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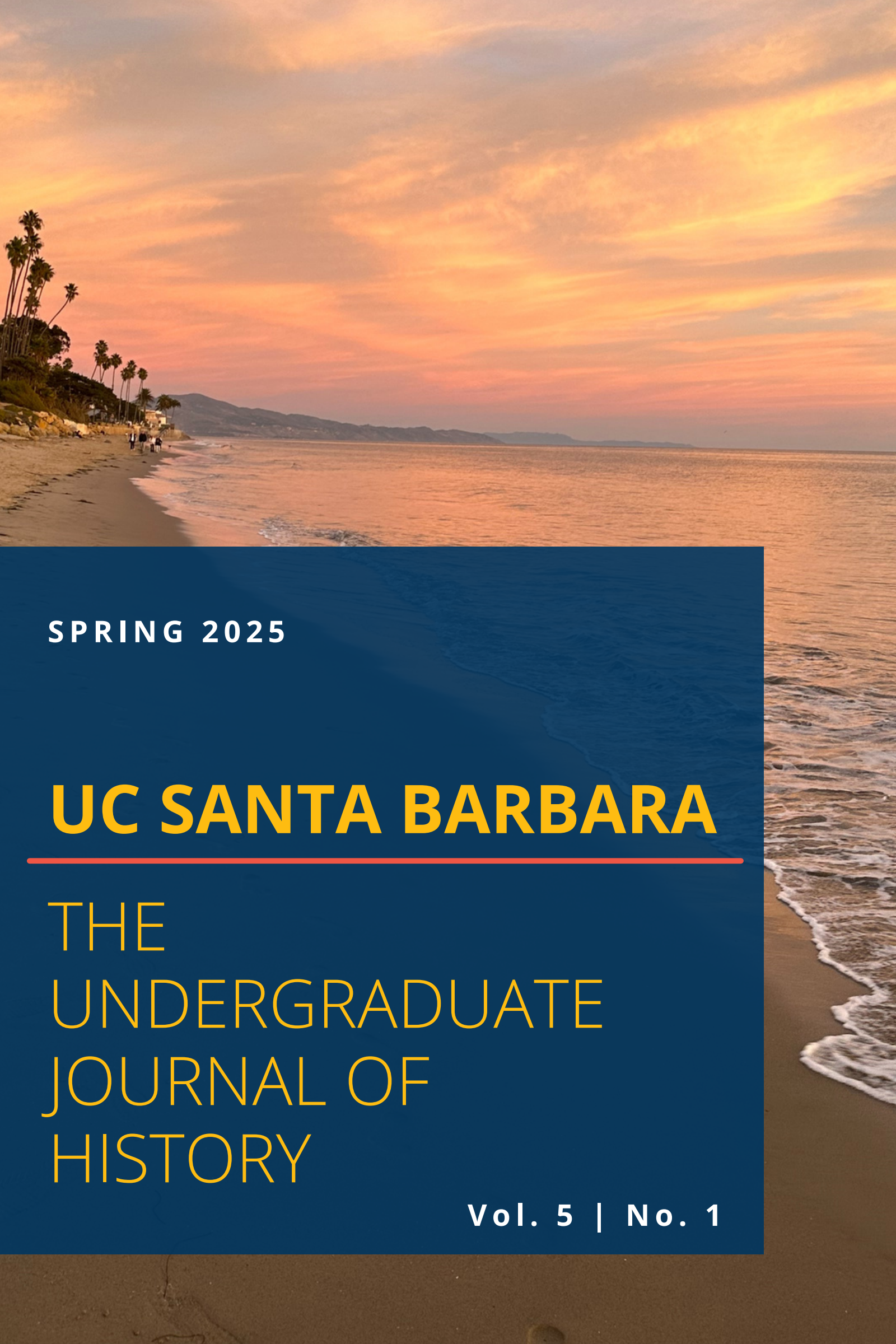
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The Roman Military Presence and Its Impact on Culinary Preferences in Britain

*Charlie Gutteridge*¹

Introduction

This paper will assess the extent to which the Roman military presence affected culinary preferences in Britain. The Roman army first landed on British shores in the first century BCE with Caesar's failed invasion of the island. Only with the successful and permanent occupation initiated in 43 CE by Claudius did the Roman army, and the Roman state more generally, have an impact on the culinary preferences of Britain. In this paper, I will argue that the Roman army had a huge impact on British culinary preferences, not only in the short term or in areas with a high military presence but across space and time. This is important because many of the foods and practices introduced by the Roman state through the army have had significant long-term impacts on the British palate, though in the context of the Roman occupation, the study of dietary changes can reveal a hitherto underexplored and less tangible vehicle for imperialism.

In assessing these questions, there are some evidentiary problems. Some food groups, notably red meat, provide more satisfying answers than culinary categories that are less archaeologically observable, such as wild game. Fortunately, the Vindolanda Tablets plug many of the gaps in the archaeological record. To explore this topic, several key scholars have provided especially valuable material, with Roy Davies, Mark Maltby, and Hilary Cool's works contributing immensely to this project through their helpful syntheses on the theme at large. Utilising Cool's culinary classifications in *Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain*, this paper will analyse the Roman army's impact on various food groups, and demonstrate the military's importance as a stimulus for changing the culinary preferences of Britons, with a comparison of the diets of Late Iron Age Britons (c. 100 BCE-43 CE) with the culinary preferences of the Roman army in Britannia, as well as urban and rural Romano-Britons during the occupation period. The army's presence contributed greatly to these changes, most significantly over the inversion of British meat preferences from beef to pork, despite some spatio-temporal variations, such as in Wales.

Britain has been chosen as the province that can best demonstrate the impact of the Roman army on the diet of a macro-region due to an unparalleled intensity of archaeological fieldwork and scholarly attention to the social aspects of consumption compared to the other regions of the Empire. Indeed, the relatively high proportion of military personnel in the province when compared to the civilian population also made Britain uniquely penetrable by the army's influence. Whilst the focus of this project is Britain, evidence from other regions in North-West Europe will

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also be utilised to complement the British findings.

The Roman military diet is helpfully explained by Roy Davies in his comprehensive review of the culinary preferences of the Roman soldier. In general, an infantryman's diet would consist of wheat, barley, and meats, buttressed by cheese and wine.² In Britain, the most common meat to consume was beef, accompanied by pork and lamb.³ Though these were the dominant meats on the soldier's plate, there is also significant evidence of poultry and fish consumption in Britain, as well as wild game, such as deer and elk.⁴ The soldier would eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, and legumes, with lentils and beans consumed most, though for the legionary or auxiliary soldier, meat was the dominant component of their diet, feasting on animal proteins every day.⁵ This contrasts with the diet of Late Iron Age Britons, which featured a heavy emphasis on mutton and privileged spelt as the grain of choice.⁶

The degree to which the Roman military presence affected British culinary preferences and precipitated a shift towards a more gastronomically homogenous "Romanised" diet will be a central feature of this paper. In this paper, "Romanisation" will refer to the degree to which an individual, group, site, or region features a homogenising trend towards the general patterns, preferences, and attitudes of the Roman army, which was used by the state as a vehicle to enforce its "culture" on occupied territories. In this case, the measure of "Romanisation" will be how similar these people or areas were to the Roman army in terms of their diets and food preferences.

"Romanisation" has an extensive historiography, which, first articulated by Francis Haverfield in 1915 in *Romanisation and Roman Britain*, is rooted in pre-processualist ideas of imperialism.⁷ Indeed, some scholars have abstained from employing the term due to its imperialist associations.⁸ Although "Romanisation" is a problematic term that simplifies the effect the army had on creating a more homogenous society,⁹ it is, nevertheless, a useful term for its encompassing of the social and cultural changes induced throughout society during the occupation period. David Mattingly explains that there are two unsatisfactory approaches to "Romanisation": Haverfield's interpretation, which stresses the top-down nature of the cultural change; as opposed to more recent studies which propose a model which emphasises the role of lesser elites in adopting Roman customs, dress styles, and language, thereby allowing for a more tangible connection with ordinary

² Davies, R. (1971). The Roman Military Diet. *Britannia* 2, p. 125.

³ Davies, *Roman Military Diet*, p. 126.

⁴ Davies, *Roman Military Diet*, p. 128.

⁵ Davies, *Roman Military Diet*, p. 138.

⁶ Redfern, R., Hamlin, C. & Athfield, N. (2010). Temporal changes in diet: a stable isotope analysis of late Iron Age and Roman Dorset, Britain. *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 37(6), p. 1150.

⁷ Mattingly, D. (2011). *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, p. 205.

⁸ Millett, M. (2004). The Romanisation of Britain, Changing Perspectives. *Kodai* 13-14, p. 169.

⁹ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, p. 206.

people to the Roman cultural milieu.¹⁰ However, whilst Mattingly understands the term as an impediment to the advancement of studies regarding social changes induced by Roman occupation,¹¹ a synthesis between Haverfield's approach and more recent studies can resurrect the usefulness of "Romanisation". Straddling between top-down and bottom-up models, by utilising the Roman army as a vehicle for cultural change, a state-controlled force comprised of non-elites, the term can be fruitfully employed without association to a deliberate policy of imperialism.

To explore this topic, this essay will be divided into different food categories based on Hilary Cool's categorisation of food in *Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain*, with sections on meat, fish, wild game, and poultry and birds. The order in which they will be assessed is based on the availability of evidence for military, civilian, and native consumption, with the most evidence arising from red meat consumption due to the relatively high level of preservability of terrestrial mammal bones. To assess the evidence for each food category, bio-archaeological, archaeo-zoological, and ancient documentary sources will be utilised, with an emphasis on the Vindolanda Tablets. As a collection of documents from the military camp at Vindolanda near Hadrian's Wall dating from the late first to second century, these tablets provide a wealth of material on the military's culinary preferences and the army's interactions with Britons. After almost two millennia, the preservation of such a large corpus of information in a vital area of interaction between the army and locals is extremely rare, safeguarded under the Northumbrian soil until its perchance excavation in 1973.

Where the evidence permits, certain questions will be answered which provide insight into the military impact on British culinary preferences. How the Roman army's diet affected local preferences and the extent to which local preferences and conditions affected the military diet will be the primary questions addressed in this paper, with temporal, regional, and socio-economic variations in dietary preferences across the country assessed where possible. Additionally, the interactions between the army and the province will be explored by inspecting how the army supplied its food, whilst the long-term effects of the Roman military presence will be analysed by observing the influence that Roman imported foods had on the post-Roman preferences of Britons. Finally, the impact of the Roman army on the social sphere will be addressed, centering around whether the army's presence led to any foodstuffs being considered "aspirational," and the subsequent effect that diet mimicry had on real and perceived social standing. After analysing the evidence utilised during this project, it is evident that the military presence in Roman Britain contributed greatly to the changes in dietary preferences over the occupation period. Though there certainly was some regional and temporal variation in the military's effect on British culinary preferences, with Davies suggesting there was a 'relative absence' of "Romanisation" in Wales,¹² the

¹⁰ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, p. 206.

¹¹ Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, p. 208.

¹² Davies, J. Soldiers, peasants, industry and towns. The Roman army in Britain. A Welsh Perspective in Erdkamp, P. (2002), p. 169-170.

army's short and long-term effects on culinary preferences in Britain were great.

Meat

Meat was the cornerstone of the military diet, with the army consuming far more meat than the population at large.¹³ Indeed, the most detailed analysis of the impact of the military on British culinary preferences can be provided for meat as it is the most visible in the archaeological record, through analysis of butchery marks, animal size, slaughter ages, and other bio-archaeological indicators.¹⁴

The Roman World privileged pork at the apex of the food pyramid, believing it to be the healthiest meat for consumption.¹⁵ For the military man, his diet would typically consist of a mixture of pig, cattle, and sheep/goat meats, whilst an animal protein would always be consumed in a roasted or boiled form at the dinner table, explaining why a spit and a boiling pan was provided as standard issue equipment to the legionary.¹⁶ The *Codex Theodosianus* [CTh. VII.4.6], for example, states that soldiers ate pork every three days and mutton almost every day, resulting in around 150,000 sheep being consumed by the British garrison each year, requiring some 113 tons of salt to preserve the meat.¹⁷ Moreover, the homogeneity of the Roman military diet can be seen in the similarity of the British garrison's palate with their counterparts based in modern Switzerland and the Netherlands. In these regions, the military diet likewise came from cattle, pig, sheep/goat, and chicken meat,¹⁸ with the latter being introduced into this region because it was a staple of the Roman diet.¹⁹ At military camps, cattle appears to be the most present species in all contexts, though some sites are dominated by pig remains.²⁰

There does appear to be some temporal variation in meat consumption at military sites, with the earliest sites dominated by pig remains and later sites being influenced by the preponderance of animals in the local area, causing a general trend towards cattle domination.²¹ The military's meat

¹³ Garnsey, P. (1999). *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p. 17.

¹⁴ Pitts, M. The Archaeology of Food Consumption in Wilkins, J. & Nadeau, R. (2015), p. 98.

¹⁵ Chandezon, C. Animals, Meat and Alimentary By-products: Patterns of Production and Consumption in Wilkins, J. & Nadeau, R. (2015), p. 141.

¹⁶ Davies, *Military Diet*, p. 128-130.

¹⁷ Gerrard, J. Feeding the Army from Dorset: Pottery, Salt and the Roman State in Stallibrass, S. & Thomas, R. (2008), p. 121-123.

¹⁸ Groot, M. (2015). How to Feed a Roman Camp in *Limes XXIII: Proceedings of the 23rd International Limes Congress*. Ingolstadt, p. 999.

¹⁹ Deschler-Erb, S. & Groot, M. (2017). Carnem et Circenses – consumption of animals and their products in Roman urban and military sites in two regions in the northwestern provinces, *Environmental Archaeology: The Journal of Human Palaeoecology* 22, p. 98.

²⁰ Groot, *Roman Camp*, p. 999.

²¹ Groot, *Roman Camp*, p. 996.

consumption mirrored the culinary tastes of the civilian population: beef was the most dominant meat;²² pork and lamb were consumed to varying degrees at different sites; and the slaughter ages of animals were broadly similar between military and urban sites.²³ Beef, for example, is best represented at military and urban sites, and in these contexts, the slaughter ages of cattle are also mirrored, with cattle generally slaughtered at their prime age.

This differs, however, from some rural contexts: at sites such as Marsh Leys Farm, Owslebury, and Newnham, there are many examples of younger cattle being slaughtered,²⁴ though rural contexts yield far greater variation in cattle consumption practices than the generally homogenous military and urban sites.²⁵ Maltby's analysis of the meat supply in Roman Dorchester and Winchester also shows this homogeneity between the civilian and urban diet: at Winchester, a major Roman center, there is very high cattle consumption, responsible for forty-six percent of remains,²⁶ whilst pig remains account for forty percent of remains in the most "Romanised" sites, such as Dorchester Grey Yard.²⁷ Indeed, where the army was reluctant to consume dog, cat, or horse meat, the population at large generally followed this trend as well, with little evidence for any of these animal proteins playing a role in the Romano-British diet.²⁸

This differs from the meat preferences of Late Iron Age Britons, who, despite consuming a similar range of meats, preferred lamb consumption as opposed to the military's taste for beef and pork.²⁹ This is demonstrated by the fact that some urban sites can feature almost four times greater levels of pig remains than their rural counterparts.³⁰ Late Iron Age Britain was extremely varied in its meat consumption, with pork consumption infrequent outside of *oppida* (pre-Roman large, fortified settlements),³¹ suggesting that King's general analysis that "un-Romanised" settlements featured higher sheep/goat assemblages whilst sites with a high military presence reveal greater beef consumption is a gross generalisation.³² Indeed, from Maltby's analysis, "native" sites feature a higher incidence of horse consumption, which mirrors Late Iron Age consumption patterns from

²² Maltby, M. (2016). The Exploitation of Animals in Roman Britain in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Britain*, Oxford, p. 792.

²³ Maltby, *Exploitation of Animals*, p. 792-798.

²⁴ Maltby, *Exploitation of Animals*, p. 792.

²⁵ Maltby, *Exploitation of Animals*, p. 793.

²⁶ Maltby, M. (1994). The Meat Supply in Roman Dorchester and Winchester, in In A. R. Hall and H. K. Kenward, *Urban-rural connexions: perspectives from environmental archaeology*, Oxford, p. 87.

²⁷ Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 97.

²⁸ Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 798-799.

²⁹ Redfern et al, p. 1150.

³⁰ Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 97.

³¹ Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 16.

³² Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 85.

Wessex,³³ despite Redfern et al. concluding that there was little difference in the diets of individuals from both the Late Iron Age and Roman sites which they analysed.³⁴ Elsewhere, there is great variation between animal sizes in native and more “Romanised” sites. At Caernarfon, for example, very large cattle appeared in the fourth century;³⁵ whilst Maltby highlights the differences in sheep/goat and pig sizes between urban and rural sites;³⁶ and across the northwestern provinces as a whole, such a trend can be observed,³⁷ showing this phenomenon of increased livestock size as a result of military action is not unique to Britain.

After presenting the evidence, it is evident that meat consumption by the military influenced “Romanisation” in Britain and how the army affected the culinary tastes of the province. This can be seen most clearly through pork consumption: even before the occupation, the sites in Late Iron Age Britain with the highest frequency of pig remains came from southern *oppida*, the most connected centres in the region to the Roman world.³⁸ Indeed, during the occupation phase, more “Romanised” sites featured higher levels of pig remains than their rural counterparts,³⁹ showing that the presence of the Roman state was directly influencing pork consumption in urban and military contexts. For the military, pork was seen as a dietary staple with a high status, shown in the high levels of pig remains unearthed at the officer’s *praetorium* at Vindolanda and Caerleon.⁴⁰ This may have been because elites sought to emulate Roman preferences for pork, well attested to in the literary sources.⁴¹

There does appear to be some nuance to this argument. The *Codex Theodosianus*’ description of the high mutton consumption of the British garrisons may indicate a synthesis of culinary traditions, with the relative abundance of sheep in the province pragmatically contributing to an adaptation in the military’s diet. However, this nuance does not repudiate the fact that whilst there was comparatively little consumption of beef and pork prior to the Roman occupation, the army’s correlates with an undeniable increase in the appearance of cattle and pig remains across virtually all sites in Roman Britain.

Moreover, the fact that pork was seemingly the most widely consumed meat at Fishbourne Palace,⁴² a very high-status Romano-British site, suggests the army’s preference for pork led to this

³³ Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 89.

³⁴ Redfern et al, *Temporal Changes*, p. 1158.

³⁵ Davies, *Welsh Perspective*, p. 183.

³⁶ Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 95-100.

³⁷ Groot, *Roman Camp*, p. 999.

³⁸ Pitts, M. “Celtic” Food: Perspectives from Britain in Wilkins, J. & Nadeau, R. (2015), p. 327.

³⁹ Maltby, *Meat Supply*, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Cool, H. (2007). *Eating and Drinking in Roman Britain*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p. 82-83.

⁴¹ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 82.

⁴² Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 83.

food commanding a high socio-economic status, and even in some more rural sites, the army's influence may be felt as pork consumption appears high, such as around Alchester.⁴³

Indeed, beef consumption mirrors this trend, with the importance of cattle meat for the military palate causing a general increase in cattle remains across the province, including in Wales, from the Late Iron Age to the occupation period. In a similar manner to pork consumption, there may have been socio-economic dynamics at play regarding veal consumption, with the Romans viewing young animals as a luxury item due to their longer cooking times,⁴⁴ explaining why meats such as veal are found in higher-status contexts. Though sheep are consumed in some areas, such as around Hadrian's Wall,⁴⁵ the appearance of the Roman army completely inverted the meat preferences of the region, culminating in the general homogenisation of meat consumption dominated by pork and beef by the later phases of Roman rule.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, the question remains as to how the army was able to penetrate the British palate. "Romanisation" was mainly induced by supply, with the army's activities in towns stimulating changes in livestock rearing across the province. Civilians, natives, and soldiers interacted through trade and, given the majority of meats were locally sourced by the army,⁴⁷ it is no wonder that the Roman army has been described by Redfern et al. as a major influencer on dietary changes in the province, primarily induced by the livestock revolution that occurred following occupation.⁴⁸ This influence also contributed to the preservation of particular preferences, with the army's taste for sheep meat around Hadrian's Wall preventing the disappearance of lamb consumption from the British palate. Indeed, though the Vindolanda tablets tell of animals raised in the *territorium* (enclosed area of land around a Roman camp or military base that was laboured on for agricultural purposes)[ii.180], Roman goods appear at native sites within a generation of conquest,⁴⁹ demonstrating the importance of trade in penetrating the cultural life of Britons. Furthermore, where the diet homogenised over Roman rule, so did slaughter practices, with a gradual increase in the age profile of slaughtered animals observable across all contexts, and Roman butchery practices, espoused by the army, even spreading to rural sites.⁵⁰

⁴³ Thomas, R. Supply Chain Networks and the Roman Invasion of Britain: A Case Study from Alchester, Oxfordshire in Stallibrass, S. & Thomas, R. (2008), p. 36.

⁴⁴ Thomas, R., Supply Chain Networks, p. 142.

⁴⁵ Kaszab-Olschewski, T. Central and Northern Europe in Erdkamp, P. & Holleran, C. (2018), p. 201

⁴⁶ King, A. (1991). Food Production and Consumption-Meat in Jones, R. *Britain in the Roman Period: Recent Trends*. Sheffield, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Stallibrass, S. & Thomas, R. For Starters: Producing and Supplying Food to the army in the Roman North-West Provinces in Stallibrass, S. & Thomas, R. (2008), p. 7.

⁴⁸ Redfern et al, *Temporal Changes*, p. 1151.

⁴⁹ Whittaker, C. Supplying the Army: Evidence from Vindolanda in Erdkamp, P. (2002), p. 225.

⁵⁰ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 89.

Therefore, it is clear that the meat preferences of the army, as the visible agents of the Roman state, caused a complete inversion in British meat tastes, dethroning mutton and lamb as the proteins of choice in favour of pork and beef. Where there continues to be some regional and temporal variation, with native and rural sites taking longer to adopt Roman butchery and dietary characteristics, by the end of the occupation phase, the army's preferences had induced a homogenisation of British meat tastes. Moreover, the army's preservation of certain Late Iron Age meat customs, such as the consumption of sheep meat in some areas, ensured that certain practices never died out.⁵¹ Thus, through its role as a great trader and symbol of elite culture, the Roman military presence had a huge impact on British meat preferences.

Fish

Fish was another food that experienced a change in popularity due to the military presence. Marine proteins were virtually absent from the Late Iron Age diet, becoming more popular after the Roman occupation.⁵² The extent to which its popularity grew is contested, with Maltby asserting that fish's place on the province's palate grew enormously in importance during the occupation period, whilst Locker argues that fish consumption only increased slightly from Late Iron Age levels.⁵³ However, it is agreed that the Late Iron Age diet was notorious for lack of fish consumption, despite some finds of imported seafood, such as the Spanish mackerel remains at Skeleton Green.

The infantryman had a general appetite for shellfish, oysters, and mussels, though these were less relevant to their diet than terrestrial protein sources.⁵⁴ Indeed, the army's preference for oysters is shown in two key ways: indirectly, oysters only appear as a substantial component of the British palate after military conquest;⁵⁵ and directly, oysters were transported from southern England to the northern garrisons to satisfy their taste buds.⁵⁶ In fact, British oysters were renowned throughout the Empire for their delectability.⁵⁷ Moreover, this trend is not unique to Britain, with garrisons in the modern Netherlands, such as at Nijmegen, showing evidence of Spanish mackerel consumption.⁵⁸ In the province at large, a wide range of aquatic foods were consumed, including oysters, mussels, and crabs - all consumed at a high frequency.⁵⁹ Elsewhere, freshwater fish, such as

⁵¹ Pitts, *Celtic Food*, p. 328.

⁵² Maltby, *Exploitation of Animals*, p. 801.

⁵³ Locker, A. (2007). In *Piscibus Diversis*; the Bone Evidence for Fish Consumption in Roman Britain. *Britannia*, 38, p. 144.

⁵⁴ Davies, *Military Diet*, p. 128.

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Supply Chain Networks*, p. 34.

⁵⁶ Thomas & Stallibrass, *Producing and Supplying Food*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 108.

⁵⁸ Deschler-Erb & Groot, *Carnem et Circenses*, p. 105.

⁵⁹ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 108-109.

eel, trout, and salmon, were consumed more frequently than their saltwater counterparts, though the preference tended to be situational, with coastal sites showing high levels of saltwater fish consumption and vice versa.⁶⁰

The degree to which the army affected fish consumption is less clear, with a general trend that more “Romanised” sites, such as those with a high military presence, featured higher levels of fish consumption.⁶¹ Locker outlines the reasons why an analysis of the consumption of fish is so difficult when compared to red meat, as marine life often have far smaller bones, which are less likely to have been archaeologically preserved.⁶² Indeed, whilst the army’s fish preferences did penetrate urban and military contexts, it appears as though pre-occupation customs led to a limited permeability into rural and native sites, with just eleven percent of fish remains from the South and South-East coming from these contexts, as opposed to eighty-five percent of fish remains being found in urbanised sites.⁶³

However, this does not exclude the possibility of a permeation of preferences to the countryside. Spanish mackerel remains have been discovered in rural, non-villa sites, such as at Great Holts Farm and Elm Farm.⁶⁴ At a heavily urbanised site such as York, there is evidence for frequent shellfish consumption,⁶⁵ suggesting some correlation between the preferences of the army and the elite, and the subsequent appearance of these foodstuffs in contexts where the Roman military presence was largest, with York serving as the headquarters of the Legio VI Victrix from 120 to 410 CE.

Moreover, there is some evidence that a heavily marine diet was preferred by elites, with the discrepancy in consumption between high-status burials at Poundbury and their wooden-coffined counterparts indicative of this.⁶⁶ The military’s taste for *garum* (fermented fish-sauce), on the other hand, does seem to have had some effect on the preferences at native sites, though the frequency of finds is still vastly greater in more “Romanised” areas.⁶⁷

Finally, Britain may have even impacted the army’s fish preferences, with British military sites’ uniquely high levels of salmon remains likely due to the far greater availability of this freshwater fish relative to a region where salmon is absent from the military palate, such as in Italy.⁶⁸ However, the continued preference for mackerel at inland sites, such as at Wroxeter, suggests a preference for certain fish.⁶⁹

Overall, therefore, despite Locker’s conclusion that the army’s impact on British fish

⁶⁰ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 105.

⁶¹ Locker, *In Piscibus Diversis*, p. 155.

⁶² Locker, *In Piscibus Diversis*, p. 142.

⁶³ Locker, *In Piscibus Diversis*, p. 147-149.

⁶⁴ Locker, *In Piscibus Diversis*, p. 150.

⁶⁵ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 109.

⁶⁶ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 106.

⁶⁷ Redfern et al, *Temporal Changes*, p. 1151.

⁶⁸ Locker, *In Piscibus Diversis*, p. 158.

⁶⁹ Locker, *In Piscibus Diversis*, p. 149.

consumption was far more limited than its impact on meat preferences, mainly due to its inability to override native hostility towards aquatic protein consumption, the Roman military presence nevertheless had a great impact on increasing both the level and diversity of fish consumption in Britain.⁷⁰ Redfern et al. likewise conclude that the army was a factor in influencing regional dietary variations and deduce that soldiers and more “Romanised” individuals (in terms of grave-goods and proximity to the Roman *civitas*) featured higher fish consumption, indicative of an influence of dietary preferences.⁷¹

Wild Game

Wild game was only a minor source of meat consumption in the military diet, with very little evidence for wild game consumption indicative of limited hunting.⁷² Wild game merely supplemented the major animal protein sources in the Roman military diet, though there is a higher proportion of wild game remains found at military sites compared to other contexts, which may be indicative of a culinary preference by the soldiery.⁷³ The military garrisons in Britain are known to have hunted deer and elk, though Chandezon purports that the animal selected for the hunt would be determined not by the taste of its meat but how “nobly” it was viewed in Roman society, with the aggressive boar seen as the most “noble” and the submissive deer less so.⁷⁴ There does appear to be some socio-economic variation in wild game consumption amongst military sites, indicated by Cerialis, commander at Vindolanda, requesting hunting nets [ii.233] whilst the higher frequency of wild game remains from officers’ quarters is a pattern observable at both Vindolanda and Caerleon.⁷⁵

Where the Roman army consumed limited wild game, it was even less relevant to the Late Iron Age diet. Amongst pre-conquest sites, there is virtually no evidence of wild game consumption despite some forms, such as pheasants, allegedly being accessible to those of even a modest social standing.⁷⁶ King and Pitts both agree that low levels of wild game consumption amongst Late Iron Age Britons were likely due to their ritualistic and religious significance, with Pitts arguing that the presence of wild animals in pre-conquest funerary contexts serves as evidence for Celtic reverence.⁷⁷

Across the province, hunting appears to have been popular: hunting dogs were a famous regional export even during the Late Iron Age, and hunting scenes are frequently found in mosaics and as

⁷⁰ Locker, *In Piscibus Diversis*, p. 155.

⁷¹ Redfern et al, *Temporal Changes*, p. 1156-1158.

⁷² Thomas, *Supply Chain Networks*, p. 34.

⁷³ Groot, *Roman Camp*, p. 999; Deschler Erb & Groot, *Carnem et Circenses*, p. 105-107.

⁷⁴ Chandezon, *Animals, Meat and Alimentary By-products*, p. 139.

⁷⁵ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 113-114.

⁷⁶ Kron, G. Agriculture in Wilkins, J. & Nadeau, R. (2015), p. 165.

⁷⁷ King, *Food Production*, p. 16; Pitts, *Celtic Foods*, p. 139.

trophy pieces, such as the boar tusks displayed at Segontium.⁷⁸ Game was hunted with the intention to consume the animal, unlike in later centuries where wild animals were often hunted solely for sport.⁷⁹ However, wild game consumption was rather limited, only forming a very small part of the citizens' diet.⁸⁰

Moreover, there does seem to be some disagreement over whether greater wild game consumption represented a higher status lifestyle, with Maltby arguing wild game consumption was the prerogative of the upper classes.⁸¹ This view is challenged by Cool, who uses the absence of evidence from Fishbourne Palace to explain that there was no correlation between a site's perceived socio-economic status and its wild game consumption, showing some scholarly disagreement in this area.⁸² The extent to which the army impacted the wild game preferences of Britons therefore appears straightforward. Although consumption remained limited, there does seem to have been a dissipation of the Late Iron Age taboo on wild game consumption, with the army's role as suppliers of wild game meat, as evidenced at Vindolanda, in conjunction with the military's taste for wild game and hunting, likely signalling to Britons of the "Roman-ness" of the practice, explaining the general increase in hunting, wild game consumption, and its prevalence in art following the occupation.⁸³ Indeed, as it was often retired veterans that would supply wild game to Vindolanda, it is conceivable that former soldiers would also sell their produce at provincial markets, representing another sphere of interaction where the military may have influenced indigenous diets.⁸⁴

Elsewhere, the inverse may have also occurred. The gradual increase in the relevance of local game in military diets may be indicative of a localisation of meat sources, suggesting either an adaptation to the fauna around Vindolanda or an increase in the supply of local game from natives over time, with this argument for economic interaction supported by Davies.⁸⁵ Therefore, the army and its preferences had a marked impact on shifting the Late Iron Age aversion to hunting and wild game consumption, influencing the British palate in the process.

Poultry and Birds

Poultry and bird foodstuffs were consumed through two sources: meat and eggs. For the infantryman, duck, goose, and chicken were notable components of the diet, eaten more extensively than fish.⁸⁶ Indeed, this trend can also be seen in the other northwestern provinces, with poultry remains from modern Swiss and Dutch military sites, though these feature some

⁷⁸ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 117.

⁷⁹ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 111.

⁸⁰ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 113.

⁸¹ Maltby, *Exploitation of Animals*, p. 800.

⁸² Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 117.

⁸³ Whittaker, *Supplying the Army*, p. 217.

⁸⁴ Whittaker, *Supplying the Army*, p. 217.

⁸⁵ Thomas & Stallibrass, *Producing and Supplying Food*, p. 9; Davies, *Military Diet*, p. 123-124.

⁸⁶ Davies *Military Diet*, p. 130-131.

regional variation, with Deschler-Erb and Groot arguing that the closer proximity of Swiss sites to the centre of the empire explains the demonstrably higher consumption rates of poultry, suggested to be due to the greater exposure of the region to the “Romanised” diet.⁸⁷ Moreover, the British garrisons were also fond of eggs, and the Vindolanda tablets reveal as much. From the writings of Iulius Verecundus, commander at Vindolanda from the late first century, the sourcing of poultry and its by-products is illuminated. He drafted a shopping list for his slave, requesting twenty chickens and two hundred eggs [ii.302], likely from a local market, which reveals how important poultry foodstuffs were for the military diet. This was a radical departure from the culinary preferences of the Late Iron Age which, much like its limited wild game consumption, has been attributed to a cultural taboo around bird and poultry consumption, with Pitts similarly suggesting that the existence of bird remains from depositional and funerary contexts is indicative of their sacrality and explanative of this low consumption.⁸⁸

In terms of the wider civilian diet, whilst chicken certainly became much more common post-invasion, it did not solidify itself as a dietary staple, though it does tend to be found most commonly in the areas with the highest military presence, such as military sites and large urban centres.⁸⁹ Furthermore, duck and goose consumption mirrors this pattern, though remains are much less archaeologically observable than chicken bones.⁹⁰ Where there is evidence of egg consumption across the province, this appears to be limited to chicken sources, rather than goose, quail, or duck eggs, the latter of which would become especially popular in Britain much later in its history, particularly during the Second World War.⁹¹ Elsewhere, there appears to be some socio-economic dynamics at play with the consumption of bird and poultry foodstuffs, demonstrable both in the shopping list from Vindolanda coming from a commander and that poultry and bird remains tend to be better represented at higher-status sites.⁹²

The extent to which the army was a vehicle for “Romanisation” was similar to its effect on wild game consumption. The existing cultural taboo on eating birds, a remnant of the Late Iron Age diet, was only ever partially permeated by the preferences of the military, demonstrated in the much greater presence of poultry and bird remains in areas with a high military presence, such as military sites and large urban centres. Indeed, the army’s influence on the British palate is perhaps more observable in their introduction of the consumption of bird species, such as chicken, on a wide scale, an effect that would have dramatic long-term consequences, with chicken now constituting

⁸⁷ Deschler-Erb & Groot, *Carnem et Circenses*, p. 102, p. 106.

⁸⁸ Pitts, *Celtic Food*, p. 329.

⁸⁹ Maltby, *Exploitation of Animals*, p. 800.

⁹⁰ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 99.

⁹¹ Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 102.

⁹² Cool, *Eating and Drinking*, p. 101.

the most widely consumed animal protein in the modern British diet.⁹³ Moreover, the army's preference for chicken may have influenced the size of British chickens, which exhibit an increase in size post-invasion, and the army's role as an importer of new species, such as nonnative pheasants, shows a further way in which the army has influenced the British palate.⁹⁴ Furthermore, on a microscopic level, veterans were responsible for supplying poultry, with evidence from Vindolanda alluding to these former soldiers directly influencing the local diets through their activities as traders of their preferred meats.⁹⁵ Finally, the influence of Britons on the military diet can also be detected from poultry remains in ritual contexts, being found as grave goods potentially relating to Mercury, showing that the pre-conquest tendency to treat birds and poultry with sacrality may have even penetrated the customs of the Roman garrisons in Britain. Therefore, the introduction of new species of birds and poultry into Britain, as well as its introduction of poultry consumption on a wide scale to the province, likely influenced by the activities of the army through trade and exchange by commanders and veterans, reveals that the Roman military presence did have a large impact on this area of British culinary preferences, though less of an impact than it had over fish and red meat consumption.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the Roman military presence had a great impact on British culinary preferences. Though some parts of the province were less impacted by the Roman army in dietary terms than others, with Wales and some rural "native" sites being less permeable to dietary change and more rigid in their adherence to pre-conquest culinary preferences, even in these contexts, the army's food tastes were still penetrative. Whilst this is most acutely observable over red meat consumption, the military's adoration for pork and beef spreading across the province and, in most areas, displacing the Late Iron Age staple of lamb and mutton, the army's tastes affected all the macro-culinary categories analysed. Through the army's importation of foodstuffs to satisfy its taste buds, it massively increased fish consumption in the province and introduced new animal species that would become important to the British palate.

Indeed, the army had demonstrable effects on the social sphere, with rural sites away from military interaction imitating the army's diet, potentially to signify a desire to increase social standing. Elsewhere, the unique agricultural world of Britain also affected the army's palate, causing certain foodstuffs from Late Iron Age contexts to maintain their relevance, such as oysters, because the military continued to consume these goods. Furthermore, the army can be seen as a vehicle for "Romanisation" and played a key factor in influencing dietary preferences, with the introduction of new foods on a wide scale to Britain that quickly became influential on the Romano-British

⁹³ Cool, *Eating and Drinking* p. 98; Billing, S., Breen, M. & Salazar, A. (2020). Eating Better Alliance. We Need to Talk About Chicken. *Eating Better Report*, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Maltby, *Exploitation of Animals*, p. 800-801.

⁹⁵ Whittaker, *Supplying the Army*, p. 217.

plate, such as chicken, indicative of this.⁹⁶ Samuel Pegge's 1780 preface to *The Forme of Cury*, a roll of English gastronomy composed by the cooks of Richard II, references the influence of Apicius' *De Re Culinaria* on English cuisine, and the fact that the only surviving cookbook from the Roman Empire had such a profound effect on mediaeval gastronomy in the British Isles attests to the long-term influence of this process of dietary change associated with the Roman army.⁹⁷ Indeed, in the roll itself, the prevalence of pork and beans, both staples of the Roman military diet, provide further indications of the army's significance in affecting culinary preferences.⁹⁸

This conclusion also has wider implications. The steady "Romanisation" of the province's diets may mirror more top-down attempts at social change, such as the description of the deliberate state policy of cultural imperialism in Tacitus's *Agricola*.⁹⁹ Indeed, where further study could be pursued, the influence of provincial elites on the culinary preferences of native Britons may yield a fruitful area of research to show the importance of using dietary analysis as a proxy for the role of high-status individuals in changing the customs of the indigenous peoples following the Roman invasion. Therefore, the original hypothesis of this paper can finally be answered with clarity. The extent to which the army affected British culinary preferences was great, with the uniquely high military presence in the province relative to the civilian population and the absence of complex and rooted social structures before the Roman occupation allowing the military to have particularly significant short and long-term influences on the British palate.

⁹⁶ Redfern et al, *Temporal Changes*, p. 1151.

⁹⁷ *The Forme of Cury*, iii.

⁹⁸ *The Forme of Cury*, p. 1-10.

⁹⁹ Tacitus, *Agricola*, p. 21.