

## Inside a Roman's Stomach: An Analysis of Class Diets of Early First Century AD Rome

Paleoethnobotany, also known as archaeobotany, is a subfield of archaeology that offers insight into the relationship between people and plants (and other organic remains) by utilizing the archaeological record. The discipline itself is not particularly new--however, there has been a significant increase in both experts and research methods in recent years. Paleoethnobotany has spread its reach to classical archaeology within the last half century, with some of the most notable work coming from Dr. Wallace-Hadrill's *Herculaneum Project*. In this project, archaeologists have excavated and examined organic remains uncovered from a sewer system located within a section of the ancient city of Herculaneum. These findings range from herbs to animal bones amassed during the decade leading up to the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. These remains have been meticulously categorized by archaeologists working to provide a comprehensive list of the organic materials found (Rowan 2014). This material provides a glimpse into the composition of the ancient Roman diet, particularly the diet of the Bay of Naples.

The sewer's contents have only been briefly glossed over in recent publications, frequently cited as evidence for what could be considered food of a wealthier class or of a non-elite class. These arguments are based upon the quality of said organic remains, with the standard of what is considered "wealthier" food coming from literary sources. The gap between the elite and non-elite classes is a topic that has been discussed at length, including by Mary Beard; however, the relationship between the classes' respective diets has not received the same attention. Thus, an inquiry must be made as to whether a drastic polarization of food

consumption between the classes was as prevalent in Herculaneum as was the disparity of wealth that we are aware was present within the city's population.

The consumed organic materials that form the composition of what is considered to be the non-elite diet has been determined through the examined organic waste whereas evidence for what was consumed by the elite class can only be found in literary sources such as Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis* and Apicius' *De re coquinaria*. Comparison and analysis between both the catalogued specimens unearthed from the sewer and the listed food articles within the literary sources is necessary to further explore this aspect of the relationship between the classes. An in-depth analysis of the above relationship will be able to show us if any significant parallels are present between the class diets. Meaning, for there to be any overlap between the two diets there must be similarities present between the found organic material and the ingredients of the elite as described in the written sources. The existence, or lack, of such correlations would help to expand upon the relationship between the classes.

Thus, such examinations of plant and animal remains not only provide us with how people interacted with organic specimens but also the classifications of a population based upon consumed organic products.

#### Bibliography

Rowan, E. 2014. "Roman Diet and Nutrition in the Vesuvian Region: A Study of the Bioarchaeological Remains from the Cardo V Sewer at Herculaneum." D.Phil. Diss., University of Oxford.