INVESTIGATING FOOD PREPARATION STRATEGIES WITHIN THE POMPEIAN HOME IN THE FIRST CENTURY CE

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Over the course of three months, between July and September 2019, I conducted research on-site in Pompeii (Italy) for my dissertation on food preparation strategies within the Pompeian home in the terminal phase of the town (Fig. 1). The aim of the project, generously supported by a grant from the Stahl Endowment of the Archaeological Research Facility at UC Berkeley, is to reconstruct how the first-century inhabitants of Pompeii prepared their daily meals and to shed light on the factors which influenced their choice of cooking techniques. This research, which is ongoing, has been conducted in conjunction with the Pompeii Artifact Life History Project and with the support and authorization of the Parco Archeologico di Pompei.

A fundamental premise of the project is that how one procures, prepares, and consumes one's food can be understood as an expression of how one exists in the world. Whether a cook stirs her stew constantly over a high flame or sets it aside to bubble away slowly nestled among the embers of the hearth is taken to be potentially revealing of her economic priorities, place in society, tastes, and even aspirations. While a close connection between food and identity has long been recognized by anthropologists and scholars in the social sciences, for too long foodways scholars have tended to privilege the consumption of food and the performative aspect of communal dining over the less conspicuous, mundane acts of food preparation in their analyses. This focus on consumption is especially true of Roman food studies.

My dissertation research addresses this imbalance and demonstrates the value of studying everyday domestic food preparation as a way of assessing socioeconomic status at the household level and personal taste in antiquity. By shifting the discourse from the dining room to the kitchen and by focusing on the art of cooking rather than the artifice so often inherent in commensality, we can get closer to unconscious practice and disposition, which is shaped by the complex interplay of social structures and personal preferences. My research sheds light on the intricacies of this interplay by addressing a seldom asked question: how did the Roman cook stir her stew?

To answer this question and reconstruct Roman cooking techniques, I examine the surviving evidence for the transformation of raw ingredients into edible dishes in the Roman world, focusing particularly on the objects employed in cooking spaces (Fig. 2). An historically understudied category of objects, this material of everyday use is our best source of evidence for how the Romans actually prepared their daily meals.

In order to reconstruct the *chaîne opératoire* of the cook at work, I have been conducting a use-alteration analysis of the bronze and ceramic vessels, iron utensils, and related implements in various materials used for food and drink preparation found in twenty-two properties in and around Pompeii (Fig. 3-4). The selected properties represent a range of types, including modest and grand houses, rural villas,

and semi-commercial residences, allowing us to assess to what extent cooks belonging to different social classes facing distinct economic realities were predisposed by their situations to prepare food in particular ways.

Use-alteration analysis, which involves the systematic documentation of traces of use (e.g. scratches, soot accretion, dents, etc.) visible on the surfaces of objects, provides a necessary corrective to traditional artifact studies which privilege morphological considerations over other factors in the ascription of function (Fig. 5-6). To document the extent and nature of use alterations, I employ a range of recording procedures. Macroscopic observations are recorded in a database (FileMaker Pro 12) of my own design, in which I also include a basic morphological characterization (dimensions, weight, material composition, etc.) of each object. A thorough photographic record compliments each entry in the database. For the macrophotography, I used a Nikon D5000 digital SLR camera to capture general views, as well as numerous detail shots of use alterations in a variety of lighting conditions.

In 2019, I was able to analyze all locatable objects used for food and drink preparation in eleven of the twenty-two study properties. Assemblages from four other properties were examined in 2018. A final data collection campaign is planned for summer 2020.

Because one cannot fully appreciate object use in a holistic sense without taking into account the array of objects employed alongside any one object, I am also attempting to reconstruct the complete *batterie de cuisine*, or assemblage of objects used for food preparation, found within each of the selected properties at the time of Pompeii's destruction in 79 CE.

Since my research involves archaeological material excavated in large part during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this requires consultation of handwritten excavation notebooks, known as the *giornali degli scavi*, and artifact inventories stored in the site archives. Portions of the 2018 and 2019 field seasons were dedicated to this task. Despite lacunae and occasional inconsistencies in the information reported, these sources are indispensable, for they provide contextual information that otherwise would not be recoverable and often describe objects which have either been lost or destroyed.

Using the information gleaned from the *giornali* and inventories, I will compare the compositions of the *batteries de cuisine* found in the selected properties, assessing the productive capabilities of each kitchen on the basis of the number of vessels and utensils, range of types, and capacities of the vessels used in each property. The results of this analysis will give us a better sense of what constituted the standard *batterie de cuisine* within the Pompeian home and how this could be modified according to the needs and priorities of the one stocking the shelves.

While it is too soon to make any conclusive statements regarding my research, since I have not yet completed the data collection phase of the project, my work has already helped clarify how certain types of cooking implements tended to be used. Patterns so far glimpsed in object use, which may reflect group-specific preferences, should become clearer with further research.

Similarly, the results of my compositional analysis of each property's *batterie de cuisine* must await further archival research. Initial indications, leastwise among the bronze cookware component of the assemblages, are that the standard kitchen kit varied considerably from property to property, included between households presumably belonging to the same socioeconomic strata. While this requires further investigation, it would seem that any notion of a standard kit should probably should probably be a flexible one and allow for substitutions.

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Figure 1. Map of Italy showing location of Pompeii on the Bay of Naples. Adapted from https://www.britannica.com/place/Pompeii.

Figure 2. *Batterie de cuisine* from the Casa di Cerere (I.9.13-14). The soot accretion visible on the interior of the ceramic cookpot (bottom right) is a common form of use alteration found among cookwares.

Figure 3. Map of Pompeii showing locations of study properties. Map adapted from https://digitalhumanities.umass.edu/pbmp/.

Fullonica di Stephanus (I.6.7)
Casa dei Quadretti Teatrali (I.6.11)
Casa dell'Efebo (I.7.11)
Casa/Caupona di L. Vetutius Placidus (I.8.8-9)
Casa di M. Epidius Primus (I.8.14)
Casa del Bell'Impluvio (I.9.1)
Casa di Cerere (I.9.13-14)
Casa del Menandro (I.10.4)
Casa del Fabbro (I.10.7)
Casa di L. Habonius Primus (I.11.5-8)
Casa della Venere in Bikini (I.11.6-7)
Casa del Piano Superiore (I.11.15-9)
Casa di Saturninus (I.11.16)
Casa Imperiale (I.11.17)
Casa I.12.11
Casa I.13.11
Casa della Fondazione di Roma (V.4.13)
Casa del Fauno (VI.12.2)
Casa dei Vettii (VI.15.1)
Casa del Focolare di Ferro (VI.15.6)
Villa Regina a Boscoreale
Villa di Pisanella

Figure 4. List of study properties (with Pompeian address given in the following format: *regio* no.; *insula* no.; street no.).

Figure 5. Detail of neck of bronze pitcher from the Casa di M. Epidius Primus (I.8.14). Lime scale adhering to upper inner wall of neck suggests that the vessel was used for heating hard water.

Figure 6. Detail of Internal Red Slip Cookware pan from the Casa del Menandro (I.10.4). Note the numerous multidirectional scratches in the interior slip, which can be attributed to utensil use. Linear scratches which follow the contours of the vessel wall were most likely produced through stirring of the vessel's contents. Vertical or oblique scratches in the wall were produced by a scraping motion intended to dislodge cooking food from the wall and prevent scorching.