

Ceres: Goddess of The Harvest

Katherine Young

The Romans associated different gods and goddesses with every aspect of their daily lives. Depending on the household or the season, different gods or goddesses would be prayed to; in this season of fall, the goddess Ceres would rule. Ceres, AKA Demeter to the Greeks, is the goddess of the harvest, the land, agriculture, and fertility. The Romans believed that she taught men how to grow and handle grain and corn, two crops that are abundant during this time of year. She is often depicted with these crops in her hand, and some sort of plant in her hair. Her many different symbols include torches, a sickle, poppies, a cornucopia with different fruits, and a crown of wheat stalks. The name Ceres itself means “to feed” or “with grain”, all reflecting what this goddess is known for.



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One of Ceres’ main themes surrounding her is the power of agricultural fertility. She is said to have discovered spelt wheat, the processes of soughing and ploughing, the bestowment of agriculture upon mankind, and the nourishment of seeds. The Romans believed that before the gift of agriculture, humans lived off of acorns, and lived a nomadic lifestyle without towns or laws. Furthermore, because of Ceres’ association with agriculture and crops, she has many different powers over these specific things. She is able to multiply plant and animal seeds by fertilizing and fructifying them, as well as holding laws that protect all parts of the agricultural cycle. Her focus on agriculture, a life-giving activity, led her to be quite involved in the people’s lives, especially the lives of the plebs or lower class. Often gods and goddesses would hardly associate themselves with humans, but Ceres was different, and hardly left them.

Ceres was worshipped on one of the Seven Hills of Rome, the Aventine Hill. She was considered the central deity to the plebs of Rome. Although she was important to the people of Rome, there are no known native Roman myths involving her. Even though there are no known Roman myths, there are many known celebrations of this goddess. Her main festival, Cerealia, was held in mid to late April, put on by the plebs, and included many different circus games. These games were called the Ludi Ceriales. There is no doubt that Ceres was an important goddess to the Roman people; there is even a phrase involving her that we can use today: “fit for Ceres”, meaning splendid.

Roman recipe review: Boring and bland ancients or masters of limited resources

Isabella Merucci

While we may hear of the Romans' peculiar culinary traditions, many recipes seem quite abstract and distant to us due to their relevance thousands of years ago. For Christmas, we probably won't be munching on peacock or fish meatballs. In an effort to better understand past recipes, I have decided to recreate some of the most common and historically accurate foods.

First, I made ancient pancakes. They are technically Greek, but the recipe is from the Roman physician Galen, implying that Romans too enjoyed this recipe. The pancakes are called *teganitai* and were often eaten as a breakfast food and were possibly sold on the streets of Athens. I made the pancakes by mixing 120g flour, 225 ml water, and 2 tbsp honey together then pouring the batter onto a frying pan with hot oil. I made sure both sides of the cakes were evenly browned, stacked them up, then covered them with sesame seeds and honey.



Overall, they tasted like baked water. I think I would have preferred to have just drenched cardboard in honey and chowed down on that instead. That is kind of what the aftertaste tasted like. I know the Romans had some limited resources, but some fruit or herbs would have been nice to add a little bit of flavor. I really wish the Romans had sugar. At least the edges were nice and crispy. I will rank it a 4/10.



Second, I made *libum* for *secunda mensa*, also known as dessert. *Libum* is a pastry that is often compared to cheesecake. The recipe comes from the Roman consul Cato. To make *libum*, you have to mix 1 cup of ricotta cheese into 1 cup of sifted flour. Then add one beaten egg to soften the batter. Divide the batter into four buns and place each onto a greased baking sheet with bay leaves under each. Bake for 35-40 minutes until golden at 375F. Remove the bay leaves and place the buns onto a plate with 1/2 cup honey poured on the plate and let the buns soak up the honey.

Honestly, they weren't horrible. I would rank them a solid 7/10 after the last disappointment. They were pretty fluffy when warm. The honey was a good touch but was not too overpowering. They could have once again used some fruit or something else to add flavor though, but I guess I'm just spoiled by modern food. Overall, I am pretty glad that we have sugar now and I am not stuck eating *libum* and *teganitai* that taste like cardboard.

The Origins of Christmas

Aeres Zhou



With the holiday season approaching, what better time to learn about the origins of Christmas? Christmas has its roots in the Roman festival of Saturnalia, which happened from December 17th to 23rd of the Julian calendar. The festival was meant to commemorate and celebrate the Golden Age, when Saturn ruled the world. Many Saturnalia traditions and festivities became adapted into holidays like Christmas and Epiphany as the Roman Empire became increasingly Christianized.

One of the most famous festivities of Saturnalia was the reversal of social norms. During this time, slaves acted as masters and vice versa. The masters would serve a lavish banquet to the slaves by some accounts. In others, they ate together. Slaves were also free to say whatever they wanted to their masters though they recognized that this reversal was only temporary so they didn't go too far. Clothing also underwent its own reversal during Saturnalia, with the Greek synthesis replacing the Roman toga and everyone was able to wear the pilleus, a hat usually reserved for free citizens only. Another reversal of social norms during Saturnalia was the prevalence of gambling, which was usually frowned upon.

Another Saturnalian celebration was the appointment of a "King of Saturnalia" by popular vote who would rule over the ceremonies and festivities. The king gave outrageous commands to the party-goers to create a raucous and lively atmosphere fitting in with the spirit of the festival. The Latin name, Saturnalicus Princeps, has led some to believe that the custom arose as a mockery of Augustus, who gave himself the title of Princeps to avoid the label of Rex, or king. The King of Saturnalia's abuses of power satirizes the emperor's absolute rule over all aspects of life. The ridiculous extremes the King of Saturnalia pushed his guests to may have been a form of protest against the excesses of Roman autocracy.

One Saturnalian custom we are all familiar with is gift-giving. Gifts that would be exchanged during Saturnalia ranged from small pottery and figurines called sigillaria to toys, dice, perfume, etc. During this time, people also gave gag gifts to each other, as described in Catullus 14. In that poem, Catullus receives a book of incredibly bad poetry from his friend Calvus. Catullus thinks the poetry is so bad that it is designed to kill him on Saturnalia, "the best of days," and vows to give Calvus an equally bad gift in return. Although gag gifts are far less common nowadays around Christmastime, clearly both holidays share a spirit of giving.

Unlike most other Roman festivals, the celebration of Saturnalia was spread throughout the empire, so its traditions continued long after it was no longer officially recognized. Pope Julius I proclaimed that the birth of Christ should be celebrated on the 25th of December, possibly trying to replace other celebrations around the same time. Thus, traditional Saturnalia customs of partying, gambling, and overeating became closely associated with Christmas, especially in the Middle Ages. The tradition of electing a Saturnalicus Princeps also enjoyed widespread popularity in Europe. However, most of these customs were largely eliminated as part of the Protestant Reformation, especially when Puritans were involved. In the mid-1800s, a "Christmas revival" took place in English speaking countries that restored many such traditions, compounded with the influence of authors like Charles Dickens to turn the rowdy holiday into a family-friendly one. This Christmas,

as your family sits around the dinner table, you can impress your relatives with your knowledge of Christmas' history and hand them a book of terrible poetry.

