
intra
TEAM VISIO
COOKING WITH APICIUS
A Visual Cookbook of Ancient Rome for Today's Kitchen

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Visio Series



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Introduction.
Apicius, the First "Chef Superstar"

If today we say "Cracco" or "Ramsey," we immediately evoke a world of excellence, discipline, and love of food. Two thousand years ago, that name was Apicius.

But who really stands behind that name? The story is more fascinating than the legend. The "Caelius Apicius" who signs the text that has come down to us is, in all likelihood, an elusive figure. As the 1852 translator shrewdly observed, the name "Apicius" attached to the book was almost certainly an early marketing strategy. An anonymous compiler (perhaps a Greek or African cook transplanted to Rome) used the name of the most famous gourmand who lived under Emperor Tiberius to lend authority and immediate fame to his collection of recipes.

The historical Marcus Gavius Apicius was an eccentric millionaire, a gourmand willing to squander fortunes on giant shrimp or rare sauces. The book we hold in our hands, however, is something more concrete: it is an operational manual, a practical compilation born from notes scribbled in kitchens, meant to preserve the memory of dishes invented or learned from others.

It is a living text, imperfect and therefore authentic. Precise quantities and proportions are often missing, because ancient cooks needed only a list of ingredients to work "by eye," relying on their own experience. And this is where we come in: this book was created to fill those gaps, transforming the notes of an imperial cook into precise instructions for your kitchen.

Why We Still Eat Like Him

It may seem that Roman cuisine, with its excesses and bold flavors, is a fossil light-years away from our modern diet. Nothing could be further from the truth.

If we look beyond the prejudice that paints the Romans merely as devourers of flamingos, we discover that the structure of our taste was born there. With the exception of a few extravagances, Roman cuisine was far less distant from ours than we might think.

As early as the nineteenth century, it was noted that Apicius' sauces, once "cleaned" of their excess of spices and aromatics (often used to mask the precarious preservation of food), are surprisingly similar to those of modern cooking. The concepts of sweet-and-sour balance, the use of fresh herbs, the technique of thickening cooking juices with starch or bread, the love of meatballs (isicia) and baked pies: these are all gastronomic pillars that Apicius planted and that we continue to use every day.

Cooking like Apicius today is not an exercise in archaeology; it is a return to the origins of Mediterranean flavor.





From the intense aroma of *garum* in the streets of Pompeii to the lavish banquets of Imperial Rome, from humble spelt soups to forbidden dishes made with flamingo: a sensory and practical journey through the most powerful—and often misunderstood—cuisine of antiquity

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