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Sung, drawn and quartered: the roman ideogram of bread (part 2)[1]

Celebrado, desenhado e cortado: o ideograma romano do pão (parte 2)

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Abstract

The common, round, and quartered loaf of wheat-bread was produced and eaten by all echelons of Roman society. The fundamentality of this segmented loaf to the daily life, industry, and economy of Rome, imbued it with ideogrammic qualities of social balance and stability which have yet to be explored. *Part 1* of this paper introduced the development of bread in Roman diets, before an in-depth analysis of its metaphoric characteristics in ancient writing genres. *Part 2* investigates how these themes translate visually into the archaeological record, exploring the emblematic use of bread on tombs, altars, frescos, and mosaics throughout the Empire. This two-part paper aims to highlight the allegorical nature of bread beyond dietetics.

Keywords

Roman, food, rhetoric, archaeology, bread.

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Resumo

O pão comum, redondo e segmentado em fatias, era produzido e consumido por todas as classes sociais romanas. A sua relevância no quotidiano, na indústria e na economia de Roma confere-lhe atributos ideogramáticos, cujo equilíbrio e estabilidade social já foram analisados na primeira parte deste artigo. Com efeito, aí procurou introduzir-se o tema do uso do pão nas dietas romanas, acompanhando-o de uma análise meticulosa dos traços metafóricos que assume em vários géneros literários cultivados na Antiguidade.

Na segunda parte que agora se publica, investiga-se a forma através da qual estes temas adquirem expressão visual, analisando, para tal, o uso emblemático do pão em túmulos, altares, frescos e mosaicos durante o Império. Com efeito, pretende ressaltar-se a natureza alegórica deste alimento, para além da conhecida dimensão dietética.

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.[2] 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.[3] 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 popula-

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

3 Fresco & Waters 2016: 83-102.

tion. Culinary studies of ancient Rome have thus far focused on recipes, food production and the trade of grain, *garum* and beer.[4] 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 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 hyperbolic use of Roman bread in ancient Poetry, Historiography, Satire, Biography and Prose.[5]
> Part II: Commemoration and Legacy – the emblematic use of bread in material culture. Specifically, in commemorations of the dead, altars, and graffiti, and in exhibitionist spaces of living with frescos and mosaics.

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

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.

5 Waring 2023.

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.

Part 1 of this paper introduced the development of bread in Roman diets, before an in-depth analysis of its metaphoric characteristics in case studies of Virgil's Poetry, Pliny's Historiography, Juvenal's Satire, Suetonius' Biography, and Apuleius' Prose. It was understood that bread provided an ideogram of balance between different social statuses, largely through allegories of interaction between the key elements of the Roman cosmos (nature, divinities, and mortals). *Part 2* will investigate how these themes translate visually into the archaeological record.

Part II: The Emblematic use of Roman Bread

As early as 2.5 million BCE simple shapes have communicated complex ideas. From the sands of Africa to the stones of the Hebrides, the success of a symbol relies on the audiences' ability (and desire) to understand its messages. Emblems of particular significance can be found reiterated across multiple media in the Roman world.[6] Led by the parabolic qualities of bread seen in Part 1 of this paper, Part 2 provides a comprehensive investigation of bread as a significant emblem for those living under Roman administration. Monuments to the industriousness of Roman bread can be found in the grain measuring tables of Pompeii, the traders mosaics in Ostia, and perhaps most famously, the Baker's Tomb in Rome itself. This building has rightly received much attention, its reliefs being particularly insightful to the making, baking and selling of Roman bread.[7] The remains of mill stones, *atropae*, ash-preserved loaves, bakeries and bread stamps have also given archaeologists quantitative indications of production.[8] This paper wishes to approach the well-trodden subject from a new perspective, however, exploring interactions with the bread

6 Consider the emotive swastika, pentagram, twitter bird, or even the yellow 'M' of MacDonald's.

7 Petersen 2003. See also *Relief Depicting a Bread Seller*, Museo della Civilta Romana, Accession: Not given.

8 Romanness: Hes. *Op.*442, Ath. *Deip.*114e, Fest. QU.XV.23, Philostra. *Imag.*2.26. The segmented loaves referred to as *oktablómous* or *blomiaioi kodratoi*, transliterate to *panis quadratus,* as seen in Latin literature from the 2nd century CE, but almost certainly in practical use with or without the name from the 6th century BCE.

itself. How were the allegories seen in the texts of Part 1 communicated visually to broader audiences?

1. One Loaf to Represent Them All

Despite a variety of breads on the Roman market, the round segmented loaf (*panis quadratus)* is seen synonymously in areas dedicated to the Roman living and dead, with impunity of class or media constraints. Its realistic portrait was painted in frescoed areas of elite dining and entertainment, providing a double entendre of wealthy status and moralistic frugality. The same circular loaf is found throughout mosaic designs of trade centres, left etched into altars of the gods and carved into floor tiles on streets. It is sculpted on expensive sarcophagi and stele of revered dead and graffitied on common walls of the poorest *insula.* Whilst this loaf seems an unlikely ideogram of social cohesion, the *panis quadratus* was undoubtedly influenced by two earlier well-established motifs:

i) The Macedonian wheel of fortune – a chariot wheel denoting hard fought victories and prestige. Its circular form acted as a reminder of actions and consequences.
ii) The Greek seed of life – a geometric symbol of continuity and prosperity, representing cyclic existence; the inevitability of life, death, and new birth.

The *panis quadratus* provided Roman audiences with their own communal icon. A product which all peoples had access to and a product which could stabilise and disrupt the social order - the *panis quadratus* had something to say.[9]

2. Dead Pan(em): Status and Transformation on Funerary Monuments

Amidst the bustling crowds of sacrifices, festivals, and funerary *collegia* bread was abundant. Warm, round loaves were baked and distributed to attendees of

9 Langer 2001: 174, Figures 35 & 56-62.

public and private rites. Like Psyche's totem-rolls in Part 1, the bread itself was transformed during these events, changing from a food of life into a grave good or temple votive.[10] The archaeological record shows this use of bread as a conduit between the living and the dead was persistent across media types.

Kline-Style

Douglas' spearhead paper described the contents of a meal as a dialogue between the host and recipient.[11] This concept was bolstered in the analyses of *Moretum* and Juvenal's satire of Part 1, but is also prevalent in material remains. On Roman sarcophagi, urns, and altars, bread is depicted in two ways. First as a funerary food, shared in feasts between the deceased, and living family members. Second, as part of transition scenes like the change of seasons, the living and dead, or the wealthy and frugal. The last sentiment is significant - depictions of common bread survive on monuments only the wealthy could afford. Beyond rhetoric, this is a reminder that the poorer classes are largely unrepresented here.[12]

Kline-style tombs are exemplary of the way Rome's wealthy used the *panis quadratus* to reflect social stability and good character. These uniformly designed sarcophagi popular between the 1st century BCE and the 2nd century CE, depict a central reclining figure (usually the deceased) surrounded by examples of their familial and material wealth. The goods depicted are specific: A three-legged table sits in the foreground, whilst the deceased family and/or slaves stand crowded about in mourning (Figure 1). A round loaf sits atop the small table amongst other ritual items of importance. These include a variety of jugs, drinking horns, artichokes, mixed fruits and the occasional pigs head.[13] The items occur in different quantities and variations, but the

10 Waltzing 1895: 687-8; Davies 2000; Donahue 2004: 130-2, Soph. *Ant*.11. Bowden 2010: 43 and 109; Herod. *Hist.*2.47; Athenaeus. *Troj.*4.141e-F.

11 Douglas 1972: 61-81.

12 Tac. *Ann.*1.2.; Suet. *Aug.*76.; Petron. *Sat.*58; 62; and 69-70.

13 See also Urn of L. Roscius, 1st-2nd century CE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. Accession:4189. Note the small round loaf on the right of the table. Sarcophagus dedicated to Calpurnius Beryllus with inscription describing freedman status, 2nd century CE. Roller 2006: 32, Figure 32.

An unusual variant of a *kline*-style with a toppled breadbasket and exposed rosette styled loaves. 1st century BCE. Ostia marble yard.

bread is always present and notably unconsumed. Regardless of the scenes broader perspective, the *panis quadratus* is usually shown upscaled in plan. The round (sometimes layered) form scored into four, six or eight triangles makes the loaf identifiable, and differentiates it from other ritual objects such as the wheel or *patella* (Figure 2). The popularity of the *kline* tombs provided a demand for pre-carved 'off the shelf' coffins with only the face of the centre figure left unworked. The sarcophagus of Caecilius Vallianus (c.270 CE) exemplifies the argued importance of bread in these elite scenes (Figure 3). The lid-decoration reiterates the process described in *Moretum* to transform natural grain into round loaves. In this context the humility of Simylus seen in *Part 1* is lost. The friezes depictions of upper- and lower-class fayre being more akin to Juvenal's satire. The base design shows the deceased reclining with family gathered around, the slaves serving high status foods including opulent cubed honeycakes, exotic fish, drinks and poultry (possibly peacock). The contrast between this and the labour of common folk making bread in the frieze above is stark. These scenes could understandably lead the viewer to assume the deceased's wealth derived from success in the baking industry. Upon closer inspection however, clear re-sculpting can be seen on Caecilius' head, which is in fact, placed upon a distinctly biologically female body of an earlier style. Sculpture recycling was common, particularly after an unexpected death or in times of marble shortage, nonetheless the bread itself has remained an important symbol in distinguishing status here.[14] The bread is elevated, ignoring the rules of the otherwise profile perspective. This design may not reflect a choice of the deceased, it is significant the coffin designer wanted the identity of the loaves to be clearer than that of the more upmarket fayre. The more luxurious produce remains largely generic. Fish, cakes, and meats can be seen, but the exact nature of these items is open to interpretation (including my own given above). Irrespective of the sarcophagus' originally intended host, the creation, sale and consumption of bread was so synonymous with a broader message of status and stability, that whosoever lay inside could benefit from its symbolic messages.

14 Birk 2013: 139, Figure 74.

Figure 1: (left) An uninscribed kline-style urn showing, 1st century BCE. (Right) The tomb of Loculus showing skewed three-legged table with round loaf, 152-60 CE.

Figure 2: The urn of Hermeros showing a three-legged table (left) and elevated bread, 1st century CE.

Figure 3: (left) Sarcophagus of Caecilius Vallianus c.270 CE including round loaves and abundant breadbaskets see in detail (right).

Other Funerary Monuments

Cabochon styles with central portraits, doorways to the underworld, and celebratory hunters' feasts also incorporated bread in scenes of transformation

and success. On *clipieus* sarcophagi quartered breads are found framing the names of the deceased, often clearly differentiated from other fayres (Figure 4). Bread was also visually mirrored with food of the underworld, like the pomegranates of Proserpina. The positioning of these life and death foods on a tomb is not hard to decipher. What has gone underexamined, are the lengths taken to ensure these foods were differentiable. The breadbasket design (an interesting research topic in their own right) is distinctive – tall, ringed, thickly woven vessels. This aids the identification of bread as a product even when the image is small, eroded, and the roundels are stacked abundantly (Figure 5). This poignancy reiterates how the *panis quadratus* was not just an aesthetic of frugality, but a symbol with meaning to be recognised in a broader context. *Part 1* explored what these communications were, though the key themes of balance between nature, the gods, and mortals is found persistently across monuments. Figure 6, for example, shows a grape harvest from vines into baskets, and the pigéage. The symmetrical design highlights the transition and balance between opposing forces like life and death, changing seasons, hunting and agriculture, natural fruits and pressed wine, mortal men and immortal gods, sacrifice and reciprocity, wild (hare) and tame (dog), Juno and Jupiter, and even genres of comedy and tragedy; All opposed but connected forces. Loaves of bread appear in natural and processed forms. On the right, Cupid stands naked and winged. Between his feet, a single segmented loaf is raised, showing its quarters. The deity holds a basket in his right arm filled with fruits, and a dead rabbit or hare in his left hand. The rabbit can be seen running from a hunting dog in the centre of the lid, the latter of which now sits heeled on Cupid's right — a further play on the *dextrum* of strength and the *sinister* of provision discussed in *Part 1*. A breadbasket stands at Cupid's left foot, filled with small round balls, possibly of dough (Figure 6). These images twin those on the left of the sarcophagus base where an unwinged, clothed mortal man holds a dead bird in place of the rabbit. His left hand grasps a leafy branch, and a sacrificial lamb sits between his feet. By his right foot is the same type of breadbasket as Cupid's, both notably different in design from those carrying grapes. The mortal man's basket is filled with more identifiable bread-loaves, larger and segmented.[15] The plaque is un-engraved, but should a client have come along, the message of abundance and social stability was clear. When everyone played their role – the harvest was good.

15 Cic. *Pis.*27.; Tac. *Hist.*4.38.

Figure 4: The sarcophagus of a couple, showing loaves adorning the inscription, 2nd century CE.

Figure 5: A basket of pomegranates (left) and a basket of eroded quartered breads (right). Note that it is the right-hand providing life as in Part 1.

Figure 6: (left) Uninscribed sarcophagus showing bread baskets and loaves in a symmetrical scene of transformation and status, 3rd century CE.(Right) Detail of the bread doughs, loaves and baskets near the feet of Cupid and mortal.

As the son of Venus – goddess of unions and opposing forces – the inclusion of Cupid in scenes of abundance and loss is not inconsequential. Hunt-

ers' feasts on urns show groups of conversing men who, alongside Cupid, sit around a pig's head and loaves of bread. Like the *kline* and *clipieus,* the roundels are elevated (Figure 7). By gathering both archaeological and textual evidence, earlier interpretations of these roundels as cushions are now unconvincing. Practically speaking, the position of the loaf does not allow use for reclining. This is bolstered by guests in clearly defined seating areas, and literary records where Petronius explicitly identifies the important of bread and pigs' heads at feasts of hunters and philosophers.[16] In Figure 8 we see two Cupids about to wrestle on 1st century BCE urn from Ostia. Between the pair, sits an elevated, segmented loaf. Whilst the desire to assume this is a wheel of some sort is understandable, the cohesive scene provides a different translation. We see the themes of transition in the unprocessed wheat sheaf and baked loaf, and seasonal opposition in the blooming trees on the left and dead trunks on the right. In the foreground, a wreath of acorns (legacy and rebirth) is interwoven with pomegranate fruits of the underworld. The Cupids are perhaps not braced for combat, but instead, reflect each other.

Before moving forward, we must consider the longevity of these purposed themes. This paper only allows for a brief diversion, but it is important to ask whether the ideogram of Roman bread was successful at communicating allegories of balance and transformation to non-Roman audiences?

Figure 7: Urn fragment of hunting scene showing two loaves of bread either side a pig's head, 1st century BCE.

16 Petron. *Sat*.40.3.66. Apul. *Met*.6.11. See also: Hunters' scene showing pig's head and loaves of bread, on 1st century BCE catacomb of San Sebastian. Germanic Institute of Rome, Accession: 79.1797. Sarcophagus lid with hunters' feast of pig's head and bread, 1st century CE. Riksmuseum van Oudheden, Accession: Unstated.

Figure 8: Small funerary urn with two cupids, an ear of wheat and a loaf of bread, 1st century BCE.

Christians, Breadbaskets and Miracles in Stonework

The elevated quartered loaves and specifically designed breadbasket so frequently used in Roman designs became a symbol unto themselves in Christian scenes of charity and transformation.[17] On the Sarcophagus of Agape and Crescentianus (330-360 CE) the commemorated are depicted centrally, whilst the rest of the tomb is divided into upper and lower friezes. Atop, Jesus Christ preforms miracles amidst sickness, death and mourning. Below, circular quartered loaves are handed of from breadbaskets in scenes of abundance and life.[18] On a variety of monuments as late as the 4th century CE, disciples were depicted as learned men in scenes identical to Hunters' feasts, and stacked of round quartered loaves show miraculous abundance whilst cherubs akin to Cupid preformed deeds of charity.[19] Whilst the societal context has changed, the potency of the quartered loaf as an icon of abundance and societal balance remains. The breads appear in Christian scenes of transition and are also exaggerated for identification. As the Romans adapted earlier symbols for their own ideograms, so too did Christianity develop the *panis quadratus* for the new world.

17 Apul. *Met.*4.7-8.

18 Vatician Museum Accession: 941.

19 Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14. See also: Christian sarcophagus, 2nd century CE. Vatican Museum Accession: 941.

Figure 9: 4th century CE urn of unknown occupant, adorned with a Christian adaptation of a Roman Hunters' feast. Vatican Museum Accession: Unstated.

Figure 10: Two urns of unknown persons showing stacks of quartered loaves in distinctive baskets amidst Christian disciples. 1st century CE (left) and 3rd century CE (right). Vatican Museum, Accessions: unstated.

Military Graves

It would be insufficient to assess the commonality of bread in grave decoration and not consider military stele. Burial monuments of conscripts offer rare glimpses of funerary communications beyond aristocracy. Bread was a key part of a Roman soldier's kitbag, with a daily ration of three pounds — significantly more than the average citizen.[20] The familiar emblem of the round

20 Davies 2000: 123.

quartered loaf appears on soldiers' urns and altars across Roman frontiers alongside wheels and weapons. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, a marble cinerary vessel celebrating military victory shows the spoils of war.[21] In the centre of the piece a stone archway frames a garlanded altar upon which, offerings are provided.[22] Amongst other (now indecipherable) votives, a round loaf of bread has miraculously survived the considerable damage of the piece. Some readers may challenge this view, reasonably arguing that this form is similar to the architectural *pulvinus*. Whilst I concede the commonality of the *pulvinus,* it must be admitted that the example is strikingly like the less refutable bread loaves in the aforementioned hunters' scenes, and whilst this example remains debatable, more convincing military altars emblazoned with the quartered circle are found as far away from Rome as Britannia. These monuments continue the themes already seen with Cupid and Proserpina, this time accompanied by Ceres, goddess of the harvest, and Nemesis goddess of justice and vengeance. Representing the balance between a good life and a glorious death, Nemesis was a particularly popular deity amongst military cultures of Rome. Scholars familiar with her attributes have understandably charged many rounded icons on Nemisonian stele as chariot wheels. Like earlier examples however, artistic measures were taken to ensure the loaves were distinguished from other tropes. Additional adornments of poppy seeds, lower rings of bread (caused by stringing before baking), and large wheat sheafs differentiate these icons from the goddess' chariot wheel which on explicit examples appears in tandem (Figure 11). Notably this is repeated on both Nemesonian and non-Nemesonian stele. But surely if Roman bread were as potent a symbol as this paper argues, we should also see its use in place of the Greek seed of life? In fact, on military altars and stele we do see cohesion in Greek and Roman funerary design. *Cippi* covered in Greek scripts are sometimes adapted for Greco-Romano audiences, where in place of the seed of life, there is a round segmented circle held up by boughs of wheat ears. Residue analysis of one example found in a tomb with three similar pillars and remnants of glass objects, suggested use in fine dining, possibly of a family group.[23]

21 Accession: 2002.297.

22 Flower 2017: 69-71.

23 Hermary & Mertens 2015: 380. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Accession: 4.51.2267. Limestone cippus of Artemidoros, 2nd–3rd century CE.MMA, Accession: 74.51.2267.

It isn't clear if it was a funerary feast, but the connection between the living, the dead, and the bread remains.

Figure 11: (left) Redstone altar to Nemesis, Chester, 1st century CE. Note the poppy seed indentations, addition of a lower bread rings, and remnants of a wheat sheaf (top right corner). (Centre) Military stele of Quintus Cornelius, 1st century CE, showing wheat sheafs and loaves of bread distinct from the wheel above. (Right) Military stele of Quintus Vibius Secundus, 1st century CE.

Altars and Graffiti

The final integration of the segmented loaf on Roman stone memorials is found on altars. The emblem is widespread and largely mimics the style used on elite sarcophagi, urns and military stele. Roman altars at Timgad to altars for Saturn, Venus and Jupiter provide clear depictions of the *panis quadratus* in a ritualistic setting. The loaves appear on engraved tables permanently set for ancestral commemoration (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Altars in Timgad, 1st century CE.

Similarly, underneath San Martino ai Monti, an altar has different sized round segmeånted loaves engraved into its sides (Figure 13). The identification of the bread is compounded here by upper moulding forms of wheat bushels, and a plateau topped with a mill stone sigil. The original context of the altar is unknown due to its reuse in the foundations of a medieval wall, but the size suggests a private dedicatory altar perhaps for Ceres or a similar deity of harvest.

Figure 13: Travertine altar reused as part of a medieval wall underneath San Martino ai Monti, 1st century BCE.

The etching of bread loaves is, perhaps unsurprisingly now, also found in larger, public areas of Roman ceremony. On Quirinal Hill lay the remains of an altar to Nero erected after the fire of 56 CE, one of three so far discovered in the arae incendii Neronian.[24] These large ceremonial areas hosted festivals and sacrifices to Vulcan (god of fire) for his protection. The organic nature of insula buildings and the dangers of high-heat ovens made bakeries especially susceptible to catching alight, and perhaps goes some way to explain why several loaf-like carvings are found on the pediment (Figure 14). Whether placemarks for votives or as permanent offerings themselves, their uniformity suggests deliberate intaglio rather than idle scribbling. Perhaps in casting *panis quadratus* into Vulcan's altars, the peoples of Rome hoped to supplicate the god whose fire simultaneously gave and took away their lives. It should be noted that similar icons are found in common street slabs as far away as Jerusalem and Ephesus. These scored rounds could of course represent game boards, but nonetheless, the quartered circle shows its potency in Roman culture.

24 Tac. *Ann.*15.117.

Figure 14: (Top) Carved quartered bread on pediment of the arae incendii Neroniani, Quirinal Hill, 1st century CE. (Bottom left) Roman breads etched into the pavements at Lithostrotos,1st Century CE. (Bottom right) and Ephesus, 1st Century BCE.

This brief assessment of sarcophagi, urns and altars shows the communal use of a decorative emblem that was akin to the seed of life, and wheel of fortune, but through its thematic use across contexts, represented a very Roman experience. The *panis quadratus* was a fundamental element of funerary commemoration, across different communities of Roman society. As a symbol of cosmological stability, bread was not a passive element of decoration. But was the *panis quadratus* ideogram limited to realms of the dead?

3. The Living Bread: Status and Transformation in Domestic Decoration

As seen in the ancient literature in *Part 1*, bread was served on the tables of the elites and enslaved of Rome alike. In wealthy homes, images of food, musicians and nature appear in frescos and mosaics, most frequently on

walls and floors of the *triclinium* and *tablinum.* Roman bread, more distinctive in its painted form, remained a stalwart element in interior decoration throughout changing fashions.

Frugality, Ritual and Status

Like the geometric emblem on stone, the painted portraits of Roman loaves are round in form, scored, and elevated to show their recognisable features. Despite differing stylisations of these portraits, the theme of bread as rustic and humble fayre, is consistent. The loaves are purveyed in one of two manners. Firstly, as an accompaniment to another frugal product (for example wine or vegetable pottage). Secondly, as a ritual tool alongside sacrificial knives, meats, and libation jugs - a stark similarity to the *kline* monuments (Figures 15-16).[25] The frugal composition of bread scenes sets a rustic tone akin to breads found in *Part 1.* The bottles of oil, garlic, and herbs echo flavours added by Minerva and Simylus in *Moretum.* Similarly, the wine and sacrificial knives reverberate Pliny and Apuleius' medicinal rituals, and accompanying bowls of stew, *puls* or soups would suit even Juvenal's menu of moderation. These halcyon images contrast the active scenes found in more opulently decorated *domus*. The well-known painting of the bread seller for example, shows two men inspecting round loaves from the stall of either a merchant or dole distributer.[26] The latter sits upon a high platform, finely dressed and seemingly unpreturbed by the investigation. Different sizes of bread are stacked neatly in order, with the smallest loaves peaking out from breadbaskets similar to those in the earlier discussed sarcophogai friezes. Beneathe the most lavishly dressed man is a young boy, ragged and bare footed. He reaches upwards towards the analysed loaf - held firmly out of reach. Whether this painting represents the bread dole or a baker's stall the message of social statuses is clear. The artist echos Juvenal's concerns of societal balance from *Part 1,* the quartered loaf sitting firmly between the wealthy observers, receptive seller, and desperate pauper.

25 *Fishes and Asparagus Fresco,* Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. Accession Number: Not given.

26 Fresco of a bread seller or distributer of the bread dole, 1st century BCE. The Antiquarian Museum, Pompeii.

Figure 15: Round, segmented loaves from a fresco in the House of Julia Felix, Pompeii, 1st century CE.

Figure 16: Painted loaves from Pompeii, 1st century CE
Top row (right to left): Loaf and two bulbs of garlic. Loaf and jar of oil. Loaf and plate from the Atrium of the house of the Lovers. Bottom row: Libations of half a loaf, meat, wine and sacrificial knife, house 16, Regio IX, Insula V. A loaf and bowl of stew.

Elsewhere, depictions of bread are paired with drinking horns and *patera* such as those in *kline* scenes. Pompeii's House of the Vettii has a *lararium* fresco of a priest holding a loaf of bread in his right hand and an uniden-

tified box in his left. He stands between two house-gods, who dance with small baskets draped over one arm and hold high drinking horns with the other.[27] Dancing *lar* with a libation-attributes are not unusual, but the bread (assumed to be a *patera*) has largely been ignored. Upon closer inspection the priest holds the object at an angle where the scored quarters can clearly be seen. The emphasis on life and death, and the interplay between gods and mortals is also present with the snake at the bottom of the painting. This talismanic property of bread in ritual is similar to those described in *Part 1* by Pliny, and in the trials of Psyche. Incidentally, the potent connection between snakes and breadbaskets is another area which needs exploring, but is sadly beyond the remit of this paper.[28]

Christians, Breadbaskets and Miracles in Frescos

Like funerary monuments, Roman fresco scenes were adapted for later Christian works. From the 2nd century CE bread becomes further aligned with Christian mythologies, appearing in depictions of miracles, rituals, and charity. The emblem of the Roman segmented loaf persisted, providing the earliest versions of the *ichthys,* and still bearing some resemblance to the *chiro*. The Catacombs of Domitilla (c.360 CE) vividly illustrate this redirected symbolism (Figure 17).[29] As a refuge that bore witness to Christian services, meetings, and internments, the ceiling fresco (shaped similarly to a *panis quadratus),* shows saints, performed miracles, or sacred plants in each segment. Again, the mortal, the divine, and the natural are drawn together, with bread appearing in almost every section. The themes of life and death, transition, and social stability are all present as breadbaskets stacked with round loaves akin to those on Roman sarcophagi are handed out amidst the community.

27 Flower 2017: 116-22.

28 Waring (Forthcoming).

29 See also Wall painting of Eucharist blessing with a three-legged table, drinking horn and round loaf, Christian catacomb of San Callisto, 3rd century CE. (Above) Early circular Ichthys (ΙΧΘΥΣ), Ephesus, 3rd century CE. Red painted and etched Roman loaf in Sardis, with later addition of Christian lettering, 1st century BCE-1st CE.

Figure 17: Ceiling painting in the Catacombs of Domitilla, 4th century CE.

Domestic Mosaics: Subtle Symbolism

Frescos were often accompanied by mosaic floors which also included a range of bread-like motifs. Mosaic *panes* exhibit the same physical traits as their painted and textual partners: round loaves, browned and cut into wedges. They appear in both private and commercial dwellings, and in realistic and geometric forms. The latter tesserae depictions are not as straight-forward to interpret. Stylistic emblems of quartered circles require the broader context to be considered during interpretation. To illustrate, the Olynthos *triclinium* mosaic shows two forms of quartered circle in one of the villa's five mosaics (Figure 18). Upon closer inspection of the area plan and archaeology, these motifs decorate the reception rooms, and appear part of a wider aesthetic of *biga,* charioteering and Greek script. In this 4th century BCE context, the spoked circles in the northwest room are therefore more logically representative of the wheel of fortune. Further examples such as these have therefore, not been included. More inferable examples of geometric breads are available such as those is the House of the Drinking Contest, and the House of the Buffet Supper. The former covers the dining room floor, showing a central Dionysius dining with a dancer and a satyr. A variety of allegorical attributes sit in the foreground (including drinking vessels and a Herculean club), and the border is made of complex geometric symbols. Incorporated, are a variety

of small circles split into quarters. It is possible that these are purely geometric devices, many of which are seen in Roman art. What is significant is the dining contexts and their similarity in design to those found in the more convincing case of Pompeii's House of the Buffet Supper (Figure 19).[30] The mosaic uses fine colour portraits of loaves to mark out dining places of guests. The inclusion of the segmented loaves (both stacked and singular) denotes a permanency of the food at this table. Highlighting the common loaf in an exceedingly fine detailed (and expensive) mosaic like this is striking. Like earlier examples, the bread remains notably unconsumed and recognisable.

In waste mosaics popular between the 1st – 3rd centuries CE bread sits whole amongst refuse filled floors (Figure 20). Foods retain characteristic elements in their eaten forms, permanently exhibiting what the household (and its guests) could afford and choose not to eat. Almost all foods in waste mosaics were from opulent menus, with the exception of the *panis quadratus*. Despite stylistic variations and artistic license, these loaves appeared often and untouched - the unadulterated form once again ensuring the breads recognition.

Figure 18: Triclinium floor, Olynthos, 4th century BCE.

30 See also *Hippopotamus Hunt on the Nile*, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, 1st century CE, Accession: Not given. Diana and Actaeon, from *The House of Venus Procession*, Volubilis, Morocco, 1st century CE.

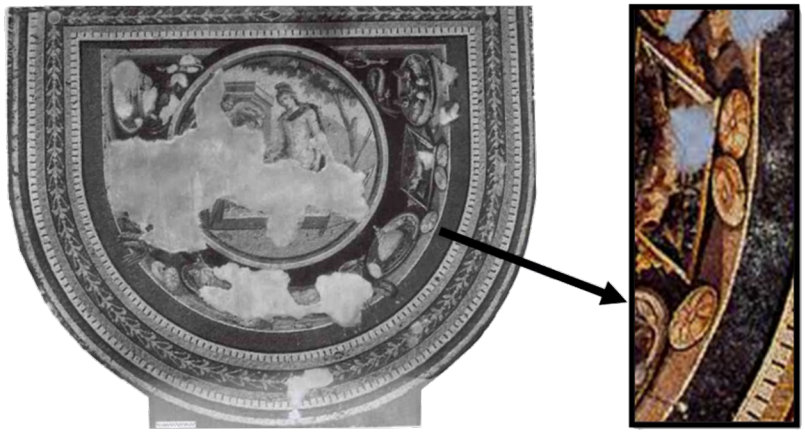

Figure 19: (Left) Mosaic from Antioch, c.200 CE. (Right) Close-up showing the colour and distinctive form of Roman loaves.

Figure 20: Waste-mosaic showing half eaten food from an opulent meal. The bread is whole.

Industrial Mosaics: Status and Transformation

The iconography of bread as a status symbol occurs beyond domestic decoration. Industrious locations including bakeries, meeting houses and merchants' shops, contain tesserae scenes of kneading, forming, and the baking of bread. Such mosaics have provided guidelines for archaeologists to identify work tools, tables, pans, moulds and ovens; Information comparable to archaeological remains at well-preserved sites such as *Ostia Antica* and Pompeii. The mosaic of the Roman Bread-oven Attendant shows the size, style, decoration, tools, heating methods, building materials, and use of local bread ovens (Figure 21). Any ambiguity of what is being baked is removed by the round quartered loaf sat on the edge of the oven's work surface. Similarly, the *forum conventibus* in *Ostia Antica* was occupied by merchants' shops whose floors were mosaicked with advertisements of available wares. The Hall of the Grain Measurers shows two men carrying grain sacks towards three others and a youth. The attire of the characters denotes differences in labourer/master status, whilst the border is adorned with possible bread emblems seen in earlier examples.[31] Similarly, the mosaic of the wine and bread merchants reflects a business lucrative enough to afford shiploads of loaves and amphorae, all of which are depicted in their entrance mosaic.[32] Centres of entertainment too show quartered puffy circles which are distinctly demarked from the seed of life and the shaded wheel of fortune (Figure 22). Like the themes of the funerary monuments and literary tropes, the symbols flitter amongst the natural, immortal, and mortal characters of the world. Whilst such mosaics are rarely preserved, from those that have survived, bread is a frequent character in the allegories and adornments of satirical decoration. The use of bread to depict good living, status, balance, and life and death is exemplified in the 3rd century BCE mosaic found in the Greco-Roman settlement at Antioch. With a motto of 'enjoy living' a skeleton sits *kline* style with an amphora of wine and two round, elevated and segmented loaves (Figure 23). It would seem that far beyond the tombs and tables of Rome, the *panis quadratus* had something to say.

31 Mosaic of the Hall of Grain Merchants, Ostia Antica, 2nd century CE.

32 Mosaic of the Wine and Bread Merchants, Ostia Antica, 2nd century CE.

Figure 21: Mosaic of Roman bread-oven attendant, 1st century CE.

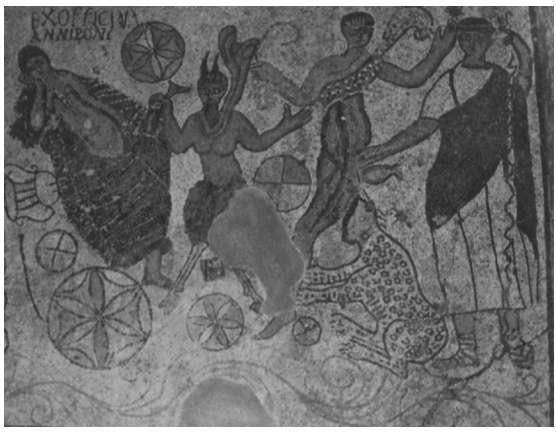

Figure 22: Mosaic of the Railway station of Mérida, published in Blanco Freijeiro (1978) 26-7, with Roman bread and Greek seed of life depicted together distinctively, 1st century BCE.

Figure 23: Roman mosaic showing a Greek motto, round loaves of bread, and a skeleton in the kline position, Antioch, 3rd century BCE.

Conclusion: Material Summery

Depicted in realistic, stylised, and geometric forms, images of the segmented loaf are found as commonly throughout Roman material culture as in literary counterparts. The communicative themes of hierarchy and frugality already seen in the literary genres of *Part 1*, continued across material commemorations in domestic, commercial, religious, and entertainment sectors of daily Roman life. The simple segmented loaf could invoke status (rich settings and frugal fayre), transition (as an active and decorative part of funerary rites) and social stability (as a product which controlled life and economy). Bread was a balancer of opposing forces, simultaneously used to feed and taunt the poor, a product to be judged and to serve judgement, a talisman to be gifted to or by the gods. In Roman material culture from Rome to Turkey the *panis quadratus* provided a communal symbol that was similar to existing icons, but represented very Roman constructs. It emblazoned the opposing elements of Roman life through nature, divinity, and mortality so potently, that its narratives can still be seen today.

Sung, Drawn and Quartered (Parts I & II): Concluding Thoughts

The mass production of bread advertised Rome's ability to provide high-quality sustenance for a growing populace. As an accessible food for all classes, bread was integral to the everyday life of ordinary ancient peoples, constitutionalising their existence. Modern scholarship on the methodological and quantitative analyses of the Roman grain economy, has addressed the sheer quantity of roundels produced in and beyond the city daily. Nonetheless, there has been a deficit of in-depth assessments on the symbolic relationship between the bread itself and those who consumed, sold and produced it. This paper has attempted to address this absence, by examining the symbolic portrayals of bread in material and literary cultures. As a communally understood emblem, the circular, segmented circle was an ideogram of the cosmological cohesion required to remain social stability. To fully understand the allegorical attributes of Roman bread this paper has for the first time, collectively confronted the literary and archaeological evidence of bread as an ideogram of this social cohesion. In the literature of *Part 1*, Roman bread was used to discuss the relationships between mortals, the gods and nature. Its circular form provided visuals and metaphor, whilst the environment in which it was produced and consumed reflected the authors' socio-political concerns. In the material culture of *Part 2*, the concept of the circular loaf as a balancer between opposing forces was exacerbated on funerary monuments, altars, and in graffiti. As a totem between the realms of the living and the dead, elite understandings of the rhetorical characteristics of bread as a frugal and wholesome food, were similarly reflected in the designs of frescos in wealthy dining areas. Mosaics in commercial and domestic settings depicted the same interplay between nature, mortals and the gods. In each scene of divine, community, elite, and theatrical dining bread appeared as a common denominator of status and social cohesion.

Collectively, these studies show the parabolic values of Roman bread were arguably more important to Roman culture than its dietetics. The segmented loaf baked for all echelons of Roman society was so integrated into daily life that it absorbed and influenced the social constructs of those who consumed it. Characterised as the food of the frugal and the end product of hard work, bread became a champion of the revered ideology of the Re-

publican pasts, elevating its status. As a complex and pluripotent symbol in Roman art, architecture and politics the daily quartered loaf participated in all aspects of Roman culture from the preparation of the dead to the opulence of the living. The round, quartered loaf adopted a similar form to other renowned symbols, its key elements presenting a very 'Roman' set of messages in a globally familiar way. This potency of the *panis quadratus* was recognised by Romans and rival communities alike – and as its story was sung by poets, drawn by artists, and quartered into stone, the *panis quadratus* outlived the Roman empire itself.

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