

Roman Dining

Food and dining are important in any culture; when the Romans invaded Britain, they not only brought new food sources and vegetation, as well as new cooking and storage methods but they also brought a new style of dining. This new style of dining included not only a different dinner etiquette but also different dining ware, and subsequently new pottery and glass technology.

Transportation and storage

It is a well-known fact that an army marches on its stomach, and the storage and transportation of food and raw materials needed to sustain the Roman army was done a grand scale. Great warehouses existed in seaports and at convenient collecting points, while a variety of shockproof packings were used in the movement of fragile items. Containers varied from wood or wicker crates to barrels, pots, nets and sacks and some of these solved the dual problems of storage and transport in one go.

The amphora handles and mortarium rims here are all stamped. The stamps can tell us where they were made, their maker and in some instances the contents.

1. Handles

Amphora handle

Pottery Watercrock, Kendal KMA 1979.125

90-125 AD by Maturgenus of Brockley Hill

Pottery Watercrock, Kendal KMA 1979.130 & KMA 1979.129

These two fragments bear the same stamp, indicating that the same potter Maturgenus created them. Maturgenus worked at Brockley Hill, Herts between 90 and 125 AD.

Southern Spanish amphora handle

Pottery Watercrock, Kendal KMA 1979.126

This amphora handle is an example of an import from Southern Spain, as indicated by the QCRA stamp.

Amphora handle

Pottery UK KMA 1979.122

Mortarium Rim

Clay Ambleside, Cumbria KMA 1987.667 & KMA 1979.127

2. Amphora neck and handles

Light buff ware Watercrock, Kendal KMA 1979.119

3. Amphora base

Buff ware Watercrock, Kendal KMA 1979.134

4. Amphora handles

Orange ware	Watercrock, Kendal	KMA 1979.120
Orange ware	Ambleside Fort, Cumbria	KMA 1987.654

5. Flagon

Orange ware	Watercrock, Kendal	KMA 1979.93
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It was not just the transportation and preservation of wine that was mastered, but the preservation of other organic matter too. Perishable foods were dried, soaked, salted down or hermetically sealed in lard. The brine or lard eventually being recycled until rendered useless.

Small amounts of grain were often held in large pots and a variation of this practice was the use of wicker lined underground storage pits on native farms. Sealed in by clay bungs the grain was preserved by the natural build-up of carbon dioxide, however there were problems caused by burrowing of rodents and bacteria.

The storage of grain on a large scale was solved within heavily buttressed and specially ventilated granaries designed to discourage rodents and stand the weight to pressure of the grain in great bins and sacks. Most forts had to 'granaries' to hold enough basic food to keep the garrison for a year in an emergency.

Five hundred mouths needed approximately 2-3000 tonnes per annum plus large quantities of hay for animals, and hides, canvas, cloth, salt and iron. In untroubled times there would have been a continuous process of supply and demand at a granary or stores to keep the contents fresh.

Dining ware

The Roman army brought to Britain large quantities of high-quality tableware in the form of glass and Samian ware pottery. Owning such tableware was a sign of wealth and status and therefore much desired by those who were rich and fashionable.

6. Pottery

Bowl	Watercrock, Kendal	KMA 1979.141
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This dish shows two running animals either a lioness and her cub, or a dog; it could be a hunting scene.

Cup	Watercrock, Kendal	KMA 1980.194
Vessel	Watercrock, Kendal	KMA 1981.10

7. Dishes

Pottery	Watercrock, Kendal	KMS 1979.49 & KMA 1979.53
Pottery	Untraced	KMA 1979.137

8. Bowl

Pottery Watercreek, Kendal KMA 1979.50

9. Colander

Black ware Watercreek, Kendal KMA 1979.54

Specialised wooden and pottery vessels such as colanders were used frequently by the Romans. These strainers or bowls were often set with sharp grit served to sieve, settle and macerate some foodstuffs but little is known about other preparative processes.

10. Samian ware

Samian ware was mostly used for displaying and serving food: bowls, dishes and plates are common. Some were decorated with floral, animal and figural designs made by throwing the pot within a mould. This brick-red pottery was originally produced in northern Italy during 1st Century BC but by 1st Century AD nearly all was being made in Gaul (France).

Bowl

Samian ware Watercreek, Kendal KMA 1979.101

The decoration is of a series of scrolls with various animals including fish, with a repetitive fleur-de-lis motif. 120-130 AD.

Other fragments

Pottery Watercreek, Kendal KMA 1979.148

By comparison, this collection of Roman pottery comes from Africa. Collected from sites such as Carthage and El Djem, this type of pottery is called red slip ware and acts as an Eastern equivalent to the Western European Samian ware.

11. Jug

Terracotta El Djem, Tunisia KMA 1982.81

12. Dishes

Terracotta Sbetila, North Africa KMA 1982.73

Terracotta El Djem, Tunisia KMA 1982.72 & KMA 1982.77

13. Flagon

Cream Slip North Africa KMA 1982.78 & KMA 1982.79

14. Dishes

Terracotta Sbetila, North Africa KMA 1982.71 & KMA 1982.75

Terracotta El Djem, Tunisia MA 1982.70

13. Dishes

Terracotta	Sbetila, North Africa	KMA 1982.76
Terracotta	El Djem, Tunisia	KMA 1982.74

Lower torso from a statue of Bacchus found at Watercreek Roman fort near Kendal.

It is believed that this sculpture from Watercreek represents Bacchus, the god of wine, as an infant. It could be a tombstone, an isolated cult object or a remnant of the decoration from a special building.

Bacchus was the Roman God of fertility, festivals and wine. Often portrayed languishing against a tree trunk that supports a fruiting grape vine, he is sometimes found holding an empty *cantharus* (wine cup), signifying a successful party or festival. He is also usually portrayed naked to display his youthfulness and vigour.

His name is derived from the Greek word **baccos** meaning wine. The Ancient Romans often adopted aspects of classical Greek mythology to give their culture credibility. In this case Bacchus is modelled on the Ancient Greek God of Wine, **Dionysus**.

The legend of Bacchus closely resembles that of Dionysus, who according to Greek mythology was born in Thebes following the union of Zeus and Semele. Dionysus was adopted wherever wine came to be cultivated in the Ancient Greek world, such as on the island of Naxos. Whoever worshipped him received the gift of wine, however, if the correct rituals were not observed then a terrible punishment might ensue.

In Roman mythology, Bacchus was born from the thigh of Jupiter, into which he had been sewn by Mercury after Semele his mother, had been killed by one of Jupiter's thunderbolts during her pregnancy. One legend concerning Bacchus tells of a group of pirates who kidnapped and chained him to their ship. As a consequence, ivy grew and entangled their oars and rigging, and a vine grew up the mast. Phantom beasts appeared on board, causing the pirates to jump overboard for fear of their lives. As soon as they entered the water they were instantly transformed into dolphins. Perhaps this is why some dolphins to this day seek the company of humans, are they the descendants of those ancient pirates?

In ancient Rome Bacchus was officially remembered in public festivals, however by 186 BC a more elaborate and secret form of worship, the *Bacchanalia*, had reached Rome. This caused the authorities so much concern that that the Senate passed a decree banning this new form of worship.

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