

# CHAPTER 14

## THANKSGIVING DERIVATIVES

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In the United States, the fourth Thursday in November is a special holiday set aside for giving thanks. And for many families the most important part of Thanksgiving is eating a big dinner together. In ancient Rome, by contrast, there was no national day of thanksgiving, and in fact, the Romans could never have eaten many of the foods we enjoy at Thanksgiving nowadays. Turkey, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, squash, tomatoes, or desserts sweetened with sugar or flavored with chocolate were unknown in the Roman world because they are products of the Americas.

Moreover, butter was not used in cooking, only in medicine as a healing salve, and since sugar was unknown, *mel* (honey) was used as a sweetener. Honey was added to dishes such as *ōva mellīta*, a concoction of beaten *ōva* (eggs) with pepper and honey on top. The English word “omelet” is derived from this delicacy.

Studies of the skeletons found in the ancient city of Herculaneum indicate that the people there were healthy and well nourished. There was little tooth decay because there were few *dulcia* (sweets), and chewy bread meant well-developed jaws and teeth. It is interesting that the English word “companion” comes from the Latin word *pānis* (bread) because someone with whom you break bread is your companion or friend.

While working people often ate at fast food counters, as the number of *thermopōlia* (bars) in Pompeii and Herculaneum attests, wealthy Romans preferred elaborate meals prepared at home in the *culīna* (kitchen). You can see that the English word “culinary” comes from *culīna*. The kitchen staff in a large household often included a slave in charge of chopping up the food that was to be served. Such a slave was known as a *scissor*.

We know quite a lot about some of the dishes that Roman cooks prepared because an ancient cookbook by a Roman writer named Apicius still exists. It is clear from Apicius’s recipes that the Romans enjoyed a varied diet. They ate both *carō* (meat) and *piscēs* (fish) and a variety of *holera* (vegetables). They can be described as omnivores!

If a modern American family says that their Thanksgiving dinner was delicious “from soup to nuts,” they mean that the meal was tasty from start to finish. Similarly, the Latin phrase *ab ovo usque ad mala* (from eggs to apples) is a description of an entire Roman meal: the appetizer might consist of hard-boiled eggs; apples or another fruit could be served as dessert.

## EXERCISES

I. Fill in the blank with the meaning of each English word. Some of the English meanings were discussed on the previous page, some may require a dictionary, and some you may know already or can guess.

<i>Latin word</i>	<i>English word</i>	<i>Meaning of English</i>
1. <i>grātia</i> , -ārum (f. pl.) = thanks	grace	<b><u>elegance of form</u></b>
	gratitude	<b><u>thankfulness</u></b>
	ingrate	<b><u>a person who is not appreciative</u></b>
2. <i>carō</i> , <i>carnis</i> (f.) = meat, flesh	carnivore	<b><u>a flesh or meat eater</u></b>
	incarnation	<b><u>person or thing embodying a particular quality or spirit</u></b>
3. <i>herba</i> , -ae (f.) = grass, vegetation	herbivore	<b><u>a plant eater</u></b>
4. <i>mel</i> , <i>mellis</i> (n.) = honey	melody	<b><u>sweet musical sounds, a tune</u></b>
5. <i>oleum</i> , -ī (n.) = oil	petroleum	<b><u>an oily liquid that can be distilled into gasoline</u></b>
6. <i>pānis</i> , <i>pānis</i> (m.) = bread	companion	<b><u>comrade, partner</u></b>
7. <i>dulcis</i> , -e = sweet	dulcimer	<b><u>a stringed musical instrument</u></b>
8. <i>culīna</i> , -ae (f.) = kitchen	culinary	<b><u>related to cooking</u></b>
9. <i>vīnum</i> , -ī (n.) = wine	wine	<b><u>fermented grape juice</u></b>
10. <i>aqua</i> , -ae (f.) = water	aqueduct	<b><u>bridge-like structure with a channel for water</u></b>
11. <i>crustula</i> , -ae (f.) = cookie	crust	<b><u>a hard outer layer</u></b>
12. <i>scissor</i> , -ōris (m.) = skilled chopper	scissors	<b><u>a tool for cutting</u></b>
13. <i>ōvum</i> , -ī (n.) = egg	oval	<b><u>egg shaped</u></b>
14. <i>prandium</i> , -ī (n.) = lunch	postprandial	<b><u>after a meal</u></b>
15. <i>piscis</i> , -is (m.) = fish	piscatorial	<b><u>pertaining to fish</u></b>

II. Translate these phrases. NB: you may need to use a dictionary or an Internet site.

- cum grano salis **with a grain of salt, with a little disbelief**
- in vino veritas **in wine (there is) truth**
- de gustibus non est disputandum **about taste it must not be disputed/argued, there is no accounting for tastes, concerning tastes there is no dispute**

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4. ab ovo usque ad mala                    from eggs to apples, from soup to nuts, from beginning to end
5. cornucopia                                 horn of plenty

### III. Match the Latin word with its English meaning.

- |                             |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1. <u>D</u> <i>ōvum</i>     | A. fish    |
| 2. <u>E</u> <i>mel</i>      | B. lunch   |
| 3. <u>C</u> <i>carō</i>     | C. meat    |
| 4. <u>H</u> <i>culīna</i>   | D. egg     |
| 5. <u>A</u> <i>piscis</i>   | E. honey   |
| 6. <u>B</u> <i>prandium</i> | F. water   |
| 7. <u>I</u> <i>vīnum</i>    | G. cookie  |
| 8. <u>F</u> <i>aqua</i>     | H. kitchen |
| 9. <u>G</u> <i>crustula</i> | I. wine    |
| 10. <u>J</u> <i>oleum</i>   | J. oil     |

### IV. Answer briefly. NB: You may need to use a dictionary or an Internet site.

- Why was it necessary for a wealthy Roman to employ a *scissor*, a slave skilled at chopping up food?  
Hint: What eating utensils were lacking in the ancient world?  
**The Romans did not use forks as eating utensils so it was important to present food in bite-sized pieces.**
- If an “aqueduct” carries water, what is the function of a “viaduct”?  
**A “viaduct” is “a bridge that carries a railroad or a highway.”**
- What is the Latin word for “dining room”? How many couches did it usually contain?  
**There were usually three couches in a *triclinium* (Roman dining room). [Each couch could hold three people reclining. Thus a dinner party could include three guests (the number of the Graces) or nine guests (the number of the Muses).]**
- What does *agō grātiās* mean in Latin?  
**Agō grātiās means “I give thanks.”**



4. Where might a Roman child be heard asking, “Dā mihi crustulam, quaesō!”?
- A. in the garden  
 **C. in the kitchen**  
 B. at the beach  
 D. in the Forum
5. A **cornucopia** decorating a dining room table ready for a Thanksgiving dinner is most likely filled with
- A. napkins  
 **B. fruits and vegetables**  
 C. candles  
 D. salt and pepper
6. Which food was never served at a Roman meal?
- A. bread  
 **C. tomatoes**  
 B. eggs  
 D. honey
7. The English words **omnivore**, **carnivore**, and **herbivore** are derived from the Latin verb *vorō* meaning
- A. cultivate  
 **C. devour**  
 B. prefer  
 D. wish
8. The author of an ancient cookbook in Latin was
- A. Tacitus  
 **C. Apicius**  
 B. Ovid  
 D. Lucretius
9. The Latin phrase *ab ovo usque ad mala* means
- A. from start to finish**  
 B. there is no accounting for tastes  
 C. to the stars through difficulties  
 D. out of many one

**VI.** Just for fun. Look at the menu below. The dishes suggested here were taken from Apicius’s famous cookbook. Find a translation of Apicius’s work and make up a menu for an elegant Roman dinner like this one. Be sure to include three courses. Does a call for pizza (*ofellae*) suddenly seem appealing?

*Appetizers*

Jellyfish and eggs

Sow’s udders stuffed with salted sea urchins

Patina of brains cooked with milk and eggs

Boiled tree fungi with peppered fish-fat sauce

Sea urchins with spices, honey, oil, and egg sauce

*Main Course*

Fallow deer roasted with onion sauce, rue, Jericho dates, raisins, oil, and honey

Boiled ostrich with sweet sauce

Turtle dove boiled in its feathers

Roast parrot

Dormice stuffed with pork and pine kernels  
Ham boiled with figs and bay leaves, rubbed with honey, baked in pastry crust  
Flamingo boiled with dates

*Dessert*

Fricassee of roses with pastry  
Stoned dates stuffed with nuts and pine kernels, fried in honey  
Hot African sweet-wine cakes with honey

Hadas, Moses, *Imperial Rome*.  
(New York, Time Life Books, 1971, p. 85)