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# SUNG, DRAWN AND QUARTERED: THE ROMAN IDEOGRAM OF BREAD (PART 1)<sup>1</sup>

## CELEBRADO, DESENHADO E CORTADO: O IDEOGRAMA ROMANO DO PÃO (PARTE 1)

BUNNY WARING

B.Waring2@newcastle.ac.uk

*Field Archaeologist. Classics Researcher. Ancient History Educator.*

PhD Candidate in Ancient History

School of History, Classics and Archaeology

Newcastle University

### ABSTRACT

When duplicated, the single icon of a monument, deity, or object, could recall entire narratives of divine intervention, great ancestral feats, and desirable ‘Roman’ attributes. The common, round, and quartered loaf of wheat-bread was produced and eaten by all echelons of Roman society. Despite the fundamentality of this segmented loaf to the daily life, industry, and economy of Rome, its imbuelement with ideogrammic qualities of social balance and stability, have yet to be

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explored. Through select case studies of literary and archaeological evidence this paper will explore the allegorical nature of bread beyond dietetics in two parts: In Part 1 I provide case studies of bread use in different literary genres of ancient Poetry, Historiography, Satire, Biography and Prose, discussing the thematic tropes in which bread appears in Roman narratives. In Part 2 I investigate how these metaphorical characteristics and themes translated visually in the mosaics, frescos, graffiti, and monuments of public and private spaces. I conclude that the *panis quadratus* was more than an economic and accessible product, and became an ideogram of the social cohesion fundamental to Rome's Empire; specifically, the circular connections between the natural, mortal and immortal worlds.

#### KEYWORDS

Roman, Food, Rhetoric, Archaeology, Bread.

#### RESUMO

Quando duplicado, o valor icónico de um monumento, de uma divindade ou de um objeto, pode evocar narrativas de intervenção divina, grandes feitos ancestrais e até determinados atributos romanos. O simples pão de trigo comum, redondo e segmentado em fatias, era produzido e consumido por todas as classes sociais em Roma. A importância deste pão na vida quotidiana, na indústria e na economia romanas, conferiu-lhe traços ideogénicos portadores de equilíbrio social e de uma estabilidade que ainda hoje carecem de um estudo mais aprofundado. Este artigo, que será dividido em duas partes, procura analisar através de alguns estudos de caso com evidência literária e arqueológica a natureza alegórica do pão, para além da sua dimensão dietética, e o seu uso como símbolo da cultura material. Na primeira parte, apresentam-se exemplos relativos ao tratamento do tema do pão em diferentes géneros literários (da poesia antiga à historiografia, passando pela sátira, pelo registo biográfico e pela prosa), fazendo incidir a análise nos tropos que comparecem nas narrativas romanas. Na segunda parte, indagar-se-á de que forma esses traços metafóricos e temáticos são transpostos visualmente para os mosaicos, frescos, *graffiti* e monumentos da esfera pública e privada. Através deste percurso, conclui-se que o *panis qua-*

*dratus* era mais do que um produto económico e acessível, tendo-se tornado um ideograma representativo da coesão social do Império Romano, especialmente nas relações entre o discurso trivial e o universo real e ficcional.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Romano, Comida, Retórica, Arqueologia, Pão.

## Introduction

Food-centric habits are fundamental to cultural identity. From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean, bread has persisted as a dietary staple for millennia.<sup>2</sup> Formed primarily from flour and water, the simplicity of its core components made bread cheap and accessible for most demographics of the ancient world. Flour ground from various regional grains provided an adaptable base which could be customised with cultural flavours, rising agents and aesthetic forms. This vast typology of localised loaves changed with food fashions and resource limitations.<sup>3</sup> The Roman Empire (27 BCE – 476 CE) relied on bread to sate the hunger of its multicultural populace and their equally divergent culinary practices. Consumed by all echelons of society, Roman bread was an integral source of nourishment, whose fundamental impact on (and by) daily life offers scope to better understand a communal element of a diverse population. Culinary studies of ancient Rome have thus far focused on recipes, food production and the trade of grain, *garum* and beer.<sup>4</sup> Roman bread itself, often appears as a by-product in valuable research on bakers, bakeries and business. Whilst these studies offer insights to ancient nutrition and economics, the social importance of the bread itself as a parabolic symbol in Roman culture, is yet to be explored. Roman bread provides an interesting conundrum of its

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2 Yale 1985-6: 25 (17-25, 30-34, 40); Sinclair & Sinclair 2010; Morgan 2015.

3 Fresco & Waters 2016: 83-102.

4 General production & trade: Bescherer Metheny & Beaudry 2015, Cavallo et al. 2008, Cool 2006; Dalby 2003. Consumption habits: Fresco et al. 2016; Austin 2012; Donahue 2004, Dunbabin 2003, Purcell 2003. Grain: Erdkamp 2005, 2001, 1995, Lorenzi 2017; Jasny 1959, 1942, Moritz 1958. *Garum*: Luaces 2021, Rodríguez-Alcántara et al. 2021. Beer: Sinclair & Sinclair 2010; Veyne 1992.

own success. Why, in a society with an empire-worth of foods, did the same type of bread appear on elite and destitute tables alike, for over 2000 years? What information does ancient literature and archaeological evidence give us about the social perceptions of bread in Roman territories? This paper will extrapolate the parabolic qualities of bread through targeted case studies of its use beyond dietetics in Roman cultural story-telling. To produce a comprehensive investigation, this argument is presented in a paper of two parts:

Part I: Expressions of Status – the metaphorical use of Roman bread in single case studies of ancient Poetry, Historiography, Satire, Biography and Prose.

Part II: Commemoration and Legacy – the emblematic use of the segmented loaf specifically, in material culture throughout ritualistic spaces: (wealthy) tombs, memorials to the dead, sacrificial altars, and religious graffiti, and exhibitionist spaces of the living: in the frescos and mosaics of commercial and private areas.

This colligation of literary and archaeological evidence aims to highlight unrecognised, yet persistent, uses of the round segmented loaf across a broad range of Roman media.



Figure 1: (Left) A carbonised segmented round loaf, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, Herculaneum. (Right, clockwise) Modern experimental archaeology of Roman bread: Farrell Monaco, Melissa Johnson, Manon Henzen, and the Getty Museum.

The main argument being that this visual frequency exposes a thematic social role of bread, whose use in story-telling and legacy formation, likely de-

veloped in tandem with its broadly recognised nutritional, economic and industrial roles. Specifically, the daily-made round loaf became so recognisable as a symbol of Rome's social balance, that a range of writers and artists were able to draw upon it as a consistent ideogram of cultural stability throughout the Republican and Imperial ages. Whilst such analyses can never be exhaustive, by focusing on the iconographic value of Roman bread over its dietetics, it is my objective to provide an investigation that furnishes future studies on Roman culinary symbolism. To do so, this first part of the paper will introduce the development of bread in Roman diets, before an in-depth analysis of its metaphoric value and characteristics in ancient writings of different genres. Part two will be released in the subsequent issue of *DLAITA Food & Heritage* and will confront how these literary themes translate visually into the archaeological record, with a thorough investigation into the emblematic use of bread in a variety of inscriptions, frescos and mosaics in private and public areas for the living and the dead.

## **Part I: Expressions of Status – the metaphorical use of Roman bread in single case studies of ancient Poetry, Historiography, Satire, Biography and Prose**

### **1. Rome and Bread**

Bread was a keystone in daily Roman life. The need for its mass production saw the development of bread-based industries that required trade, logistical organisation and labour. The quality and quantity of different breads matched the vast range of budgets and palettes, creating a hierarchy of grains, flours and loaves both within and beyond Roman communities.<sup>5</sup> The diversity of grains and flours used to produce bread varied widely in texture, shape, cost and flavour. The traits of each grain – how easy it was to grow, harvest, mill, and the quality of bread it produced – were discussed at length by an-

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<sup>5</sup> Lucil. 9.352-3, Plaut. *Asin.*141-143, Varro, *Rust.*10-11, Quint. *Inst.* F24.6.3.60, Juv. 5.11; 66-79, Celsus *Med.*3.10.2, 4.11.7 & 4.12.9, Jer. *Ep.*128.2, *Hist.Aug.*9.6, Suet. *Gram. et rhet.*2, Prudent. *C. Symm.*11.

cient Mediterranean writers who linked these characteristics to the people that consumed them.<sup>6</sup> The parallelism between a demographic and its dominant cereal fashioned bread into an indicator of a society's capabilities. This proved particularly problematic for the early reputation of Rome whose citizens relied on *puls* as their daily staple for the first five hundred years of the city's development.<sup>7</sup> This porridge made from salt, water and the flour of emmer-grain, was quick, easy, and cheap to produce. It complimented the vegetables, broths and *garum* that formed the majority of early Roman Republican nourishment, with meats deliberately abstained from, except during times of hardship, community feasts, or special ritual occasions.<sup>8</sup> Whilst the soft-husked emmer could be ground into flour by hand with relatively little labour, its suitability for porridge did not transfer to bread, making hard and bland loaves. This breadless diet did not go unnoticed in a world increasingly stigmatised by grain choice and consumption habits.

The commentaries of ancient authors and orators characterised Republican Romans as unsophisticated *multi-phagones* (porridge eaters) - a politicised mockery of Rome's perceived lack of dynamism, and an apparent inability to produce the most basic of foods.<sup>9</sup>

Rome's emmer-based cuisine was in part dictated by the geographical and pedological limitations of the city's arable land.<sup>10</sup> Prior to Roman territorial expansion, the Republic's farmland was small, and fed the citizens who cultivated the produce. These farming-families had their numbers regularly reduced when the men were called into military service. The intermittent reduction of labour limited Roman agriculture to seasonal, hardy and low maintenance crops which could be sown and harvested between army reconnaissance. Rome's military successes during the third Macedonian war (171-168 BCE) had expanded the city's territory, providing access to a wider pool of labour and agricultural land. New cereals -which critically included grains that produced high quality breads- became widely farmed throughout

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6 Plaut. *Asin.* 142, *Cas.* 310-311, Suet. *Gram. et Rhet.* 26, Varro. *Ling.* 5.106-108.

7 Val. Max. 2.2.5, Plin. *HN.* 18.62, Auson, *Technop.* 9.5-7, Harcum 1918: 59, Tchernia 1986: 10-11.

8 Caes. *B. Gall.* 7.17.3-5.

9 Plin. *NH.* 18.72 & 83-84, Cato. *Agr.* 85.

10 Wilkins & Hill 2006: 22-24.



Rome's new rural landscape, introducing wheat and spelt-based breads to the Roman table.

Although *puls* remained part of the Roman diet, its days as the core staple were superseded by wheat-breads which could be produced, customised, stored and transported to every settlement under Roman governance. New land, trade-deals and slave-labour allowed Rome to produce bread in vast quantities in every land it annexed. By the mid second century BCE wheat-bread had become the primary foodstuff of all people within Roman reach and became a symbol of Rome's cultural competence.

## 2. Rhetorical Use of Bread in Ancient Roman Literature

Despite its commonality, bread played an important role in the lives of the wealthy. It featured prominently as a metaphor in different genres of Roman literature produced by (and catering to) elite audiences.<sup>11</sup> During the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Rome's growing territories increased the scope of exotic imports, promoting exhibitionism in elite dining.<sup>12</sup> Authors drew on culinary behaviours as a socio-political practice, to compare revered Republican assiduousness to the luxury of Imperialism. As staple cereals had represented societal capabilities, so too did extravagant feasts come to expose their corruption.<sup>13</sup> This complicated relationship between social and moral hierarchies deliberately left the reader wondering who or what was really being consumed.<sup>14</sup> Bread did not escape this categorisation. High-quality Roman wheat-breads were an accompaniment to the feasts of the wealthy, differing in nutritional and textual quality to the roundels that formed the majority of frugal lower-class meals.<sup>15</sup> Delayed grain shipments, political instability, crop disease, or financial tactics, saw the demonisation of bakers and emperors alike when bread became scarce.<sup>16</sup> Bread was a literal and metaphorical catalyst of settle-

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11 Celsus.*Med.*2.18.4 compared with Mccance and Widdowson 1956: 5.

12 Sall. *Cat.* 12.

13 Tac.*Hist.*2.95

14 Suet. *Vitellius* 13, *Elagabalus* 19-32, *Geta*, 4-5.

15 Celsus *Med.*2.18.4, Plaut *Asin.*142 & 200, Aul. Gell. *NA.*195-196, Bacchyl. 580, Juv. *Sat.*14.166, Gal. *Nat.Fac.*1.2 & 1.7.

16 Tac.*Ann.*15.38. Suet.*Claud.*18.2. Morgan 2015: 8-17.

ment and destabilisation in Roman society, and thus, the ideal literary tool to expose the characteristics and moral concerns of all Rome's social classes. The term *panis* was the most dominant title for bread, and the first part of this paper will provide short case studies on the use, production and reception of *panis* in different literary genres.

[Virgil] *Moretum* 43–55.<sup>17</sup>

*levi tum protinus illam componit tabula, tepidas super  
ingerit undas, contrahit admixtos nunc fontes atque  
farinas, transversat durata manu liquidoque coacta,  
interdum grumos spargit sale. iamque subactum levat opus  
palmisque suum dilatat in orbem et notat impressis aequo discrimine  
quadris. infert inde foco (Scybale mundaverat aptum ante locum)  
testisque tegit, super aggerat ignes. dumque suas peragit Volcanus  
Vestaque partes, Simulus interea vacua non cessat in hora, verum  
aliam sibi quaerit opem, neu sola palatē sit non grata Ceres, quas  
iungat comparat escas.*

Then immediately he lays it [the dough] out onto a smooth table, pours warm water on it and now draws together and mixes the liquid and the flour crossing from one side to the other in order to make a hard blanket through the action of hand and liquid, now and then sprinkling a little heap of salt. And now kneaded he lifts up his hard work and with open palms spreads it out into a circle and brands it stamping out equal separate quarters. Then he brings it from there to the hearth (Scybale had beforehand cleaned a suitable place) and he tests and protects it above the fuelled fire. And with Vulcan [heat] and Vesta [hearth] playing their part, Simylus meanwhile is not inactive in that empty hour, but instead seeks another resource for himself, with not only one palate to please, he brings together a meal which Ceres herself would be grateful for.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Although the authorship of *Moretum* has been contested, the poem displays several Virgilian elements, see Buckley 2019.

18 All translations by author.

*Moretum* provides a powerful ekphrasis of frugal living through the baking of Roman bread. The poem follows the morning ritual of a humble farmer who rises before dawn to prepare a round loaf. The description of the bread's lowly status and the farmers hard labour provide a hyperbolic narrative on the socio-political metonymy of Augustan society.<sup>19</sup> The bread-making highlights the importance of social unity, with patience, skill and divine support required to complete the task. Descriptors of the process from milling to baking are equally applicable to martial, agricultural and sexual translations, reiterating the *patronus* role of the protagonist.<sup>20</sup> *Contrahit* entwines the water and flour together, unifying the two core ingredients. The concept of wet femininity and dry masculinity reoccurs either side of the salt sprinkling, adding further fertility to the 'marriage' of dry hand-processed flour and natural wet water. *Grumos* plays on the word *grumus* –an agricultural term for soil or territory– pertaining to the sexual and literal planting of seeds, to Simylus' profession, or even the delegation of land following successful military operations – a topic hotly debated after Augustus' annexation of Egypt. During the moulding of the dough, the incorporation of sexual, agricultural and military tenets continues in: *infert*/lifting (also meaning to march or thrust), *locum*/places (also meaning territory, land, or female genitals), *verum*/instead (also meaning spear or honesty), *opum*/resources (also a declension of *opis* the fertility goddess) and *sola*/one (also a declension of *solum* meaning soil, or *solus* meaning protector). This overarching theme of cohesion and strength culminates in reward, with Simylus creating a loaf of bread that is good enough for *Ceres* goddess of fertility, corn and agriculture. The bread provides a symbolic lynchpin between these classes, with slaves, citizens and deities all playing a role in its production. As the dough is transformed into a loaf *Ceres* replaces the aforementioned *frumentum*, Vulcan, god of fire, personifies the flames, and Vesta, goddess of the household (and incidentally, bakers), dances to protect the hearth.<sup>21</sup> Minerva joins the rite too, providing oil (returning to the wet femininity) for the accompanying *moretum* making the bread-baking a divine family affair with the sisters, son, and daughter of Jupiter all taking part. Simylus' family works alongside the immortal progeny, with Scybale the slave

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19 Virg.*Mor.*43-55.

20 Compare *tundere* with the oxymoron of the hard blanket of dough.

21 Ovid. *Fast.* 6.260.

counterbalancing the omnipotent gods. Described in detail from her physicality to her character, she reflects the merits of hard work and is as critical to the process as the master. This communal event is ritualistic, the bread itself becoming a relic. The segmented circular form of the loaf is described in detail, and the importance of this form is echoed in visuals of the quern stone, mill wheel, and Simylus' kneading throughout the poem. In Simylus' laboured provisioning, the segmentation of the final loaf should not be underappreciated. The impecunious hunger fearing Simylus still retains self-discipline when uniformly dividing his bread into double the number of pieces required for himself and his companion Scybale. This refusal to over-indulge is a critical reflection of the provisioning, order, and duty that Augustus desired Rome to be. Here, the production of a recognisably round Roman loaf reflects these characteristics in a cyclic way that an unscored, square loaf could not. In short, *Moretum's* humblest bread embodies the most prized (Roman) characteristics.

Pliny – *Naturalis Historia* 22.68.138-9.

*Panis hic ipse quo vivitur innumeras paene continet medicinas. Ex aqua et oleo aut rosaceo mollit collectiones, ex aqua mulsa duritias valde mitigat. Datur ex vino ad discutienda aut quae praestringi opus sit et, si magis etiamnum, ex aceto, adversus acutas pituitae fluctiones, quas Graeci rheumatismos vocant, item ad percutta, luxata. Ad omnia autem fermentatus, qui vocatur autopyrus, utilior. Inlinitur et paronychiis et callo pedum in aceto. Vetus aut nauticus panis tusus atque iterum coctus sistit alvum. Vocis studiosis et contra destillationes siccum esse primo cibo utilissimum est. sitanius, hoc est ex trimestri, incussa in facie aut desquamate cum melle aptissime curat. Candidus aegris aqua calida frigidave madefactus levissimum cibum praebet. Oculorum tumori ex vino inponitur, sic et pusulis capitis aut adiecta arida myrto. Tremulis panem ex aqua esse ieiunis statim a balineis demonstrant. Quin et gravitatem odorum in cubiculis ustus emendat et vini in saccos additus.*

The very bread which forms our staple diet has almost innumerable medicinal properties. Applied in water and oil or in rose oil it softens abscesses; in hydromel it is very soothing to inductions. In wine it is given to disperse or to compress as need

may be, and, if greater strength be called for, in vinegar for those violent fluxes of phlegm which the Greeks call rheumatism, as well as for bruises and sprains. For all purposes, however, leavened bread, of the kind called *autopyrus*, is the more beneficial. In vinegar it is also applied to whitlows and to callosities on the feet. Stale bread or sailors' bread, pounded and then baked again, checks looseness of the bowels. For the voice of learned men, and runny catarrhs it is very beneficial to eat dry bread at breakfast. This year's bread made of three-month wheat, applied with honey, is a very good cure for bruises on the face or scaling skin. White bread soaked in warm or cold water affords a very light food for the infirm. From wine it is placed on swollen eyes, or with the addition of dried myrtle to blisters on the head. Those effected by shaking should, whilst fasting, eat bread soaked in water immediately after a bath. In fact, when burnt [bread] removes the odours in the bedroom, and in wine when inserted into the sack.

Pliny's 1<sup>st</sup> century CE *Naturalis Historia* provides an entire chapter on the curative properties of bread. Given its own space amongst other provisions such as: grains, wheats, beans, pulses, brans, mushrooms, plants and herbs, bread is set apart as a product in its own right.<sup>22</sup> The categoric manual of bread applications persistently identifies *panis* as Rome's key curative, rivalling other superficial overviews in Pliny's work.<sup>23</sup> Descriptions of its medicinal use for internal and external afflictions are both practical and symbolic, though the latter has received less scholarly attention. As a gift from nature and the gods, Pliny's bread echoes *Moretum*'s as the culmination of natural, human, and divine efforts. Like contemporary Greek medicinal tomes, Pliny's bread could heal cultural as well as physical wounds.<sup>24</sup> At first glance, the uses seem purely medicinal, the long list of which has been criticised as an unnecessary diversion

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22 Plin. *NH*.22.57-61 & 69-82. Processed foods like flour and polenta are discussed as separate components.

23 Plin. *NH*.22.46-7, 49-50, 53-4 & 61.

24 Plin. *NH*.7.57 & 24.62, 29.23, 11.7, 8.61. Dioscon. 2.107, Gal. *De San.Tue*. 6.342, 412 & 449.

from the author's historical narrative.<sup>25</sup> I would instead suggest, following from Purcell's research on terminological choices in ancient literature, that Pliny's catalogues can be interpreted as complex, but formulaic metaphors.<sup>26</sup> Through paronomasia of the human body (the city of Rome), and its ailments (the social classes), Pliny illustrates the consequential balance between the human, divine and natural realms. Each ailment, or deformity of the city-body, correlates to the behaviours and duties of Rome's social classes, the concerns and conflict of which fit well within the framework of first century CE historiography. *Panis* is described as a human-made spongy vessel that can absorb and deliver natural ointments for aid. Like *Moretum* there is a notable contrast in the light and gentle descriptors of the prescribed bread, and the sharp, discomforts of the various illnesses. The use of natural water, human-made flour and divine rose-oil are also not incidental, representing the three core elements of Roman cultural influence.<sup>27</sup> Pliny's bread reiterates that social cohesion between the natural, mortal, and divine elements is required for Rome's healthy 'constitution', the malnourishment of which leads to messy, scattered, and unwanted build-ups, that occur within the unbalanced 'body'. Pliny highlights the catalytic properties of bread - healing physical and social ailments when present and encouraging physical and social corruption when unavailable.

Through the visual ekphrasis of the 'ailments' Pliny discusses the use of bread to clear blockages rebalancing the flow within a body (*rheumatismos*), to cure small, deep lacerations that cause big discomfort (*paronychiis*), and to sooth the thick skin at the very bottom of the foot. The breads which cure these ailments are hierarchised, with white breads being the highest quality and but *autopyrus* the most beneficial. This is significant given the social connections of white loaves to the elite (discussed later) and *autopyrus* as a well-known type of wholegrain loaf, often eaten by those exhibiting wholesomeness or frugality.<sup>28</sup> The status in bread types continues throughout the chapter, reiterating the need for different bread-classes to heal different social wounds - Soldiers are healed by *vetum*, a title reflecting both veteran status and staleness of the prod-

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25 Goodyear 1982: 671.

26 Purcell 2003: 333.

27 Rose associated with Venus, rituals, and passion: Vir. *Aen.* 1.723, 2.588, 7.25, 9.1, 11.896 & 12.593. Aphrodite's rose-oil: Hom. *Il.* 2.23.186 (also Vir. *Aen.* 1.159).

28 Plin. *NH.* 18.11.60-61, 18.12.63-65 & 18.27.105-109.

uct. Sailors' bowels are similarly cured by sailors' bread. *Siccus* (meaning both dry land and the characteristic dry biscuit loaves of the Roman army) can soothe the voice of learned men – crucial for those who, (through orders or oration), provide the political mouthpiece of Rome. White bread eases those exhausted by sicknesses (though which sickness is conveniently not specified), and when soaked in wine, aid swellings which effect the eyes and *capitis* – meaning both 'anatomical head' and 'leader of others'. The inclusion of myrtle and rose-oil in this juxtaposition of class-type-curatives is notable as both are attributes of Venus – the guardian of unions and opposing forces – and used elsewhere in the work.<sup>29</sup> Finally, those effected by shaking should break a fast by eating bread soaked in (bath?) water immediately after bathing, an elemental use of water in public places which contrasts the burning of bread that provides relief in the most intimate settings of the home. Pliny's connection between bread-types and their healing qualities reaches the very top of the society. As a friend and brother-in-arms of Vespasian, the potency of the 'highest quality nutrition for the neediest of peoples', despite a 'three-month period of hard growth and spoil' arguably parallels Vespasian's rise to Emperor in the wake of three quick and calamitous predecessors.<sup>30</sup> This is bolstered by the final lines of the passage which return to the opening statement – that only the highest quality white (elite), wheat-breads can cure the sicknesses of Rome.

Though less direct than *Moretum*, seen in the broader context of allegorical attributes, Pliny's bread is not the focus of a distracting list of curatives, but a key factor in the dispelling, soothing, and softening of all Rome's ailments.<sup>31</sup> He reiterates the importance of bread (set aside from the grains and flours) and how it sits complicatedly as a social anchor between the delicate hierarchical balances so entwined within Roman society. Strikingly, Pliny's bread can cure almost any deformity, internal or external.<sup>32</sup> As in *Moretum*, Roman bread is transformative changing illness into health, unstable to stable, chaotic to orderly. Rome is thus cured by that it creates. The order in which Pliny exposes each ailment and its paronomasia, suggests a deeper

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29 Plin. *NH*.15.36 discusses corrosion between the classes using the same substances.

30 Plin. *NH*.18.17-20, also: 18.10, 18.44 & 18.23-24.

31 Fane-Saunders 2016; Hekster 2015.

32 For further examples of bread as a healing vessel: 18.44, 18.45, 19.53, 20.15, 20.20, 20.44, 20.51, 21.83, 28.81, 30.12, 31.46 & 32.24.

ideographic language than a haphazard list. The use of Roman breads specifically, suggest a wider understanding of its emblematic value amongst and beyond Roman audiences.

Juvenal – *Saturae* 5.66-75

*Maxima quaeque domus servis est plena superbis. 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. 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."*

Each of the greatest houses are full of proud slaves. Behold, another. How far his mutters about hardly breakable bread reach, already a solid mouldy morsel of dust-flour, which shakes molars, permitting no small pieces (to be bitten). But the tender and white and soft wheat form is saved for the master. The right hand is mindful of being restrained; Respect is saved for this breadbasket. Yet imagine you are imprudent [enough], there is always one who will reprimand you: "Be accustomed, impertinent guest, to satisfy yourself from the right basket and colour of your (designated) bread".

The criticism of Roman society in Juvenal's satire was more forthright than Pliny's subtle prose. The *Saturae's* rhythmic and emotive dichotomy between the upper and lower classes, mirrors the political divide during the first and second centuries CE. The *mos maiorum* of Republican pasts was revered by the author, who perceived his contemporary peers as largely corrupt. Writing under multiple leaderships Juvenal produced a series of situational narratives that developed alongside Emperors Domitian (81-96 CE), Nerva (96-98 CE), Trajan (98-117 CE) and Hadrian (117-138 CE). Embittered by his own political stagnation, the satires covered a range of concerns about elite behaviours, specifically, the problematic opulent lifestyles of the wealthy. As with *Naturalis Historia* and *Moretum*, Juvenal's hyperbolic descriptors of bread types reflect class and morality.



In book five the audience is immediately placed into the shoes of a dissatisfied guest at a sumptuous meal. The catalyst of discontent is the marked difference in the hard, teeth defeating bread of the guest, and the soft, white loaves for the wealthy host. This visual is reiterated with the terms *tener* and *mollis* (meaning youthful, civilised, unspoilt, voluptuous, or tame) being used for the hosts' fare, whilst the *genuinum* wisdom teeth (also meaning wild and untreated) cannot bite the frugal loaf. Amidst the contrasting textures there is emphasis on the societal labels attached to each bread-type. The aforementioned hierarchical status of grain-types is articulated clearly in the descriptions of different flours used to make either the finest Roman wheat-breads, or hard, dry, and mouldy wholegrain loaves for the poor. As seen previously, the appearance of the breads is highlighted – the barley bread being rough morsels, and the high-quality loaves identified as *panis quadratus* by the description of the *artoptae* pan. The presence of both types at such an opulent banquet reiterates the importance of bread as a specific visual symbol in all levels of Roman society (discussed in part two). In this context, we see (as in *Moretum*) the metaphorical right hand. Associated with soldiers, labour and contractual obligations, the description of the *dextra* reaching for others' bread becomes an equivocal of reaching above one's class. Notably, there is no intermediary bread between the unbreakable and mouldy, and the whitest, softest loaf – a dichotomous theme present throughout Juvenal's work. The final reprimand of the upper-class diner bolsters this segregation, reminding the unprivileged guest to partake only of bread assigned to them by colour and basket.

Like Virgil and Pliny, Juvenal's bread provides (and symbolises) the potential for social harmony or calamity. This idea is reinforced later in the poem, with the subsequent serving of more exotic and expensive foods to the master, whilst the guests continue with comparably lowly fare; the slaves with nothing at all. Despite the array of extravagant foods, the greedy master gains no more satisfaction, his guests and workers however, exposed to starvation and low-quality products, grow resentful. The rebuked freedman wonders why he endured hardship when no new benefits were obtained, and this is a stark comparison to the collaborative labour of the miller and his slave in the Republican setting of *Moretum*. Notably in this scene, the gods are absent. Unlike Simylus who is rewarded for his character and hard-work, Juvenal's upper classes of the Imperial era are rewarded for their wealth. The common denominator is the expression of these characteristics through the attribute of

bread. Juvenal's distaste for wealthy citizens' greed-driven behaviours, makes the reader second guess who the 'proud slaves' of the first line really refer to. The repulsion at the gatekeeping of even staple sustenance offers sympathy with those who dare to reach beyond their hypothetical breadbasket, despite (or perhaps in favour of) its destabilising impact on the new social order. Between the mouldy rolls and soft loaves, Juvenal uses an implemented Roman symbolism of bread types to illustrate that whilst all may have bread, not all breads are equal.

Suetonius – *Divus Augustus*.2.93.7.

*Ad quartum lapidem Campanae viae in nemore prandenti ex inproviso aquila panem ei e manu rapuit et cum altissime evolasset rursus ex inproviso leniter delapsa reddidit.*

At the fourth stone on the road to Campania, in a forest, he took his lunch out of which, unexpectedly, an eagle alas snatched his bread from his hand and when it had flown up to the greatest height turning back it descended gently to return it.

Thus far, the case studies have considered Roman bread in distinct passages of poetry, historiography, and satire. In Suetonius' second century CE works *De Vita Caesarum*, bread appears more consistently throughout Suetonius' thematic biographical framework. Acting as an intermediary between the autocrats and the peoples of Rome, bread was both a stimulant and an anodyne in allegories exposing desirable and undesirable characteristics of Caesar, Augustus, Caligula, Claudius and Nero.<sup>33</sup> The first instance is in book one of *Caesar* who rebukes and chains a baker for handing him a higher quality bread than was offered to his guests.<sup>34</sup> The harsh penalties applied to the baker give an impression of the seriousness with which Caesar perceived his equality to other (elite) citizens, despite clear autocratic ambitions. This behaviour at once contrasts Juvenal's banquet, advertising Caesar's apparent humility and anti-nepotistic outlook, specifically through the provision of bread. It is noteworthy to once again reiterate both Suetonius and Juvenal's inclusion of

33 Plut. *Vit. Cat. Mai.* 2.1 & 4.2.

34 Suet. *Iul.*48.

different bread types as an important part of Roman dining etiquette at even the most influential of tables. Pompey is recorded as recognising the potency of bread as symbol of status and stability, ensuring breads made in desperation from the poorest of ingredients, were hidden from his influenceable troops before battle.<sup>35</sup>

Augustus, renowned for correlating the Roman loaf with self-discipline and virtuous frugality, experienced an incredible event whilst lunching on common bread.<sup>36</sup> The modest grove in which Augustus chooses to eat the similarly modest fayre, immediately connects him with nature, and the mythical founders of Rome (weaned in such a grove). Themes of divinity, foundation and nature occur regularly in Augustan art, alongside his annexation of Egypt. The groves position on the Campanian Road, connects Augustus with Campanian granary stores - the largest in Italy, and filled with imported Egyptian grist. Beyond frugality, the bread of Augustus symbolises power. The snatching and return of it by an eagle, undoubtedly hyperbole for civil war. The eagle itself, representative of military valour, the king of gods and the city of Rome, willingly returning the bread to Augustus is a potent condonation of actions against the Roman general Antony, the defeat of whom saw Egypt and its grains annexed under Augustan rule. Augustus' calm surprise at the eagle's behaviour reflects stability in the face of adversity, a characteristic seen above, here showing wisdom amidst the intricacies of the omen. The contrast in Augustus' experience between bread as the lowliest staple and the sacred bird of Jupiter (Rome's most potent deity), is not inconsequential. By combining the most humble and powerful Roman symbols in one scene, Suetonius, can portray Augustus as a leading intermediary. The bread itself is once again transformative, changing the eagle from its pre-bread state of an erratic snatcher of power (Antony), to a controlled and compliant ally. Augustus' humble lunch itself becomes a miraculous event, the bread providing a conduit between Augustus and the gods. The overarching message of this parable is one of humility breeding credit. If a Roman is humble, learned, and wise, the gods provide. Only those who do not seek power will be able to maintain it. Beyond Augustus, Suetonius' allegorical bread continues to draw out the virtues and vices of Rome's emperors:

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35 Suet. *Iul.*68.

36 Suet. *Aug.*7.6, 76-78, Pyy 2018.

- (i) Caligula's portrayal is poor. The emperor commandeers the transport and animals of bakeries for his own greedy profiteering, causing a scarcity of bread, and disrupting the courts.<sup>37</sup>
- (ii) Nero's tale is equally evocative. He first poisons his enemies and children, then prevents access to work and grain, so the poor could not earn their daily bread.<sup>38</sup>
- (iii) Claudius is arguably characterised more favourably. After being pelted with bread by an unhappy public at the start of his career, Claudius passed legislation that protected and stabilised the food crisis, consequently pacifying the peoples of Rome.

The realism of starving people throwing food rations, or Nero's assigned madness are of course arguable. Nonetheless, like Juvenal's bread, Suetonius' anecdotes of Caesar, Pompey, Augustus, Caligula, Nero and Claudius, utilise bread as a focal point for the author to note inconsistencies in imperial approach, and the role of reciprocity. Beyond its dietary qualities Suetonius' bread is the pith between nature, mortals, and the gods, and like *Moretum* and *Naturalis Historia*, it acts as a symbol of quality and a conduit of Roman character.

Apuleius –*Metamorphoses* 6.19.

*Canis namque praegrandis, teriugo et satis amplo capite praeditus, immanis et formidabilis, tonantibus oblatrans faucibus mortuos, quibus iam nil mali potest facere, frustra territando, ante ipsum limen et atra atria Proserpinae semper excubans servat vacuum Ditis domum. Hunc offrenatum unius offulae praeda facile praeteribis ad ipsamque protinus Proserpinam introibis, quae te comiter estigial ac benigne, ut et molliter assidere et prandium opipare suadeat sumere. Sed tu et humi reside et panem sordidum petitus esto; deinde nuntiatio quid adveneris, susceptoque quod offeretur rursus remeans canis saevitiam offula reliqua redime; ac deinde, avaro navitae data quam reservaveras stipe transitoque eius fluvio, recolens priora estigial ad istum caelestium siderum redies chorum.*

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37 Suet.*Calig.*39.1-2.

38 Suet. *Ner.*36.2.

For there is a huge dog gifted with three vast heads, monstrous and terrifying, whose thunderous throat barks with thundering jaws at the dead, who he is now, unable to harm, intimidating them in vain. Always he lies in front of the threshold outside Proserpina's black courts, guarding the empty house of Dis. This one can be tamed if you offer one of the loot (breads), you will pass without difficulty and without pause to the host herself, Proserpina. Whereby in a friendly manner and with kindness, she will persuade you to sit down gently beside her and eat a sumptuous supper. But you must sit on the soil and sultry bread you must eat. Next announce why you have arrived, take what is offered and return, offering the small piece of bread you have left to buy off the ferocious dog. Then give the greedy sailor the coin you saved, cross his river, and retracing your steps you will return to this sanctuary of heavenly stars.

Bread has thus far proven a symbol of Roman stability, provided a catalyst of transition, and exhibited markers of status and character. Apuleius' catalogue of prose continues these themes, drawing specifically on its role between the mortals and gods.<sup>39</sup> Bread regularly occurs as a form of payment, or as a protective totem for bakers who end up as victims or crooks in various divine schemes. In *Metamorphoses* the symbolism of bread reaches beyond the physical mortal world and provides protection in the realms of the dead and divine. The work is a parabolic love story centred around the god Eros and his desired companion, the mortal Psyche. Despite their mutual affections, Eros' mother, the goddess Venus, sets impossible tasks for Psyche to complete before she can prove worthy of her son's affections. One such trial requires Psyche to go in and out of the realm of the dead with nothing but little roundels of bread for protection.

Like the bread of Virgil and Suetonius, Apuleius' loaves are the stable connection between the mortal, divine and natural worlds. The (backhanded) divine gift of bread from Venus to Psyche transforms the lowliest fayre into a talisman, connecting the mortal protagonist and the antagonistic goddess.

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<sup>39</sup> See also Plaut. *Amph.*196, 400, Plut. *Mor.*1055.5, Sha.*Aurel.*35, *Ant.Pius.*3, Juv. *Sat.*5.169, Plin. *HN.*28.62.

Like the loaf snatched by the eagle in Suetonius' *Divus Augustus*, Apuleius' bread becomes a tool of divine providence, reiterating its transformative nature and ability to tip the balance between life and death, corruption and nature, stability and chaos. Once in the underworld, the bread transforms again from talisman to votive, from votive to sustenance, from sustenance to payment. The frugality of the loaves ensures the safety of their bearer from great horrors and peril. The provision grants entrance to the underworld, feeds her (living food) whilst there, and allows her to leave unscathed. In previous trials, vexed Venus fed Psyche solely on bread during imprisonment, a demarcation of lowly status reminiscent of Juvenal's banquet. Whilst Psyche's abstinence from the food of the dead would ensure her escape of the underworld, Venus' demand that she sits in the soil and eat sultry loaves reiterates bread as the lowliest of foods. Akin to the rebuke of Juvenal's disgruntled guest, Venus' demand that Psyche not eat above her station, reminds the audience that even in the underworld, bread-types denoted status. The two rolls which accompany Psyche into the underworld reiterate this hierarchy whilst attesting the importance of the frugality, self-control and discipline similarly outlined in *Moretum* and *Naturalis Historia*. Psyche's safety is assured by the bread not because of her standing, wealth, or schemes, but because of her self-abnegation and wholesome motives. Arguably, in this context, the calming effect of common bread on the furious Cerberus discontent with his uncontrollable fate, could be hyperbole for controlling Rome's masses. Either way, Apuleius' story is a reminder that the simplest loaf could defeat even the schemes of a god.

## Conclusion: Literary Summary

Whilst the interpretations of bread as an attribute can be argued against, the importance of the bread itself as a recognisable symbolic tool cannot. As paupers' fae produced through intensive labour and economic stability, bread was the product of harmony between the mortal, immortal and natural worlds.<sup>40</sup> This societal interplay reflected the overall cohesion required

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<sup>40</sup> For further examples of bread as a harmoniser between nature and mortals see: Plin. *NH*.8.61 (howling dog in mourning), 9.8 (loyal dolphin friend), 9.9 (loyal dolphins giving life), 11.7, 14-15 (loyal worker bees). For talismanic properties: Plin. *NH*.27.62, 24.62, 28.63 & 29.23.

for Rome's structural stability, and as a result the capacity to produce bread became synonymous with socio-political balance. The familiarity and status of Roman bread in everyday life enabled it to supersede the standard stature of food types and provide a conduit through which authors could reflect on periods of instability and change. Via both complex and unabashed rhetoric themes of stability, status and transition reoccur as core imbuements of bread, specifically in times of socio-political discontent.

Physically Roman bread was the barrier between life and death, wealth, and poverty. Symbolically it reflected a deeper concern with what it meant to be 'Roman', the internal hierarchy of bread-types denoting social class and the personal qualities of those who consumed or interacted with them.<sup>41</sup> The fundamentality of bread to both Roman and non-Roman audiences of the ancient world, enabled bread to disseminate narratives of Roman morality throughout and beyond the empire.

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<sup>41</sup> For local societal implications of baking see: Cic.*Pis.*68.28 and global perceptions: Plaut. *Poen.*53.

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