

GASTEREA: Digital Diachronic Thesaurus of Latin Food Words and their Heritage in European Languages

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Our international lexicographical project is set to assemble all classical Latin culinary words of surviving texts to create the first Digital Diachronic Thesaurus of Latin Food Words and their Heritage in European Languages in history, an interactive searchable database structure of culinary contexts for exploring the history of the culinary words of antiquity and their reception from the Middle Ages and Renaissance up to the present. Each classical Latin word describing food is to be supported by its etymology when possible—with relevant quotations in Ancient Greek for Ancient Greek loanwords—and, if that particular word has progeny in other old and modern, especially Romance European languages, it will be provided with links to derivatives and appropriate contexts. We will also strive to cover the majority of Medieval Latin food words in the same way during the second stage of the project.

The project is in its initial stage now but we would like to show our colleagues the preliminary digital structure of the Thesaurus that allows the display of the historical chains of shifting lexical forms—including dialectal when possible—and their meanings. Every food context in the chain would be provided with a translation and a short commentary in English and in Italian describing its historical, anthropological, cultural and culinary peculiarities. This frontier, interdisciplinary project covers the whole history of European languages and literatures. It should be able to bring to light the varied typology of European culinary vocabulary—something nobody has done before—and, at the same time, help to preserve the rich culinary heritage and diversity of European countries. We hope it becomes an invaluable tool for many Classical, Medieval and Renaissance scholars and other researchers engaged in Language, History, Food Studies and so on.

Our lexicographical project GASTEREA¹: “Digital Diachronic Thesaurus of Latin Food Words and their Heritage in European Languages” is conceived as an interactive online searchable database structure of culinary contexts intended for Classical, Medieval and Renaissance scholars and researchers in the fields of Language, History, and Food Studies.

A significant number of Latin food words were mistranslated in the past due to the lack of scholarly interest in this seemingly humble field. Nevertheless, Latin language possesses a well-developed system of culinary terminology that deserves a separate analysis *in toto*.

Our project has two main goals, closely knit together. The first consists in creating a list of all Classical Latin culinary words by combing surviving texts. The results are to be distributed into three main groups and researched according the group order:

¹ The project is called GASTEREA after Brillat-Savarin’s Muse of culinary art, in our opinion the name combines notions of Classical Antiquity and Food History and symbolizes the inevitable twist of word form and meaning that occurs with the passage of time—if Brillat-Savarin followed original Classical rules he should have spelled “Gastrea” in his *Physiology of Taste*.

- 1) names of foods, food products and dishes,
- 2) verbs for kitchen activities,
- 3) names of cooking utensils.

Both literary texts and inscriptions (up to Saint Isidore of Seville and 7th century CE) will be processed by our research team, contexts for each word will be provided in every Thesaurus article. Each Classical Latin food word in the Thesaurus is also to be supplied with its etymology whenever possible (with relevant quotations in Ancient Greek for Ancient Greek loanwords) and a bilingual translation into English and Italian. The contexts will be fully referenced and accompanied with linguistic, anthropological, historical and culinary commentary in both languages. This is a fixed-term goal that can be reached in five years after our research team obtains the necessary funding for the Thesaurus project.

The other goal is of a more innovative and experimental kind. It concerns reception of the Classical Latin food words from the collected list in European, especially Romance languages through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance up to the present times. In fact, we have already traced derivation links for many an obscure Classical Latin food word. However, at the first stage of our project we will be displaying in the database only such derivatives that are used as names for cooked dishes. They will be collected with their appropriate contexts in whichever language or dialect they are found (both in the written and oral traditions) and accompanied with detailed interdisciplinary commentary.

Some entries in the Thesaurus will look straightforward, for example grape must cake *mustaceus* of Cato the Elder (Agr. 121) and Cicero (Att. 5.20.4) has survived both in Italian language and Italian tradition. It is presented as *mostacciolo* in *Nuovo Vocabolario Illustrato della Lingua Italiana*, G.Devoto e G.C.Oli, Selezione dal Reader's Digest 1992, p. 1927. It is also known as *mustazzuolo* in Calabria, *mustazzuelo* in Apulia, *mustazzola* on Sicily and so on according to *L'Italia dei Dolci*, Slow Food Editore 2003, p. 52 and other sources. Of course in many regions of Italy—as results of field research² conducted by the principle investigator of the project show—grape must of Classical Antiquity has been replaced by chocolate, and other important changes in this cake's typology have occurred. Such evolution will be represented in the Thesaurus in all these interlinked forms with the variety of recipes and quotations available. But in the majority of cases the history of the food words and food concepts' development is much more convoluted, full of unexpected turns and unexplainable hapax legomena that considerably complicate its presentation.

One of the most difficult things that our team hopes to capture and display in the Thesaurus is the similarity of culinary ideas that bear different names and have no onomastic relationship whatsoever. It is another, additional purpose of our project to represent not solely the domain of language, but the knowledge of the world as well, in other words to combine lexicographic approach with that of an encyclopedia. The theoretical model elaborated for creating dictionary entries chooses only those properties of a definition that will distinguish the concept from all others. But it takes properties that Kant used to call analytical for the judgment *a priori* from which the concept might be derived from the definition of subject (Kant, I. ((1781) 1929). *Critique of Pure Reason*. New York: St. Martin's Press). And, naturally for the project embracing Classical Antiquity, we trace this idea back to Aristotle according to whom even if every attribute of a definition could be applied to other subjects as well, however, in whole, as a group of attributes, a definition is applicable only to one subject (Aristotle, *Analytica Posteriora*, II 3, 96a 35), which is in line with modern cognitive theory³.

² Alexandra Grigorieva won Geoffrey Roberts Award in 2004 and Julia Child Research Fellowship in 2005 and traveled to Italy and France respectively collecting traditional local food words and recipes.

³ Caramazza, A.; Hillis, A.; Leek, E.C.; Miozzo, M. (1994) "The organization of lexical knowledge in the brain: Evidence from category—and modality—specific deficits", in Hirschfeld, L. A.; Gelman, S.A. (eds.). *Mapping the mind: Domain specificity in cognition and culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

So when Latin food words that haven't apparently produced any derivatives in Italian seem to describe foods that are remarkably similar in typology to those of modern Italy we are going to display it in the Thesaurus. For example a dish named *omentata* in a late Roman recipe (Apicius 2.1.4), a pork liver patty cooked wrapped in bay leaf and fatty caul, is very close to the present day *fegatello* of Tuscany (Devoto e Oli, p. 1136, *La Toscana dei Sapori*, Salone del Gusto, Torino 24-28 ottobre 2002). Bread salad *sala cattabia* (Apicius 4.1.1-4.1.3) soaked with vinegar and olive oil could be the forerunner of *panzanella* (Devoto e Oli p. 2162, Butazzi G. (1989), *La Cucina delle Regioni d'Italia: Toscana*, Edizioni Mida, Bologna) of the same region. So in the former case the two food words will be linked with the concept of caul-wrapped food, bay leaf-wrapped food and liver-based food whereas in the latter case the concept of soaked bread will link the Latin and the Italian word together.

This is why we have planned two kinds of links to achieve maximum clarity: both onomastic and semantic ones. In this way common culinary typology of certain dishes even with unrelated names will be brought to light. And of course the only way such complex intertwined structure can exist and be comprehensible is a digital form. Thesaurus entries overloaded with references and contexts are much more effectively displayed digitally than in any printed version, and the distinctive feature of GASTEREA project is the sheer volume of data that has to be processed, hence the inevitable need for an updatable online database for the project investigating *inter alia* the genesis and subsequent development of European culinary vocabulary.

We are currently experimenting with several kinds of software that could allow us to display all the information we collect in a clear and user-friendly manner, and we hope to demonstrate results of our research to our colleagues at the Congress and to hear their valuable opinions. And although at the first stage of our project we plan to work more with Italian and French material we would be delighted to have on board lexicographers specializing in Catalan, Spanish and Portuguese and would be happy to discuss possible collaboration once necessary funding for the project is obtained.

Still at first we'll be concentrating more on Italian and various dialects of Italy, attempting (another experiment) to investigate the current system of dish naming in Italian culinary terminology and to collect as many words as possible, even those that do not go back to the time of Ancient Rome. This could allow us to compare and analyze two naming systems, that of Classical Latin and that of Italian. Relevant French connections will be included too: knowledge of France and its historic influence is vital for the understanding of development of modern Italian culinary vocabulary, or as Alberto Cappatti and Massimo Montanari elegantly put it: "Scoprire dietro un dolce alla sciantile la crème Chantilly è opera da filologo" ("to discover whipped cream Chantilly in Italian dolce alla sciantile is a philologist's job" in *La Cucina italiana. Storia di una cultura*, Laterza 1999, p. 236.).

After all we also aim to investigate the semantic and the onomastic culinary continuum of Europe that shifts shapes from language to language and from century to century almost imperceptibly changing with every shift. So the boundaries we have delineated for the first stage of our project are purely arbitrary but strictly necessary to regulate the amount of work that could be done at the same time. As the result of the first stage of our project we hope to have a complete Thesaurus of Classical Latin food words and a nucleus Thesaurus of Italian food words both displaying many links to other European languages.

During the second stage of the project we will strive to cover Medieval Latin food words (30 times more texts than in Classical Latin, the majority of these being unpublished) and work with the Romance languages that haven't been hitherto covered, at the same time venturing into non-Romance language territory (e.g. Greek). And so it could slowly go on from language to language: a research of culinary onomastic practices combined with displaying of European

Press; Eco, U. (2007). *Dall'albero al labirinto. Studi storici sul segno e l'interpretazione*. Milano (pp. 13–15): Bompiani; Malt, B.C. (1994). "Water is not H₂O". *Cognitive Psychology* 27 (p. 41-70) and so on.

culinary semantic typology. It is also during the second stage that we plan to move on to words for kitchen activities and cooking utensils.

Even after the completion of the first stage only GASTEREA project could become a unique interdisciplinary research tool for scholars of Humanities all over the world due to the scarcity of research in our chosen field. Food studies are a recent discipline in any case but most of food-related research in the Humanities has been done mostly in the Food History field by such prominent scholars as Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, whereas food words have rarely been the focus of serious scholars' attention.

For example the only finalized attempt focused on Latin food words (again, among other things) was made by Dr. Andrew Dalby in his *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London, Routledge, 2003), but he himself acknowledges that due to the popular format of the book it is less than complete and doesn't include sufficient data. As for Emily Gowers' *The Loaded Table* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), subtitled *Representations of Food in Roman Literature*, it covers the symbolic and the moral aspects of Roman Food Culture, whereas our project is targeted to reveal the linguistic and cultural ropes behind the food words used in Roman Antiquity and to open up a new dimension of the language of Latin literature and its reception into Romance and other European languages.

How our project compares with other current projects in roughly the same field? As far as we know the future project of Naples University: *Atlante Generale dell' Alimentazione Mediterranea* (AGAM) if we can judge it by its presentation⁴ is not supposed to analyze culinary terminology of any language in its entirety and provide all possible contexts for every food word, so although our research areas cross in some aspects the results will still be very different, not to mention that AGAM is notoriously slow and isn't going to produce any accessible results for quite a while yet.

Lessico Etimologico Italiano (LEI) and *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini* (TLIO) are incredible minute works but very far from completion and parsimonious of quotations. They are also not particularly easy to use for a person without lexicographic background in the field. We are including dialectal words into our Thesaurus but we want to accompany every one of them with dated quotations with translations – so that it would become more user-friendly. On the other hand we will spell dialectal words in the quotations themselves in the traditional academic way, so our Thesaurus will have two basic interface layers: a user-friendly one before the hyperlinks and specialist one after them (this also concerns Greek and other non-Latin characters). And of course our project, being a specialized will hopefully be much more compact, coherent and easy to navigate.

In fact, beside the complete Thesaurus of Latin Food Words, our project will call into existence a unique online network of commented food word thesauri that preserve European culinary heritage and bring to light the typology of European culinary vocabulary. Any researcher or even a lay person with an interest in cookery and culinary history will be able to use this tool to look up words in any number of European languages he or she is interested in and track down the history of any food word of Latin origin.

Of course these are early days yet but we really like to think that with time and effort GASTEREA project could ultimately incorporate all food words of all European languages, interconnected with thousands of links in a regularly updated hypertext database, both diachronic and synchronic and evolve into a *pan-European thesaurus of food words*, with all languages of Europe⁵ equally represented and researchable.

⁴ General Atlas of Mediterranean Eating, see Domenico Silvestri. *Saperi e sapori mediterranei. La cultura dell'alimentazione e i suoi riflessi linguistici*. In *Semiofood, Comunicazione e cultura del cibo*. Centro Scientifico Editore, Torino, 2006.

⁵ And even some non-European ones, but those that have at any time influenced the development of European languages, such as Arabic and so on.

Here's an example of what an entry of our Thesaurus is supposed to include. We are sorry that we are not displaying onomastic and semantic links and quotations in full here and are presenting only the English version, withholding the Italian one. All this would have cluttered the printed text too much and made it unreadable. You can look up the omitted parts of *SFONGIA* article at www.gasterea-thesaurus.com/latin/sfongia:

SFONGIA (ova) f - resembling a sponge in texture, word applied to an egg dish, a kind of omelet made with milk, fried on one side in oil and served with honey and black pepper as one of the rare “home-made sweet treats”, *dulcia domestica* (Apicius 7.11, 8 recipes) as opposed to the more usual ones provided not by the cook but by the professional baker (cf. Iudicium coqui et pistoris and other sources).

Text:

I-IV CE

Ova *sfongia* ex lacte: ova quattuor, lactis heminam, olei unciam in se dissolvit, ita ut unum corpus facias. in patellam subtilem adicies olei modicum, facies ut bulliat, et adicies impensam quam parasti. una parte cum fuerit coctum, in disco vertes, melle perfundis, piper adspargis et inferes. Apicius 7.11.8

EN *Sponge* eggs with milk: mix together until homogenous 4 eggs, half a pint (0.269 l) of milk, an ounce of olive oil. Pour a little oil on a thin-bottomed pan, make it sizzle and add the mixture you've prepared. When one side is done, invert on a serving dish, pour some honey over, sprinkle with black pepper and serve.

Semantically related Latin quotations

the only sponge metaphor applied for a food description in Classical Latin

I *spongia* LAT Ancient Rome Martialis

Picenum bread gets bigger with wine as a light sponge inflates with water EN

Onomastically related Latin quotations

“sponge” bread

VII *sfungia/spungia* LAT Medieval Spain Isidorus Hispalensis

well-leavened moist bread EN

culinary usage of the verb “to sponge”

I-IV *sfongio/sfungio/isfongio/fongizo* LAT Ancient Rome Apicius

remove unwanted liquid from food with a sponge EN

Etymology:

Latin word *spongia* “a sponge” was used since the time of Cato the Elder (II century BCE), and derived from the Greek word *spoggiá* (σπογγία) of the same meaning. Manuscript *sfongia* of Apicius is a hapax legomenon but we suspect that, as is the case with many other culinary words, it might have been borrowed directly from Greek usage and not from Latin, especially as later Greek terms for omelets show the same replacement of “sp” by “sf” in the beginning of the word – something that didn't happen to the word *spongia* in later Latin and Romance languages – whereas even demotic Modern Greek word for “sponge” now is

σφογγῆσι with an initial “sf-“. The relatively “foreign” nature of the noun *sfongia* would also seem to be a plausible explanation for its use in paratactic combination of plural and singular – normally ungrammatical for Latin – with the noun *ova* (*pl.*) in the text of Apicius who gives us “*ova sfongia*” (σφογγῆσι).

Derivation:

It seems reasonably clear that *sfongia* is the forerunner of Byzantine noun *sfouggaton* “sfungaton” and Modern Greek noun *sfouggato* “sfungato”, both denoting baked omelets (see the timeline and geographical distribution). This word probably was a part of Greco-Roman culinary koine during Late Antiquity, and, when Greek language finally adopted it for its own, it acquired the popular Latin culinary word suffix *-āt-*, meaning usually “with the addition of”, “having the properties of” and thus especially prone to substantivization. The loss of *-i-* before *-āt-* is unproblematic: many late Greco-Roman food words that had initial variation of forms with *-i-* suffix and without it formed *-āt-* derivatives from stems without the *-i-* suffix: cf. citron wine, wormwood and so “sponge dish” with “p” becoming aspirated after “s” and “o” becoming “u” in the Late Antiquity.

Another proof of this process is the later *sfungia* quotation of Isidore of Seville where the word is applied to a well-leavened moist bread. This word probably was the efficient forerunner (cf. Du Cange entries *sfungia* and *ifungia*) of other later bread names connected to the “sponge” concept, such as Sicilian *sfincia/sfincio* and *sfincione/sfingiune*, although the usage of *sfincione* in the province of Trapani seems to indicate some kind of “sponge egg” connection.

There is also no doubt that deriving these Sicilian words from Arabic *isfanġ*, as some dictionaries do (cf. *Dizionario Etimologico dei Dialetti Italiani* (DEDI), Cortelazzo M., Marcato C., Torino, Libreria UTET, 1992), is putting the cart before the horse: this Arabic word is itself a borrowing from Late Antiquity Greek and means just a “sea sponge”, a marine creature with nothing culinary about it at all (as the scholars of Arabic have told us). In all probability, Sicilians enjoyed their sponge bread (baked and fried) long before the Arabic invasion.

As far as we can see the “sponge egg” food names and “sponge bread” food names coexisted as two different branches that only ever overlap in the present-day West of Sicily. As for Renaissance *spogata* of Northern Italy, fin-de-siècle aristocratic Italian *spugnato* punch and contemporary English *sponge-cake* words, they should rather be treated as independent forms (due to “spongy” nature of objects they denote), unrelated to the phonetically similar Late Antiquity and Greco-Roman culinary words.

SFONGIA: food names related to “sponge” concept, timeline:

CE

I spongia LAT Ancient Rome Martialis

Picenum bread gets bigger with wine as a light sponge inflates with water EN

:

I-IV *SFONGIA* ova LAT Ancient Rome Apicius

omelet with honey and pepper EN

VII *sfungia/spungia* LAT Medieval Spain Isidorus Hispalensis

well-leavened moist bread EN

- XII diplosfougaton GR Byzantium Prodromus
omelet with vegetables EN
- XV spongata LAT North of Italy document 1454
festive cake for duke Francesco Sforza EN
- XVI sfougaton GR Byzantium Damascenus Studites
omelet EN
- XVIII sponge EN England Hannah Glasse 1747
leavened bread dough starter EN
- XIX sponge-cake EN England Jane Austen 1808
light unleavened cake made with eggs, sugar and flour EN
- XIX sfougaton GR Greece first Modern Greek Cookbook (translation from IT)
1828
baked cheese omelet EN
- XIX spugnato FR Paris, France Balzac
punch with egg-whites whipped with sugar EN
- XIX spugnato IT Turin, Piedmont, Italy Turin menu 1898
punch with egg-whites whipped with sugar EN
- XX spongata/spunghèda/spungada IT Emilia, Italy Devoto e Oli, Gosetti della
Salda, official regional food list
traditionally wine crust layered Christmas pie with honey, fruit and nuts, EN
- XX spungata IT Sarzana, Liguria, Italy official regional food list, internet
wine crust pie with rich fruit preserve filling EN
- XX sfincia di San Giuseppe IT Palermo, Sicily, Italy official regional food list,
internet
sweet fritter often with ricotta cream filling EN
- XX sfinciune/sfincione IT Palermo, Sicily, Italy Gosetti della Salda, official
regional food list
thick pizza with sweet tomato sauce, anchovies, onions and cheese EN
- XX sfincio di zucca gialla/sfinciune dolce di riso IT Messina etc., Sicily, Italy
Gosetti della Salda, internet
sweet (sometimes savoury) fritter, made with pumpkin, rice, ricotta etc. EN
- XXI sfingiune/sfingione di riso IT Catania, Sicily, Italy interview 2008, internet
sweet or savoury fritter, often made with rice EN

XXI sfincione IT Marsala, Trapani, Sicily, Italy interview 2004
baked omelet with vegetables EN

XXI sfougato GR, EN Crete and Lesbos, Greece internet, life of St. George
baked omelet with vegetables EN

SFONGIA: food names related to “sponge” concept, geographical distribution (will be complemented with a map in the online version):

Italy

I spongia LAT Ancient Rome Martialis
Picenum bread inflates with wine as a light sponge with water EN
:
I-IV *SFONGIA* ova LAT Ancient Rome Apicius
omelet with honey and pepper EN

XV spongata LAT North of Italy document 1454
festive cake for duke Francesco Sforza EN

XIX spugnato FR Paris, France Balzac
punch with egg-whites whipped with sugar EN

XIX spugnato IT Turin, Piedmont Turin menu 1898
punch with egg-whites whipped with sugar EN

XX spongata/spunghèda/spungada IT Emilia Devoto e Oli, Gosetti della Salda,
official regional food list
traditionally wine crust layered Christmas pie with honey, fruit and nuts, EN

XX spungata IT Sarzana, Liguria official regional food list, internet
wine crust pie with rich fruit preserve filling EN

XX sfincia di San Giuseppe IT Palermo, Sicily, Italy official regional food list,
internet
sweet fritter often with ricotta cream filling EN

XX sfinciune/sfincione IT Palermo, Sicily, Italy Gosetti della Salda, official
regional food list
thick pizza with sweet tomato sauce, anchovies, onions and cheese EN

XX sfincio di zucca gialla/sfinciune dolce di riso IT Messina etc., Sicily, Italy
Gosetti della Salda, internet
sweet (sometimes savoury) fritter, made with pumpkin, rice, ricotta etc. EN

XXI sfingiune/sfingione di riso IT Catania, Sicily, Italy interview 2008, internet
sweet or savoury fritter, often made with rice EN

XXI sfincione IT Marsala, Trapani, Sicily, Italy interview 2004
baked omelet with vegetables EN

Greece and Greek Islands

XII diplosfougaton GR Byzantium Prodromus
omelet with vegetables EN

XVI sfougaton GR Byzantium Damascenus Studites
omelet EN

XIX sfougaton GR Greece first Modern Greek Cookbook (translation from IT)
1828
baked cheese omelet EN

XXI sfougato GR, EN Crete and Lesbos internet, life of St.George
baked omelet with vegetables EN

England

XVIII sponge Hannah Glasse 1747
leavened bread dough starter EN

XIX sponge-cake Jane Austen 1808
light unleavened cake made with eggs, sugar and flour EN

Spain

VII sfungia/spungia LAT Medieval Spain Isidorus Hispalensis
well-leavened moist bread EN