

*Apicius, A Critical Edition with an Introduction and an English Translation of the Latin Recipe Text "Apicius", ed. by Christopher Grocock and Sally Grainger, Totnes: Prospect Books, 2006, 414 pp., ISBN 9781903018132.*

The reviewed work comprises three fundamental parts, namely a broad *Introduction* (pp. 13–123), the text of the Latin edition accompanied by an English translation (*Apicius: Latin Text and English Translation*, pp. 125–325), and appendices (pp. 327–403). The book closes with a list of selected topical literature (pp. 405–407) and an index (pp. 409–414).

The first part of the book contains considerable new information, included in its individual subchapters, with the following being particularly noteworthy: *Apicius and its Context* (pp. 13–38), *Cooks and Ancient Cookery Books* (pp. 39–72), *Cooking Techniques in the Ancient World* (pp. 73–83) and *The Language of Apicius* (pp. 86–106). The conclusions of Ch. Grocock and S. Grainger [= G. and G.], set forward in the introduction, alter the vantage point from which *Apicius* should be viewed. First of all we must turn attention to the fact that the authors are opposed to the majority of theses hitherto adopted with respect to the treatise, and in particular they have carried out a convincing critique of the theses put forward by Edward Brandt (pp. 18–22)<sup>1</sup>, which from the moment of publication of his dissertation have strongly influenced the interpretation of the history and contents of the collection in question.

Brandt arrived at the conclusion that the collection was created in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, as the work of a single author (compiler). He was supposed to have compiled it from a number of treatises of varying types, namely the hypothetical work of Marcus Gavius Apicius<sup>2</sup>, a treatise on agriculture and husbandry<sup>3</sup>, an anonymous Greek agronomy handbook, a Greek study devoted to dietetics (penned by an unknown author) and a collection of medical writings<sup>4</sup>.

G. and G. criticise first and foremost the research method adopted by Brandt, namely the fact that he analysed the collection solely as a literary text, without concerning himself in any way with its material content, i.e. gastronomic issues (pp. 18 f.). Next, the authors negate the view that the recipes contained in the collection originate from specific and identifiable literary works (p. 19), agreeing solely with the hypothesis that some of the recipes from books I and III are analogous to tips appearing in Classical agronomic treatises (pp. 19 f.). Furthermore, the authors do not support the concept that there was one editor/compiler of the collection, opting for the natural evolution of the work's form (pp. 20–22). They maintain that the person responsible for the final form of the collection was not a conscious editor, but rather a scribe "without culinary experience" who "may have had no occupational interest in the content of the book" (p. 28).

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<sup>1</sup> E. Brandt, *Untersuchungen zum römischen Kochbuche: Versuch einer Lösung der Apicius-Frage*, Leipzig 1927 (Philologus Suppl. XIX, 3).

<sup>2</sup> This concerns a gastronomic treatise of an unknown title, which was concerned primarily with sauces. Cf. Brandt, *o.c.* [n. 1], pp. 88–90; B. Flower, E. Rosenbaum, *Introduction*, in: Apicius, *The Roman Cookery Book*, a critical translation of *The Art of Cooking*, for use in the study and the kitchen, by B. Flower and E. Rosenbaum, London 1958, p. 12; S. Wyszomirski, *Wstęp*, in: *Apicjusz, O sztuce kulinarnej ksiąg dziesięć*, tekst, przekład i komentarz I. Mikołajczyk, S. Wyszomirski, Toruń 1998, pp. 6–8.

<sup>3</sup> Fragments of the same work may also be found in *Geoponica*. Cf. W. Gemoll, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen, den Verfasser und die Abfassungszeit der Geoponica*, Berolini 1883, pp. 98–105.

<sup>4</sup> Brandt, *o.c.* [n. 1], pp. 38 f., 78 f., 95–97, 133 f. For a recapitulation of Brandt's findings with the authors' own comments, cf. Flower, Rosenbaum, *o.c.* [n. 2], pp. 13–15; Wyszomirski, *o.c.* [n. 2], pp. 9–11.

According to G. and G., the collection of texts analysed thereby constitutes a somewhat “haphazard collection” (p. 13). It was developed “over many centuries” (p. 13) and ordered not by the logic typical of a literary work, but rather by its usefulness for Classical cuisine. The authors maintain that there are no reasons to connect the work with the person of Apicius (pp. 35–38). Indeed, if we can speak of any link, then it would be essentially symbolic and refer not only to the commented collection, but to all related (and today missing) collections of culinary texts attributed to the same gourmet *ex post* (p. 36). It happened because Apicius became a symbol of refined (and genuinely good) food in his own lifetime<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the adjective *apicianus* did not really mean “created by Apicius”, but started to be understood as “of high quality” (p. 35) and only later authors (examples on pp. 36 f. and 363–368) treated this general term as an indication of a specific person<sup>6</sup>.

In reality, the collection has many authors, whose identification is impossible. These were numerous and nameless masters of the culinary art, on the whole uneducated in literature (p. 13). They belonged to the lower classes, for the entire Classical culinary art was the domain of skilled slaves and/or persons who did not belong to the contemporary elites (p. 14; cf. comments on p. 18).

The authors put forward the postulate that at least some of the recipes were (in their initial form) handed down verbally. It is also possible that some of them were not written down by their creators, but dictated to persons who had mastered the skill of writing (p. 91). G. and G. consider it probable that a certain fragment of the collection could be attributed to one of the Classical culinary schools (pp. 70 f.). Their members wrote down their own recipes and exchanged them between themselves. It is in such a very circle that the recipes (initially circulating individually) were gathered into a whole. A trace of this process is visible in the specific nature of the collection – it is not intended for the general public, for whom it is “difficult to decipher if you are not ‘in the know’” (p. 70), but for practical usage by those familiar with the technology of specialists, who do not require details in order to bring out the desired final aroma of dishes.

This origin of the collection also explains why the work attributed to Apicius differs from the remainder of Classical gastronomic literature known to us (p. 14). The latter usually contained a narrative thread that was intended to gracefully connect into a single whole descriptions of various (and not connected with each other) features of delicacies presented, using a beautiful literary style. G. and G. note that typical works of Classical gastronomic literature were not cookery books in the present meaning of the term, and the recipes set forward therein never constituted their central subject. This was so because they omitted the potentially boring (the readers were after all dilettantes) technical details, concentrating on entertainment value. The analysed collection, on the other hand, is full of details and nearly devoid of narrative elements, while the attention that it gives to literary value may be considered insignificant or, indeed, non-existing.

The authors reach the conclusion that the chronology of the origin of the work is difficult to precise. They give arguments indicating that the beginnings of the collection are rooted in the first century AD. This does not mean, however, that we should date the individual component parts of the book to the same period. In all probability, these already had their own history, stretching as far back as the second century BC (*lucanicae* – p. 16). Many of the recipes included in the collection were originally written in Greek (p. 17). The culinary art reached Rome from the territories of Greater Greece, while the language of the Hellenes was that of the best cooks in the entire Mediterranean Basin. This explains the opinion expressed by G. and G., namely that “Apicius may be a Roman recipe book written (mainly) in Latin, but it was probably a Hellenistic collection of recipes at its inception, and continued to be one” (p. 17).

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<sup>5</sup> Similar opinions had been voiced even earlier by authorities on the subject. Cf. A. Soyer, *Food, Cookery, and Dining in Ancient Times: Alexis Soyer's Pantpheon*, Mineola, N.Y. 2004, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. analogous views, however without the drawing of final conclusions: W. Stearns Davis, *A Day in Old Rome: A Picture of Roman Life*, Boston–New York 1925, pp. 100 f.

The authors oppose the thesis that the work is a collection of recipes that by their very nature are meant to be luxurious and intended solely for the elite (pp. 23–25). Although it does also contain such recipes (in particular book VII; cf. comments on pp. 30 f.), they state that it is “an urban and cosmopolitan collection” (p. 23), taking this to mean that more than one half of the recipes refer to dishes that could be afforded by a considerable part of the urban population. As an example they quote recipes for numerous dishes such as *patina*, *minutal* and *isicia* (p. 29). Actually, they have pointed out that the collection also contains recipes for a Classical *fast food*, sold in the numerous *popinae* (p. 25), which *ex definitione* satisfied the needs of customers of limited means<sup>7</sup>.

Valuable comments may also be found in the fragment concerning the language of the work (pp. 86–106). The long-standing gastronomic practice of S. Grainger allowed her to better understand (and clarify) not only concepts, but also characterise their designata. Thus, the collection has ceased to be a set of *termini technici*, and started to appeal to the senses of taste and smell. The competence of G. and G. is well visible on p. 86, where they give an analysis of the term *mortarium* (spices ground in a mortar), while further proof of the erudition of the commentators is found on pp. 87 f., where we find a new interpretation of *temperare* (instead of “to mix, pulverise”, this verb should be translated “to season according to one’s taste”). The positive opinion of the innovativeness of the research is strengthened by an analysis of the remaining terms, namely *frigida* (pp. 89 f.), *frigere* (pp. 90 f.), *ab ossibus tangere* (p. 92), *subassare* (p. 92), *exbromare* (pp. 92 f.) and *ad vaporem ignis* (pp. 93 f.).

The original Latin text, accompanied by a simultaneous English translation, has been printed on pp. 125–325. It is preceded by clearly presented (pp. 107–115) principles of interpretation, which facilitate reading of the work. The editors have executed their tasks in an exemplary manner, while the inclusion of the translation makes working with the Latin text considerably easier. In effect, G. and G. have presented a work based on editing principles analogous to those previously adopted by Jacques André<sup>8</sup>, and which, as the authors have aptly stated, “do it justice not only as a source of information for food history, but as an linguistic document of its own right” (p.109).

The third part of the publication comprises appendices (pp. 327–387), entitled *A Glossary to Apicius* (pp. 329–362), *Original Sources on Apicius* (pp. 363–368), *Named Recipes in Apicius* (pp. 369–372), *Excursus on garum and liquamen* (pp. 373–387) and *Concordance of Recipes with Earlier Editions* (pp. 389–403).

In particular, we would like to turn the reader’s attention to two of these appendices. The first is the glossary to the collection which is further testimony to the professional knowledge and passion of S. Grainger as regards recreating Classical cuisine. The effect of this marriage of competence and experience is that individual entries turn into separate studies of considerable scientific value. A good example of this is the section concerning *defrutum*, where the authors have proposed a completely new interpretation of the term (pp. 345 f.). *Defrutum* is, in their opinion, a reduced (thick) and – most importantly – aromatised (with quince, dates or other products) syrup made from must. *Sapa* in turn was simply boiled off grape juice, prepared without any additives. The culinary experience of S. Grainger fully entitles her to include purely practical conclusions. Examples of such tips are numerous, but we shall only cite the repeated proposition of modern substitutes instead of unavailable Classical products (such as anchovy paste in place of *allec*, p. 330), tips concerning the handling of spices (how long one should dissolve asafoetida, p. 332), or observations confirming the properties of famous products of Classical cuisine (asafoetida does indeed have properties softening foodstuffs, p. 333).

<sup>7</sup> The views of Ch. Grocock and S. Grainger have been recapitulated by the latter in her work entitled *Cooking “Apicius”*: *Roman Recipes for Today*, Totnes 2006, pp. 7–15.

<sup>8</sup> Apicius, *L’art culinaire*, texte établi, traduit e commenté par J. André, Paris 1965 (second corrected edition, Paris 1974).

The second particularly valuable appendix is a long article on *garum* and *liquamen* (pp. 373–387). It contains a new and well-documented interpretation of the meaning of both nouns. According to the authors, the Latin term *garum* referred to a high quality sauce made from the blood and intestines of fish, which was produced in the Mediterranean Basin. It was used as table seasoning, i.e. it was used to flavour a dish by the immediate consumer. Such *garum* was relatively expensive, and – when made using refined additives – available only for the elite. *Garum* was invented during the imperial period and should be differentiated from the Greek *garon* (γάρον; γάρου), which was of older origin. The latter was also known under the Latin name *liquamen*, and made from whole small fish (or pieces of larger specimens), which underwent dissolution under the influence of salt (thus, the technology was analogous to that used in modern times to make Thai variants of this product). *Garon/liquamen* did not constitute a luxury ingredient and was commonly used as an ingredient ensuring that dishes had the appropriate – i.e. salty – taste (p. 380).

Although the deliberations of G. and G. are in principle sufficiently clear, they are still not devoid of a few somewhat imprecise statements. For example, on p. 48, when discussing the development of Roman culinary art as presented by Plautus, they conclude that “...his passage suggests that Greek food had moved on quite considerably from Arcestratus’ simple style, and had already become more complex before it moved into the Roman sphere of influence”.

I cannot agree with the simplification introduced by the authors, which – in my opinion – suggests that Arcestratus knew only a simple Attic cuisine, based on the natural taste of products. Fragments of his poem, preserved by Athenaeus of Naucratis, clearly show that this was not the case. We should therefore authoritatively state that there is no evidence which would allow us to fully refute Arcestratus’ acceptance of the refined Mediterranean cuisine of his times and declare that he had a predilection for culinary simplicity. All that we do know is that sometimes (and mainly as regards specific products) he condemned the pretentiousness of Sicilian/Italian cuisine, which was characterised by excessive usage of sophisticated spices<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, we would like to voice our reservations regarding the bibliography. In our opinion, it was an error to limit it to selected works, which occupy less than three pages. As we see it, the bibliography forms a part of the commentary just as the notes and observations regarding the language of the collection. Even if one adds works mentioned in the footnotes, the list still appears severely limited. In consequence, one observes the lack of fundamental works – both those published some time ago<sup>10</sup> and more recent<sup>11</sup>.

However, these imperfections do not diminish the overall most positive assessment of the work, which from the moment of publication will become a must for any researcher of Classical cuisine.

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<sup>9</sup> Athen. VII 322 a–c (86, 15–33, Kaibel).

<sup>10</sup> F. Bilabel, *Opsartytiká und Verwandtes*, Heidelberg 1920; idem, *Kochbücher*, RE XI 1 (1921), coll. 935–937.

<sup>11</sup> S. Hill, J. Wilkins, *Mithaikos and Other Greek Cooks*, in: H. Walker (ed.), *Cooks and Other People: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1995*, Totnes 1996, pp. 144–148.