ends. This might seem to have made them unwieldy but was, in fact, hugely beneficial in nautical transport. Thurmond describes the design of the amphorae this way:

The pointed feet of the vessels are wedged into the lathing covering the ribs of the hold, and create a solid tier of vessels. Then the feet of upper tiers are wedged into the interstices created by the shoulders of four vessels on the lower. So tightly are amphorae packed into the holds of ships that breakage from shifting must have been quite minimal, and a huge number of vessels can be laden.⁵⁷

This was such an effective shipping strategy that sometimes ships would carry as many as 3,000 amphorae in their holds.⁵⁸ However, for all their benefits, amphorae had one large drawback: they were not standardized in size or volume, even though ancient Romans regularly used the term “amphora” to indicate a standard unit of measure.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Thurmond, 208.

⁵⁶ Thurmond, 208.

⁵⁷ Thurmond, 214.

⁵⁸ Thurmond, 214.

⁵⁹ Thurmond, 214.

Transportation of wine was critical in the food supply chain because it linked to a key aspect of this commodity's value itself. The Romans widely recognized that the quality of wine was tied to that of the land and grapes from which it was made, so a product from a reputable place was esteemed highly, much like today. This naturally led to a general increase in the importation of wine.

To transport fish, one needed not only amphorae, like those used with the transportation of wine, but also a supply of *muria*.⁶⁰ *Muria* is one of the four types of fish sauce: *garum*, *muria*, *allec*, and *liquamen*. Fish sauces were among the main condiments used by ancient Romans to accompany many dishes, *garum* being the one most commonly mentioned. Because the sauces differed slightly and yet terms were sometimes used interchangeably, one cannot rely on ancient sources solely to discriminate accurately between such condiments, especially as pertains to the dish's quality. *Muria*, for instance, was a brine made from fish and acted as a preservative in transporting seafood.⁶¹ The same term, however, is also used to refer to *garum* itself as a condiment rather than a packaging fluid.⁶² Scholars agree that *liquamen* is essentially just inferior *garum*, but they disagree about the production of *allec*. Some, such as Joan Alcock, allege that the dark, sediment-rich fish sauce was produced through an entirely different process from that used for *garum*. Others, Carol Déry in particular, argue that *allec* is actually a byproduct of *garum*.⁶³

⁶⁰ Alcock, 30.

⁶¹ Déry, Carol A. "Fish as Food and Symbol in Ancient Rome." *Fish: Food From the Waters*. Totnes: Prospect Books, 1998. 106.

⁶² Alcock, 30.

⁶³ Alcock, 30. Déry, 106.

Retail

One risk of urban dwelling was the threat of harvest shocks, the sudden increase in prices due to poor harvests. Luckily, the most essential goods were part of the largest markets, which could weather catastrophes better.⁶⁴ The grain market was particularly susceptible to harvest shocks, but the Roman empire could endure these reasonably well due to its connectivity and the distribution of grain not through merchants but the government itself in partnership with private businesses.⁶⁵ This led to a general stability in the grain trade, so the pricing and obtaining of grains was not a problem for city-dwellers of Virro or even Trebius' social station.⁶⁶ Thus, the distinguishing factor concerning grains was the amount of processing it had gone through, not the purchasing of this foodstuff itself.

Conclusion: At the Table

Now that we have surveyed the general nature of Roman foodways, let us conclude this chapter by looking ahead to the next, where I will review Juvenal's fifth satire. This work depicts a guest, Trebius, enduring what he perceives as mistreatment at the hands of a host, Virro. In the Roman Empire, dining was often an elaborate production, a way to demonstrate one's social standing. Morning and midday meals, if taken at all, were small, casual affairs. They typically consisted of some portion of grains accompanied with things like dates and honey. The real dining experience came in the

⁶⁴ Erdkamp, 326.

⁶⁵ Alcock, 326, 328.

⁶⁶ To be clear, there was general stability in the grain trade throughout the empire, but there was more governmental aid in the city of Rome itself.

evening where meals in a wealthy Roman house were typically multi-course. They usually took place in the *triclinium*, a room with three couches laid out for nine, usually a host and several guests. On which couch any diner sat was strictly regulated and reflected his social status.⁶⁷

Thus, Trebius arrives at Virro's dinner party only to be served course after course of lower-quality foods, some of it utterly disgusting. The host, in turn, not only dines on better fare but also restricts Trebius' access to it. During the final course—Virro's most extravagant—Trebius appears to have been served nothing at all. The majority of the satire is spent enumerating Trebius' woes in lurid detail, but in the last third of the work the satirist focuses on the guest himself and excoriates him for subjecting himself to this level of public disrespect. Emily Gowers argues that this antithesis of host and guest is central in ancient rhetoric: "we have to assume that these sharp polarities do represent conceptual divisions, and give us a broad outline for considering Roman culture."⁶⁸ Thus, the structure of *Satire V* can be seen as the presentation of two menus at a single dinner party, one for the guest and one for the host. When informed by an understanding of the foodways described above, it is possible to see more clearly exactly how this dance of *distaste* plays out. That is the goal of the next chapter.

⁶⁷ "He" is used deliberately here, for women seldom participated in this form of dining. If present at all, they were usually seated elsewhere.

⁶⁸ Gowers, 12.

CHAPTER 2: JUVENAL'S FIFTH SATIRE

Building on the information laid out above, this chapter analyzes the food served at each course of the meal described in *Satire V*, with close attention to the cultural value and connotation of each item as well as its nutritional and dietary value. By carefully deconstructing this meal as a whole, it is possible to articulate more fully Juvenal's view that not only is dining in Rome more pleasant if one is wealthy, but also the greater truth that for rich and poor alike it is brutish and immoral compared with the rustic dining experiences to be enjoyed at one's own countryside villa.⁶⁹

First, I will lay out dish by dish Juvenal's presentation of dining disparities between host and guest, and then I will contextualize the Roman socioeconomic hierarchies underlying the choice of foods presented, or in the guest's case, the lack thereof. Next, by analyzing the dietary qualities of the separate menus I will demonstrate how these food hierarchies are not, in fact, based on nutritional value but instead a display of opulence. As I will show, the obsession with consuming rich food was so great among the upper classes in Juvenal's Rome that their diet actually caused them grievous harm, both through overeating and the delicacies they consumed. This stands in marked contrast to the more modest fare outlined in the eleventh satire, where a man dines at a villa in the countryside. Finally, I will note that foods play a key role, though in a very different way, in another of Juvenal's works, *Satire III*, where he argues that Rome itself debases and kills the indigent population.

⁶⁹ Though contrary to intuition, Juvenal himself does seem to think that the dining habits of the rich were brutish and gaudy. The satirist seems to think civilized Roman way of dining is something city-dwelling Romans did not participate in.

On Roman Satire

Like other Roman literature, their genre of satire was derived from earlier Greek works. That said, there are not as many direct derivations as can be found in drama (e.g. Plautus' reworking of Menander) or thinly-veiled responses to the earlier works (e.g. Vergil's epic in contrast to Homer's). This is to the extent that some scholars argue Romans invented satire as an independent literary genre.⁷⁰ In fact, even Quintilian writing in the first century CE described satire as being entirely Roman.⁷¹ The epic poet Ennius is credited with inventing Roman satire during his life from 239 – c. 169 BCE, but the first example of a Roman writing satire as an independent genre was Lucilius who lived from c. 180 – c.102 BCE. After the tumultuous period of the late republic, which saw no major satirical works, the production of Roman satire was taken up by Horace (65 – 8 BCE). Juvenal's works, coming much later, are clearly similar to the Horatian diatribe of moralizing, but also very similar to the epic poet, Vergil (70 – 19 BCE), whose style Juvenal uses to contrast the epic and the mundane.

⁷⁰ Coffey, Michael. *Roman Satire*. London: Methuen & Company, 1976. 3.

⁷¹ Coffey, 3.

Table 1: Courses Served to Trebius and Virro.

	Trebius (Guest)	Virro (Host)
1	Wine (low-quality)	Wine (high-quality)
2	Room-temperature water	Ice water
3	Moldy bread	Snowy white bread kneaded from fine flour
4	Crayfish with an egg cut in half	Lobster (large) with asparagus
5	Oil that smells of lamp for the seafood	Venafran oil for the seafood
6	Local mullet from the provinces (presumed and also very small)	Mullet from Corsica or the Tauromenian cliffs
7	Poor quality eel or a Tiber fish splattered with grey blotches	Imported lamprey eel
8	[not stated]	Huge goose, a fattened fowl the size of a goose, and a boar
9	[not stated]	Truffles
10	“Dubious” fungi (meaning unclear)	High quality mushrooms (like Claudius ate)
11	Scabby apple (like one a performing monkey would be fed)	Apples whose aroma is a meal in itself, everlasting fruit of time, etc.

Without knowing the exact dimensions of Virro’s dishes, how they were cooked, what additives were included (if any), and how much the host himself consumed of the plates served to him, it is impossible to provide an accurate assessment of the calories he consumed during this single meal. That said, he could have easily met the minimum daily calories necessary for adults by consuming just a couple of the dishes on offer.⁷² All in all, it is a safe guess that Virro would have consumed at the very least 2600 calories during this meal. This does not include any ingredients added during cooking, which Roman cookbooks indicate would be expected. It would not be surprising then if Virro’s intake in this one meal amounted to twice the minimum daily calories for an average

⁷² This estimate assumes an adult would need 1500 calories a day, at a minimum. This is a very low estimate and is not recommended for health purposes, but is an estimate recommended to survive in antiquity.

adult.⁷³ More than that, in a period of history where most people were insecure about meeting their minimum daily caloric intake, Virro's behavior exemplifies not only the aristocracy's habit of public gluttony but also the economic power they wielded and intentionally put on display during banquets.

Potables

At the beginning of the meal, Juvenal points out that there is something awry when Trebius is served a different wine from the one his host, Virro, is drinking. For rhetorical effect, the satirist increases the inequity between the dishes as the meal continues, so this initial discrepancy ends up looking minor compared to later courses. Nevertheless, the contrast is telling, as the poet quips (5.24-27):

*vinum quod sucida nolit
lana pati: de conviva Corybanta videbis.
iurgia proludunt, sed mox et pocula torques
saucius et rubra deterges vulnera mappa*

[For you] wine which juicy wool would refuse to absorb: you will see the diners as Corybants. They carry on tirades before the fight, but soon wounded you're hurling cups and rubbing wounds with a napkin painted red.⁷⁴

Juvenal's riff here suggests that the wine Trebius received was likely not good enough to be used even for medicinal purposes, an extended metaphor he continues in the next line's battle imagery — “wounded,” “hurling,” and “rubbing wounds” — reflecting the brutish quality of the beverage. Wine of such a poor quality would also likely be the

⁷³ Calories alone are not an indication of a food's nutritive value and a number of calories does not imply harm to the diner on its own. An individual's recommended caloric intake is highly specific to them and their lifestyle. Additionally, micronutrients and macronutrients are far more significant in regard to dietary health.

⁷⁴ All translations are my own. Susanna Braund translates *sucida ... lana* as fresh wool to indicate the soaking of wool with wine as a disinfectant, which carries the satirist into his next metaphor about cheap wine turning the dinners into a bloody war scene.

bitter, cheap sort that was made from astringent grapes and, as noted in the first chapter, was set aside for immediate use after fermentation without an aging period. Though this may sound unpalatable to the modern reader, such wine was consumed by many Romans. This would not, however, be the type of wine a guest would have expected to be served when dining at the house of a man of Virro's status. In fact, such wine was notably the wine set aside for slaves on farms to consume, as seen in Cato's *De Agricultura*.⁷⁵ This indicates that the host does not only see Trebius as lower than his social class, but far lower in deserving the status of slave.

This was showcased by the higher quality wine Juvenal depicts Virro drinking, the complete opposite of Trebius' (5.30-37):

*ipse capillato diffusum consule potat
 calcataque madet bellis socialibus uva,
 cardiaco numquam cyathum missurus amico.
 cras bibet Albanis aliquid de montibus aut de
 Setinis, cuius patriam titulumque senectus
 delevit multa veteris fuligine testae,
 quale coronati Thrasea Helvidiusque bibebant
 Brutorum et Cassi natalibus.*

He himself [Virro] drinks a [wine] bottled when the consuls had long hair and is sodden with a grape crushed in the Social Wars, he who will never send the smallest fraction of a pint to a friend suffering bowel distress. Tomorrow he will drink something from the mountains of Alba or Setia, of which [wine] old age has erased its country and label with soot on the ancient earthenware, the sort that Thrasea and Helvidius were drinking on the birthdays of the Brutuses and Cassius.

Virro's wine is not merely more potable but more palatable as well. His was the vintage associated with the aristocracy and luxury in times of war, whereas Trebius' places him in the trenches. In addition, it is significant to note that Virro's wine is described as being aged around two hundred years — the Social Wars took place in 91-87 BCE — which

⁷⁵ See *De Agricultura*, sections 56 and 57.

underlines the stark contrast between the host's and guest's refreshments. While Juvenal does not indicate whether either of these wines contained any additives, it is clear that Virro does not even bother to mask the poor quality of the wine he serves Trebius and that his own was of such natural superiority it warranted no enrichment.

From wine, the satirist turns to the difference in water served to patron and guest.⁷⁶ Trebius' has no ice and presumably is room temperature. Though Virro has blatant disregard for Trebius' good health, as shown later when he gives him a sewer fish to eat, typically water served straight would have been boiled and allowed to cool. It is fair to assume the host would at the very least boil his guests' water so as not to put their lives in danger. Virro's beverage, on the other hand, was served deliciously chilled (5.49-50):

*Si stomachus domini fervet vinoque ciboque,
frigidior Geticis petitur decocta pruinis.*

If the stomach of the master is feverish with wine and food, boiled water cooler than the Thracian frosts is sent for.

Virro's water would have been boiled, allowed to cool to room temperature, and then chilled with ice, a quintessential luxury good, since iced water was served purely for the comfort of the diner and the snow that cooled it had to be imported from neighboring mountains. So, here, the insult served with the wine is taken a step further, and Juvenal's point comes into even clearer focus: Virro views Trebius as significantly beneath him.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ This transition has one of the best jokes of the satire, which Braund translates as "Was I complaining just now that you are not served with the same wines? You drink different water too" (219) or as I like to translate it (liberally) as "You thought the difference in wine was bad? Don't get me started about the water."

⁷⁷ Juvenal also makes a distinction between the slaves serving Trebius and Virro here.

Grains

The satire has not yet reached the main courses when Trebius again encounters mistreatment. Next comes the bread course in which the guest's fare is far inferior to his host's

(5.67-71):

*ecce alius quanto porrexit murmure panem
vix fractum, solidae iam mucida frusta farinae,
quae genuinum agitent, non admittentia morsum.
sed tener et niveus mollique siligine fictus
servatur domino.*

Look! Another [slave]! With how great a murmur he extends scarcely breakable bread, now moldy scraps of solid meal, which shake your molar, not granting a bite. But [bread] soft and snow-white and kneaded from tender wheat is saved for the master.

The quality of the breads varies drastically here. Not only is there an obvious distinction in freshness — Trebius' is on the verge of spoiling — but they also differ in color. This indicates a distinction in the processing stage of the two loaves. Trebius' darker bread would have gone directly from the mill to the bakery, while Virro's blanched flour would have been ground and dried in the sun for some time before it was baked. Unlike the chilled water, here the luxury of Virro's fare is not because it is imported but because there was an increased processing time, similar to wine. Trebius' bread closely resembles the quality of the wine he was served, and Virro appears to have instructed his household to serve his guest anything they had lying around.

Worse yet for Trebius, Virro's household also seems to have been under strict instruction to police the guests' dining experience (5.71-75):

*dextram cohibere memento;
salva sit artoptae reverentia. finge tamen te*

*improbulum, superest illic qui ponere cogat:
 “vis tu consuetis, audax conviva, canistris
 impleri panisque tui novisse colorem?”*

Remember to control your right hand: respect for the bread pan must be preserved. Nevertheless imagine you are somewhat audacious, there someone stands over who makes you put [it] down: “Reckless guest! Be satisfied, won’t you, to be stuffed with the usual basket and know the color of your own bread?”

This indicates that Virro does not expect his guests to obey the social niceties and eat what is placed before them; rather, he anticipates they will try to appropriate the host’s fare. Thus, he has taken care to make sure his slaves physically enforce the rules of the table. In this way, Virro is placing even his slaves in positions of power over Trebius, which would certainly be an insult to any free man, much less a fellow Roman and a citizen.

Seafood

Entering into a series of seafood courses, the gap in food quality is widened incrementally with each dish. The first two feature crustaceans, though it is unclear as to whether this course just differs in the size or represents differing species.⁷⁸ The satirist writes (5.80-85):

*Aspice quam longo distinguat pectore lancem
 quae fertur domino squilla, et quibus undique saepta
 asparagis, qua despiciat convivia cauda,
 dum venit excelsi manibus sublata ministri.
 sed tibi dimidio constrictus cammarus ovo
 ponitur exigua feralis cena patella*

See the lobster which is brought to the master, how it distinguishes the platter with its long chest, and the asparagus by which it is enveloped on

⁷⁸ Understanding precisely which species of lobster, crayfish, or sea crab Juvenal means here is difficult due to the lack of consistency in terms for such things, as noted in chapter one with vegetables and grains.

all sides, how it disdains the dinner party with its tail while it comes raised by the hands of the noble servant. But to you is served a sea crab wrapped in half an egg, a funereal dinner on a meager plate.

Before this, it was bad enough that Virro's household enforced the guest's standing, but now it seems even the dishes, which are carried in above him just out of his reach, regard themselves as above the maltreated diner. Trebius, instead, is served a smaller crustacean less impressively plated. He also receives a halved egg, an item far easier to access in larger quantities than the host's wall (*saepa*) of asparagus. The size of the portions demonstrates the difference in status of those at the dinner party, as does the manner in which each dish is served. If the earlier courses of drinks and bread had not made the disparities in rank evident to everyone in the room, it is now abundantly clear to all involved that there is a wide gap in the meals designated for guest and host.

Another distinction in this course is the quality of olive oil accompanying the food. The satirist writes (5.86-88):

*ipse Venafrano pisces perfundit, at hic qui
pallidus adfertur misero tibi caulis olebit
lanternam.*

[Virro] himself bathes [his] fish with Venafran olive oil, but this pale cabbage which is brought to poor you will smell of a lamp

Again, Virro serves his guest what seems to be anything the household could find.

Meanwhile, the host is presented with olive oil that is not only imported but also renowned for being of the highest quality. An added insult is that the smell of Trebius' lower quality oil, let alone its ghastly taste, proclaims its inferior state. David Potter argues that in this period scent was an important indication of class and that Romans

could present themselves as opulent by making their dining experiences smell nice.⁷⁹

Thus, Virro takes his abuse of Trebius a step further by imposing a poor-smelling garnish on him, a public declaration of the host's contempt for his guest.

The second seafood course is mullet, a foodstuff commonly served in ancient Rome—so often, in fact, that it was overfished and natural populations had begun to decline in size and quantity by the time of the early empire. Juvenal writes (5.92-98):

*mullus erit domini quem misit Corsica vel quem
Tauromenitanae rupes, quando omne peractum est
et iam defecit nostrum mare, dum gula saevit,
retibus adsiduis penitus scrutante macello
proxima, nec patimur Tyrrhenum crescere pisces.
instruit ergo focum provincia, sumitur illinc
quod captator emat Laenas, Aurelia vendat*

The mullet of the master will be one sent from Corsica or one from Tauromenian cliffs, because our sea has been wholly fished and now runs short, while the palate rages, with the provision-markets deeply scrutinizing the nearest [waters] with incessant nets, and we do not allow the Tyrrhenian fish to grow up. Therefore the provinces prepare [our] cook stoves, from there is obtained what Laenas the fortune-hunter buys, [and] Aurelia sells.

To remedy the problem of the small size of local mullets, Virro once again has himself served an imported fish. Through this display of gluttony and wealth, Juvenal implies that Virro's voracious appetite is so vast that it exceeds even the power of nature to feed it.

The rich are literally eating the world.

The third and final seafood course is eel. Virro's is of epic proportions (5.99-102):

*Virroni muraena datur, quae maxima venit
gurgite de Siculo; nam dum se continet Auster,
dum sedet et siccat madidas in carcere pinnas,
contemnunt mediam temeraria lina Charybdim*

⁷⁹ Potter, David. "The Scent of Roman Dining." In *Smell and the Ancient Senses*. Ed. by Mark Bradley. London: Routledge, 2014.

To Virro a lamprey is given, of which the biggest comes from the Sicilian whirlpool; for while the South Wind sustains itself, while it sits and dries its dripping wings in prison, the rash nets pay no heed to the center of Charybdis.

Here Juvenal delves into mythic imagery as he elevates the wealthy man's dishes beyond their physical presentation. It is not quite enough that lamprey was viewed by Romans as the highest quality eel, Juvenal resorts to myth in conveying the effort required to procure dishes Virro deems worthy of himself. Capturing the eel that can satisfy Virro's appetite becomes an Odyssean labor. This is sharply contrasted with Trebius' dish (5.103-106):

*vos anguilla manet longae cognata colubrae
aut glaucis sparsus maculis Tiberinus et ipse
vernula riparum, pinguis torrente cloaca
et solitus mediae cryptam penetrare Suburae*

For you waits an eel kindred to the long snake or a Tiber fish sprinkled with bluish-gray spots itself, a slave of the banks, thick from the torrential sewer and accustomed to penetrate the crypt under central Subura.

Trebius is given an unspecified dish procured from the sewers. Juvenal's presentation of options here both lowers the quality of the dish, hinting that it may be so poorly plated that it is difficult to identify exactly what it is, and diminishes its importance. The creature is not only some sort of bony eel or diseased ichthyoid, but it also is so pathetic and unremarkable compared to Virro's lamprey that the satirist does not bother diagnosing it further. Clearly, no hero of epic had anything to do with securing this fish. Additionally, this direct comparison of the epic to the modern is more overt than Juvenal's other uses of this rhetorical strategy. For instance, the comparison of Hades to Rome in the third satire is far more coded. More to the point, this is the first dish that threatens actual harm to Trebius due to its abysmal quality, announcing to all Virro's blatant disregard for the wellbeing of his fellow Romans who are less well off.

Main Courses

At this point in the satire, the main courses are brought out. Though already having consumed a feast by any fair standard, Virro gorges on another palatial banquet (5.114-119):

*Anseris ante ipsum magni iecur, anseribus par
altilis, et flavi dignus ferro Meleagris
spumat aper. post hunc tradentur tubera, si ver
tunc erit et facient optata tonitrua cenas
maiores. "tibi habe frumentum" Alledius inquit,
"o Libye, disiunge boves, dum tubera mittas"*

Before [Virro] himself is the liver of a great goose, a fattened fowl equal to a goose, and a boar frothing, worthy of the weapon of blonde Meleager. After this truffles will be delivered, if it is springtime and the welcome thunders make the dinners greater. Alledius says, "O Libya, keep your corn, unyoke your oxen, as long as you send truffles."

This time, Virro's courses are served with an emphasis placed on the immense size of each dish. In consuming meat, portion size was an indication of status for ancient Romans⁸⁰ The reason varies based on which animal was being consumed and how it was sourced. For example, full-grown wild animals were highly valued since they were harder to come by; whereas large farm-raised ones were also deemed impressive since their size typically indicated they had been alive longer and therefore were more costly to the farmers. It could also mean that they had come from farms focused on increasing the size of their animals.

After the main courses of meat, Virro is served truffles. Though much more common in antiquity, they still required some effort to source, as described in the

⁸⁰ Déry, Carol A. "Fish as Food and Symbol in Ancient Rome." *Fish: Food From the Waters*. 94 – 115. Totnes: Prospect Books, 1998. 96.

previous chapter.⁸¹ If Virro has in fact consumed everything served him so far, he has eaten at least enough to meet the minimum daily caloric intake of at least four or more adult Romans in his day.⁸²

In contrast to Virro's main course, Juvenal writes nothing of Trebius'. It could be that Trebius is served nothing at all, or that his dishes are so lackluster compared to Virro's that they are not worth mentioning. Either way, this passage indicates Virro's true intention, for Trebius and everyone in the room to bear witness to his host's high station and recognize that no one but the host may claim a substantive share in the feast at hand. To make a hungry person watch someone eat, indeed *overeat*, is a form of torture and humiliation. Virro's physical control of the entire table represents a microcosm of the control and power wealthy people wielded over the social hierarchies of Rome.

Fungi

After the meat courses, Trebius' humiliations continue (5.146-148):

*Vilibus ancipites fungi ponentur amicis,
boletus domino, sed quales Claudius edit
ante illum uxoris, post quem nihil amplius edit.*

(Next) unreliable fungi will be served to worthless friends, (but) the best kind of mushroom to the master, but of which sort Claudius ate before the one he got from his wife, after which he ate nothing more.

At some point, the guest is permitted to resume dining again with his host. While the type of mushroom he receives was less favored by Romans, Virro unsurprisingly gets one of

⁸¹ See page 18. Truffles were so common in antiquity that they were often eaten boiled instead of grated over foods like we do now.

⁸² This is an very conservative estimate, seeing as there is minimal data size and caloric density of animals and produce, in addition to lack of data on how the dishes were prepared.

the highest quality, akin to those former emperors ate. It is telling that the host's fare here is mentioned in the same breath with the type Agrippina used to poison Claudius. This hints at an underlying theme in the satire, that the elegant food which the rich and powerful consume is in fact a potential source for poisoning them.

Dessert (Apples)

Roman diners often concluded their evening meals with pieces of fruit for dessert, in the same way Virro's does (5.149-152):

*Virro sibi et reliquis Virronibus illa iubebit
poma dari, quorum solo pascaris odore,
qualia perpetuus Phaeacum autumnus habebat,
credere quae possis subrepta sororibus Afris*

Virro will order those apples be given for himself and the remaining Virros, whose scent alone you could feed on, the type which the Phaeacians' unending autumn enjoyed, which you could believe have been stolen from the African sisters.⁸³

Virro's apple is still fragrant and fresh, a luxury during this period. The fresher the produce, the more nutrients it retains. So, to judge from the aroma alone, this is likely the most nutritious part of the host's entire meal, possibly of his entire diet throughout the day, and as always, he keeps it to himself.

Meanwhile, Trebius' own dessert course is less alluring (5.153-155):

*tu scabies frueris mali, quod in aggere rodit
qui tegitur parma et galea metuensque flagelli
discit ab hirsuta iaculum torquere capella*

You will enjoy the mangy apple, which he gnaws on the pier — he who covered by a small shield and helmet and fearing the whip learns to hurl a javelin from a hairy old goat.

⁸³ The African sisters here refer to the Hesperides, who were nymphs possessing golden apples that Hercules stole in one of his labors.

Trebius is served an apple much inferior to Virro's, which Juvenal likens to the fodder fed a circus monkey. In contrast with the host's apple, this apple shows evidence of being older and thus less nutritious than Virro's fresh one. With this insulting comparison, Juvenal sums up the theme of social inequity enacted through the presentation and consumption of food.

A Nutritional Analysis of Both Meals

Virro's treatment of Trebius is one way for a host to communicate his guest's social standing as he sees it. The master of the house clearly assesses his subordinate as someone who should not have access to the Mediterranean world beyond the gates of Rome, which was, foodwise, an urban desolation. This is abundantly evident from the difference between Virro's long series of imported foods as compared to Trebius' dismal local fare amounting to whatever even Virro's household would not deign to consume themselves, veritable inedibles like lamp oil and medicinal wine.

However, despite the varying quality of dishes served at Virro's banquet, there is little or no nutritional difference in the two meals described in this satire. Assuming that before dinner both Virro and Trebius ate meals consisting mainly of grains and the occasional dried fruit and if this dinner is indicative of what each man consumed regularly, neither meal provides much nutritional sustenance. Moreover, assuming that the quality of Trebius' food is not so poor it gives him food poisoning, we may conclude his dining pattern left him slightly better off than Virro whose fodder is so opulent that a regular pattern of this sort of dining would almost certainly put him at risk for many negative health conditions. Whether Juvenal was consciously aware of this or not, he

certainly knew that wealthy people sometimes died from overconsumption of rich foods and meats.⁸⁴

While there is no remedy for the dining perils in Rome as they are outlined in this work, in his eleventh satire Juvenal outlines a better diet. The foods described there are the typical modest fare of a landowning Roman who lived in the countryside. They include mullet, beans, polenta, goat kid, wild asparagus, eggs, grapes, pears, apples, vegetables from the garden, dried pork for festivals, bacon as a birthday treat, venison or guinea fowl, and locally-sourced wine. The nutrients from the dishes in *Satire XI* would have provided diners with a wide array of micronutrients, and it is notable that Juvenal indicates fatty meat is to be eaten only sparingly on special occasions. Like the dining experience of the fifth satire, there is still room for the guests and host to overeat at the rustic villa, especially if all of the foods listed above were to be served at one dinner and shared among limited guests, but Juvenal's language hints that this was not the case as he asserts it was so often in the city. In any case, the nutritional quality of this meal far surpasses that of Virro's banquet.

Conclusion

Satire V concludes on an unexpected note. While Juvenal does not tell Trebius outright what he ought to do, he makes it clear that a guest has only so many options for avoiding the abusive, indeed life-threatening dining experiences haunting Virro's table. But instead of upbraiding the wealthy for their abuse of those less well off, Juvenal ends

⁸⁴ In *Satire I*, Juvenal describes a man dying in the baths after eating an entire peacock among other opulent fare at a dinner party (lines 1.140-144).

the satire by condemning the guest-diner for allowing himself to be subjected to such rude and offensive mistreatment (5.166-174):

*spes bene cenandi vos decipit. "ecce dabit iam
semesum leporem atque aliquid de clunibus apri,
ad nos iam veniet minor altilis." inde parato
intactoque omnes et stricto pane tacetis.
ille sapit, qui te sic utitur. omnia ferre
si potes, et debes. pulsandum vertice raso
praebebis quandoque caput nec dura timebis
flagra pati, his epulis et tali dignus amico.*

The hope of dining well traps you. "See! Soon he will share his half-eaten hare or something from the haunch of the boar, soon a littler table bird will come to us." Thence you all are silent with bread ready and untouched, drawn tight like a sword. He's a smart one, that man who uses you thus. If you are able to bear all these things, then you ought to as well. There'll come a time when you will submit your head to be beaten and shaved on the crown and you will not be afraid to take the hard whip, you who are worthy of this feast and of such a friend.

Here Juvenal makes explicit the implicit message that courses through the earlier parts of the satire, the bitter truth that the guest-host relationship is not one of hospitality as it should be but a form of ritualized torture that centers on the reinforcement of class hierarchies in Rome. Trebius subjects himself to the abuses of Virro, acting less and less like a free man — indeed hardly a Roman at all — and more like a slave inured to physical trauma. Ironically, Juvenal seems to speak in favor of Virro's poor treatment of Trebius and even suggests the host's actions represent wisdom (*sapit*, 5.171). In this way, it seems almost necessary that Virro do this to establish his social standing and distinction which rely on the public subjugation of others. Trebius' vain desire to join Virro's social circle and have a respected seat at the rich man's table enables the host to demonstrate just how large the gap is in their wealth, power, and standing. But that is to look at the satire only through a satirical lens. A nutritional analysis shows that Juvenal, consciously

or not, deems this system of power harmful both to the benighted Trebius and to men of Virro's status.

The simple fact is, contrary to expectation, neither of the men is actually eating nutritionally valuable food. While it is clear that Virro's intake surpasses Trebius' in both quantity served and quality of taste, the host is clearly doing considerable harm to his body through this gluttonous and vacuous demonstration of power. In other words, both men lack nutritional quality in their dishes. Neither has a diverse range of produce and arguably both consume far too high a proportion of meat. Whether or not it was implicit in Juvenal's message, this leveling of the field results from a dire fact which at least some Romans, including Juvenal perhaps, must have known: the city was functionally a food desert.⁸⁵

The solution to a nutrition-challenged city life is obvious, or so it seems, to judge from Juvenal's writing: move to the country, the very theme of his eleventh satire. Here, the poet depicts guest and host on a more equitable social footing, eating a modest meal with fresh, varied ingredients. Even without taking nutrition into account, this is an essential part of Juvenal's argument in the fifth satire. No one should be at the mercy of the power structures which simultaneously overfeed people and starve them of the vital ingredients necessary to life. The better solution, indeed the only solution, is to evade the city entirely and enjoy the healthier life and diet afforded in the countryside.

This argument runs through the larger body of Juvenal's work and is seen very clearly in *Satire III*, a bitter denunciation of the urban lifestyle in Rome. However, in one

⁸⁵ The "food desert" metaphor is not one I particularly favor, since indigenous people have thrived in many deserts which are, in fact, not "food deserts." There are indeed many deserts around the world which provide better nutrition than urban areas. To judge from the evidence, the metaphor "food cities" would be more apt.

respect pertinent to this study, *Satire III* is especially remarkable. For all the ways it insists the city itself is bent on killing its inhabitants, Juvenal's tirade is all but devoid of any mention of food. Amidst other life-threatening terrors like huge slabs of rock that can crush a person, collapsing buildings, thugs hungry for violence and chamber pots heaved from top-floor windows, there are only a few random traces of the diet-related anxieties the underclasses suffer: a starving immigrant desperate to be the person you want him to become (*Graeculus esuriens*, 3.78), clients waiting in long lines for a handout (3.95-126), and a poor man begging for crumbs (*frusta rogantem*, 3.210). One possible reason for this omission is that Juvenal saw so much satirical fodder in the practices of dining that the satirist chose to reserve this subject for its own poem. All the same, the connection between these satires is readily apparent. Both condemn urban communities for the unlivable condition they impose on any but the richest of the rich, and even those it kills by feeding them to their own excesses. Thus to Juvenal, crowded cities are more than just food deserts; ironically, they are human deserts too.

Together, these satires demonstrate Juvenal's larger argument, namely that urban life is no life at all. To inhabit Rome is to die horribly, be it slowly or quickly, no matter one's social position. The only difference is the degree of humiliation that must be endured on the way down, and the only feasible answer is to move away to the countryside where life is safer and the diet provides the nutrition necessary for subsistence. Thus, using an interdisciplinary approach to foodways and nutrition admits not only a deeper understanding of Juvenal's work but demonstrates how such a method may be applied to other literature involving dining. Here, understanding the details of the different meals served in the fifth and eleventh satires indicates that, according to

Juvenal, the moral weight of food in the first and second centuries is horrifyingly similar in its nutritional value and that the satirist's warning about the deadliness of the city is carried through even to the food itself. Such analysis of other works, like those of Martial and Petronius, will, no doubt, highlight different aspects of the same theme and perhaps uncover more underlying arguments, providing deeper cultural understanding of the texts and the perspectives of other authors who wrote in this period.⁸⁶ All in all, food is more than sustenance; it is culture and identity. The characteristic consumption of guests and hosts alike as diners reveals deep truths about both. Sometimes the best way into a person's house is not through the front door but the kitchen.

⁸⁶ Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* argues that how one categorizes actually categorizes the one analyzing more than what is being analyzed.

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