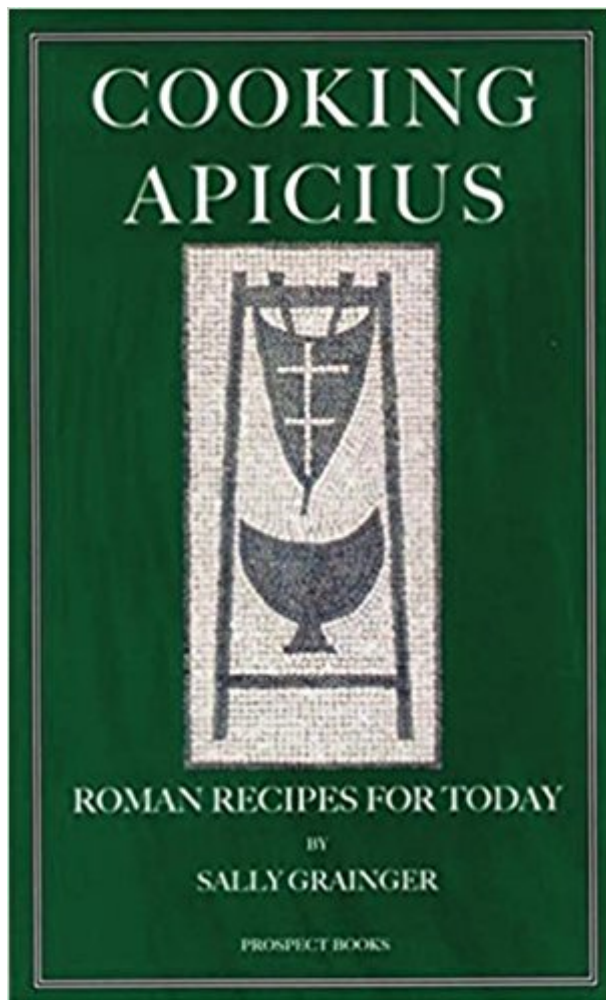


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Cooking Apicius



Synopsis

Sally Grainger has gathered, in one convenient volume, her modern interpretations of 64 of the recipes in the original text. This is not ‘recipes inspired by the old Romans’ but rather a serious effort to convert the extremely gnomic instructions in the Latin into something that can be reproduced in the modern kitchen which actually gives some idea of what the Romans might have eaten. Sally Grainger, therefore, has taken great pains to suggest means of replicating the particular Roman taste for fermented fish sauce. It may sound unpleasant, but actually is not too far removed from the fish sauces of the Far East and any reproduction of Roman cookery must depend on getting this particular aspect right.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Apicius was a Roman scholar.

Was a gift . She loved it

I bought this book because I mistook it for the volume that she co-authored with her husband. Okay, with the price difference I should not have made that mistake, but the source I got her name from just described an authoritative book on Apicius by Sally Grainger and did not give a title. When I found this book I looked no further. If I had looked at the inside views of the book I would have seen that the recipes in this book are her interpretations of her favorites from the original work, and not the complete ancient work. Mia culpa. The one major failing of the book is that it lacks an index. I am

talking about the ink-and-paper, hardcopy, book. Not Kindle. Printed books should have an index, in my opinion. A minor annoyance is her use of a variety of spoon sizes with no real information. She specifies four sizes of spoons in somewhat vague terms, and only gives the metric volume of the largest. It should have been easy enough to measure and specify the other three spoons that she uses. This would not have been so annoying had she not said that you needed to stick closely to her amounts of ingredients the first time you cooked any recipe of hers, and only vary amounts after you are sure how the dish tastes when cooked her way. That's a little difficult to do if you don't know what amounts she is actually using. I don't feel it is wise to advise people to wander the streets picking berries from people's hedges, especially when you admit that the ones you are instructing them to pick closely resemble some that are very toxic. On that topic, it might have been useful to suggest alternatives for some of the more difficult-to-obtain ingredients, on the off chance that your reader has bought the book heading into winter and doesn't happen to have some dried abortifacient plant leaves in her kitchen cabinet (I am referring to rue in this case). Those complaints aside, I was inspired by this book to try cooking some ancient Roman dishes. It happens that the first one that I tried was one that I found on another author's blog, but that is the way of things. That dish turned out wonderful, by the way. I used colatura for the garum, which I bought on . I have to wonder why someone who so obviously dislikes the flavor of garlic chose to specialize in reproducing recipes from a part of the world where either garlic or another spice, asafetida, which tastes much like garlic, is used in so many recipes. I get the idea that she likes fish sauce because she can use it to drown out everything else. I will attest to the truth of her statement that you can use the umami quality of fish sauce to cover up the other spices in a dish. I had made a highly spiced turkey dish, in a Chinese mode, that I accidentally over-sweetened. I decided to follow some published advice that one can balance sweetness with salt. I added miso paste, which is a salty vegetable-based source of umami. By the time the sweetness was balanced, the dish tasted like beef pot roast. It was like tasty beef pot roast, cooked with onions and carrots until the vegetables dissolve into nothing but flavor, but it was nevertheless not turkey with Chinese spices. So because she obviously knows what she is doing in the kitchen, I gave her four stars even though I don't necessarily agree with her goals or some of her instructions. I also bought the book co-authored by her husband, which has all of the Apicius recipes translated. It's what I really wanted in the first place.

It is a Time capsule, Mrs Grainger reaches out her hand and stirs the pots as a sous chef in Apicius Kitchen, then retreats bringing the finished product to my table...delicious, aromatic, spicy, not at all bland and distant, filling the blanks with modern imagination. Some dishes need attention and time,

the mark of a great Master Chef....If one feels adventurous and bold and discover that Ancient times are no different than today, including fast food joints in Pompeii...before 79AD!!!

Interesting and fun. While some recipes' ingredients are a bit out there, it seems to be a practical interpretation of Roman dishes for modern readers.

NICE BOOK.

I wanted the huge academic work by this author and her husband but as it was too expensive, I took a chance on this smaller, less expensive book. I am THRILLED. First, the history section at the beginning is interesting, detailed and marvelously informative. I enjoyed reading about what the items of food likely were, how they were likely prepared, and who likely did the cooking. The academic work may get into more footnoted details but this was wonderful. Pleasant to read and chock full of details I can USE. Then there are the recipes. She cooks. The recipes are clear. Understandable. She gives information on period techniques and suggestions for modern methods that give a similar result. USEFUL! I am delighted that I could put a dish in front of my family from the 1st Century AD and know that it is not too different from what people would have eaten. I love living history. My Byzantine persona for the Society for Creative Anachronism would have likely eaten like this. What bits and pieces I have read from 10th Century, they were eating very similarly to the foods in Apicius and unlike many extant writings, Apicius was written for the cook, likely by a cook, or cooks, and so is practical and not merely philosophic meanderings about food. For the cook who loves history, or the history buff who wants to cook period appropriate foods, I highly recommend this book.

For years, people reconstructing Roman food have taken Apicius literally, and without any thought into the many elements of Roman food. Usually, the food is at best tasteless, often inedible, and the excuse is usually an emphatic "this is how the Romans did it! Their taste is not ours". Rather, Apicius is a guide for experienced cooks, much like 18th and 19th century US cookbooks, where the recipe leaves almost all the explanations and cooking instructions out. Sally Grainger has done meticulous research into the elements of Roman cooking, and actually worked the recipes out into very palatable dishes. I've read through almost all the so called Apicius cookbooks and this is by far the most thorough explanation of the ingredients and how they are made, including mulsum and garum, and in depth descriptions of the unusual seasonings like lovage. This will change how our

reenactment and reconstruction efforts will present Roman food from now on, and make the accompanying academic book that much more interesting.

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