

**Beyond Romanization: The creolization of food.
A framework for the study of faunal remains from Roman sites.**

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The effects of the Roman conquest of Britain and the ensuing processes of Romanization have been studied for many years. The historical background to the development of the theory of Romanization has been widely discussed elsewhere (see Hingley 1996). Haverfield's (1906) treatment of the topic was a major landmark in this development. He considered that the Roman conquest was a 'good' thing as it brought civilisation to the 'natives' who, recognising the superiority of Roman culture, willingly embraced 'Roman-ness'. The theory of Romanization was further refined by Millett (1990) in *The Romanization of Britain*.

Millett (1990: 1) states that "the concept of acculturation is itself important as it removes us from the one-sided view of Romanization". However, in his five stages of acculturation, which describe the process by which all layers of society become more Romanized, he identifies the concept of 'progressive emulation', in which the lower orders of native societies, taking their lead from their own élites, aspired to 'things Roman' and thus spread Roman culture. Although the native élites may have had a 'community of interest' with the newly arrived Imperial authorities, this was not the case for the lower orders of society. Thus we need to open up different avenues for exploring the cultural fusion that resulted from the Roman conquest (Millett 1990), if we are to approach an understanding of the experiences of those other than the élites. This model, although trying to achieve a more complex view of Romanization by including the native elite, still does not allow for much input from the native lower orders, nor does it address the social complexities within native society at that time. Thus the problem with Millett's model is that it does not consider the possibility of covert acts of resistance lower down the social scale (Webster 1996). The weakness does not lie at the level of the native élites but at the level of the lower orders. The fact that Roman-style material culture was used by the lower orders of society does not mean that they whole-heartedly consented to the Roman occupation, or that they wished to become Roman. The assumption that underlies Millett's model is that cultural artefacts which to archaeologists look 'Roman' were perceived in the same way in the past. But need this be so? This paper will concern itself with looking at new approaches to culture change, especially relating to food, following the Roman conquest in Britain. It will aim to suggest methods of applying these new approaches to faunal remains, which will enable us to evolve a more subtle understanding of food in the Roman period.

The principal new approach employed here is that of 'creolization theory'. Creolization can be defined as follows: "The process of intermixing and cultural change that produces a creole society. It is not a product but a process incorporating aspects of both acculturation and interculturalization, the former referring...to the process of absorption of one culture by another; the latter to a more reciprocal

activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment each to each.” (Brathwaite 1971: 11).

This was first applied to archaeology through the study of the ways in which African-American culture emerged on slave plantations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The concept of a ‘creole culture’ is best illustrated in Ferguson’s seminal work *Uncommon Ground* (1992). This work applies the linguistic concepts devised by Joyner (1984) to describe the creolizing process to archaeological sites in the form of slave plantations and other slave communities. In this model, artefacts are part of the ‘lexicon’ of culture, while the ways they are made, used and perceived are part of the ‘grammar’ or ‘structure’ of the language of material culture. Thus creolization focuses on how artefacts were used and perceived, not merely as isolated items but as part of a whole, and how this whole fitted into everyday relationships between natives and élites and between élites and the administration.

Within developing ‘creole cultures’, change can take place in superficial features, in the underlying structure or in both of these combined. For example, slaves on plantations were eating from glazed and decorated English bowls, whereas the planters’ families were using plates (Ferguson 1992). Therefore, whilst the artefacts (lexicon) of slave meals, like those of the planters, were European, the foodways of the slaves reflected African practices (Ferguson 1992). Such a model can be easily adapted to archaeological artefacts and processes. An example of how this could be applied to Romano-British culture is provided by the study of food vessels used, and how food was eaten and served. It would seem that on many sites bowls were common, but, these were often larger, communal bowls rather than the smaller, individual bowls as was the Roman fashion (Okun 1989). Creolization as a model for interpretation allows the subjected people the ability to accept or reject in part the package of Roman material culture which was available to them

Cultures need not be commonly known as ‘Creole’ cultures for an analysis of creolization to be applicable (Ferguson 1992; Webster 1996). To begin applying this to Roman Britain we need first to connect the artefacts with the people. Fragments of pottery, outlines of houses and the remains of meals represent a past material world that not only provided tools for cooking and shelter, but also served as symbols that reinforced people’s view of themselves as cultural beings (Deetz 1996). The use of material culture in the construction of identity in Roman Britain can be approached through foodways.

Food, and in particular the archaeological remains of food, convey important messages about people in the past. Archaeologists have often focused on how food was obtained and how it fitted into the economy. However, less attention has been paid to the cultural meaning of its consumption or its preparation. Although an understanding of food production and supply is valid, focusing solely on the economic side (which has often been the case) removes the people and their daily lives from the picture. Therefore we need to get beyond species proportions and quantified data to look at what all this food actually meant. As has been suggested above, creolization is an ideal interpretative tool for such a study.

Now we will focus on how animal bone assemblages have been seen in the past. Zooarchaeologists who have analysed faunal remains from the Roman period point out that the most distinctly observable trend is a decrease in the number of sheep bones, relative to the two other main domestic animals, pig and cattle (King 1978; Grant 1989). King (1978) states that the more 'Romanized' deposits, namely from villas, roadside settlements, towns and forts, tend to favour sheep less than the native sites, which continue to show the Iron Age pattern of consumption. He also states that the earliest military sites follow the pattern of native sites, thus demonstrating their reliance on the available local food sources at that time (King 1984). The broader change, away from a sheep dominated diet to one characterized by cattle (and to a lesser extent pig) is ascribed to the influence of incoming troops originating in Gaul and Germany, particularly the Rhineland. The main catalyst for this change, however, has been attributed to the spirit of emulation amongst the indigenous tribal aristocracies, as postulated by Millett's (1990) model of progressive emulation. This is demonstrated in particular by evidence relating to the consumption of pork. Pig bones are particularly common on high status 'Romanized' sites, such as Fishbourne palace. That pig (and pork) was a high status meat can be seen in the cookbook attributed to Apicius *De re coquinaria*, where most of the meat dishes are based on pork, and it is likely that such a written work could only be read by those of relatively 'élite' status. The occurrence of pig remains on high-status sites has been used, therefore, to support the view that native élites readily adopted a Roman-style dietary pattern (King 1978).

In this way we have identified what was eaten, but we have not satisfactorily explained why and how this change occurred. Many assemblages of animal bones have thus been seen in the theoretical light of Millett's acculturative Romanization model. Therefore, at the time of the Roman conquest people were still eating their Iron Age food, whereas as the Roman influence increased over time they began to eat a more Roman diet. However, in the previous sections the problems with this model have been outlined.

The way to get beyond a mere economic approach is to utilise the quantitative data generated from a bone report to construct a more sophisticated and theoretically-informed approach, 'creolization' being but one of the possible frameworks. This will allow us to ask a number of questions of the faunal remains. How did food habits change during this period? Were different foods consumed or were dishes merely prepared in different ways? What was the importance of imported flavourings and ingredients, such as garum and olive oil? Were there changes in butchery practices, and in general patterns of consumption? These questions can be addressed in the archaeological record by focusing faunal analysis on a range of variables. In addition to looking directly for evidence of butchery practices, we can measure fragment size, and therefore investigate joint size and method of cooking. The representation of different skeletal elements might indicate which parts were favoured for food. Finally, the context of deposition begs further questions - were deposits structured in particular ways or located in specific areas of the site? Were specific remains associated with each other? Exploration of all of these aspects of the data can generate more comprehensive accounts of cultural change.

The role of ceramics and other relevant archaeological material such as archaeobotanical remains will also help to inform a study focusing on the social context of eating and of food preparation. The size and form, as well as the fabric of vessels, tied in with results from the kind of faunal analysis discussed above, will help to elucidate the role of pottery in the preparation, cooking, serving and eating of food on different sites. It will also ultimately allow a sophisticated study of status differentiation and of regional variations. The Roman conquest did not see 'Britons' become 'Roman' nor 'Romans' become 'Britons', but it did see the creation of new cultural entities, created through the fusion of distinct cultures in a context of unequal power relations. Native society was more complex and heterogeneous than terms like 'native' and 'Roman' imply; they are merely convenient labels and in no way infer cultural homogeneity. In the same way it is necessary to get beyond the superficial assumption that just because 'Roman' material culture (including foodways) is prevalent on most sites, it was always made, used or perceived as 'Roman'.

An essential concept in the study of the creolization of foodways is that the utensils used to prepare and consume food and drink should not be separated from the food and drink itself. Ceramics are normally studied separately from faunal or botanical remains in current archaeological practice, and there is little interaction between these specialisms. However, when these studies are combined, a more holistic picture of food consumption emerges. Very little new data is needed for such work, rather, what is desperately needed is a new approach to the data, one which allows native society as a whole (and not just the elites) a voice and allows for their input into the creation of the 'creole', 'Romano-British' culture. This was the outcome of a colonial negotiation, and the natives may have had little choice but to adopt the trappings of Roman-style material culture (Cooper 1996). Yet when looking at such artefacts in the light of creolization theory an alternative discourse emerges. For example, Black Burnished Ware One (BB1), a coarse ware in production through most of the Roman period, was an actual continuation of an Iron Age tradition of hand made pottery, even though it was made in 'Roman' forms. Many local wares that are grog-tempered (an Iron Age fabric), but in 'Roman' forms could also be evidence for the process of 'creolization'.

Further afield in Gaul, Okun (1989) conducted a study of diet and culinary practices in the Upper Rhine area during the early Roman period. This established that, although there was a marked increase in the consumption of pork, and the arrival of new pottery forms such as mortaria, new ingredients and new preparation methods, this took place alongside continuity of use of cooking pots and hearth types from the preceding La Tène period (Okun 1989). There is also considerable evidence to suggest that Roman-like serving ware was commonly used. Nevertheless, the Roman fashion of using individual bowls for each dish was not adopted; instead there was a tendency towards employing larger, communal serving vessels (Okun 1989). Meadows has interpreted these examples in the light of the acculturative Romanization model (1994). However, this situation is open to an alternative interpretation using the creolization model. Native practices continued and new

ingredients were adopted. What was cooked and eaten was a 'fusion'; neither wholly Roman nor wholly native.

Another example of the creolization of food comes from Stonea, on one of the Central Fen islands in the Cambridgeshire Fenland. It sits in a landscape which in many ways can be seen as creolized, where architectural traditions and displays of wealth are a fusion of two distinct cultures (Fincham forthcoming). The faunal assemblage contains an over-representation of heads (especially sheeps' heads), and a general dominance of sheep bones (Stallibrass 1996). However, Roman ingredients such as olive oil, garum and wine were also present on the site, represented by the presence of various types of amphorae associated with such goods (Jackson and Potter 1996). Thus the food consumed at Stonea may have been a fusion of sheep meat with Mediterranean ingredients.

There is also evidence for the continuation of Iron Age traditions of butchery into the early Roman period. At Sheepen (Luff 1982), near Colchester, heads and joints have been found that were butchered in an Iron Age manner, i.e. the ligaments had been cut with a sharp knife thus leaving very few marks on the bone. This contrasts with the 'Roman' tradition of butchery, which involved hacking the joints of bones off and simply preserving the shaft (Grant 1989). This latter method also leaves more archaeological traces, thus possibly providing a biasing factor in bone assemblages.

This paper can conclude that to obtain a holistic picture of what food actually meant in the past we must study not only the animal bones but also the artefacts associated with the preparation and consumption of food. A second point is that creolization rather than Romanization allows for native input in the shaping of new cultural entities. It takes account of the myriad different responses people had to the Roman Conquest and allows us to focus, not on the process itself, but people's daily lives.

Although these are only preliminary elements in a broader programme of research to be conducted by the author, they clearly illustrate that a new approach is needed. Such an approach will bridge the divide between what has been traditionally regarded as 'environmental archaeology', and social theory, which has already been applied in many other aspects of the Roman period, such as religion (Webster 1996), ceramics (Cooper 1996) and landscapes (Fincham, forthcoming). It will also give us a more nuanced and subtle reading of the material culture of Britain at this time, one that takes account of native voices.

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