



Amphorae exhibited in Mérida Museum (Spain - Ruta Vía de la Plata). From left to right: two used for oil in the early Empire and one for fish preserves in the late Empire. They were all found in the city of Mérida.

# Roman Gastronomy. Pottery

THE OBJECT OF THE  
SEASON.



## CUISINE

Roman cuisine refers to the food and cooking practices of ancient Rome, which was heavily influenced by Greek, Etruscan and Carthaginian traditions. It was characterized by simple, yet flavorful dishes made with ingredients such as olives, cheese, eggs, and a variety of meats such as pork, chicken and beef. Bread was a staple food, as well as various fruits and vegetables. Spices and herbs were used to enhance the flavor of dishes. Wine was an integral part of daily life and cuisine. Some of the most famous dishes from ancient Rome include „garum“, a type of fermented fish sauce, and „moretum“, a cheese and herb spread.

## POTTERY

We can get key information about Roman cuisine by studying Roman pottery which is the most common find during any archaeological excavation.

Pottery production was one of the most important industries in the Roman world, providing essential household items such as cooking pots, tableware, lamps and storage jars. It was widely traded and used throughout the Roman Empire giving us valuable insights into contacts of different regions of the ancient Roman civilisation.

## DOLIUM/PITHOS AND AMPHORA

In this Peace of the Month we will present two types of pottery called „dolium“ or „pithos“ and amphora from the different geographic areas of each Iter Romanum member. These large ceramic vessels were considered as essential containers for storage and transport of goods such as wine, oil and grain.

# AMPHORAE AND DOLIA (PITHOI)

The food storage, preservation and its transportation are the key issues in all periods of human civilization, both within individual households and in the commercial exchange. It gained importance with the increase of the population in the Roman Empire, concentration of the population in the cities, as well as with gaining secure food supply of the Roman army.

Roman Empire had an extensive network of roads and waterways, including the Mediterranean Sea, that facilitated the transport of goods across vast distances. This enabled trade of various kind of goods from the places where they were produced to the places where they were needed, both within the Empire and beyond. There are different types of Roman storage pottery, each designed for a specific purpose. Some of the most common types included amphorae, which were tall, narrow vessels with two handles used to store liquids such as wine and oil, and dolia (pithos) which were large, round jars used to store grains and other dry goods. Roman storage pottery was produced in large quantities throughout the Roman Empire, and many examples have been found in archaeological excavations across Europe and the Mediterranean. These vessels provide important insights into the everyday life and the economy of the ancient Romans.



*Locally produced ceramic vessel/dolium, with red engobe, height: 49,5 cm. Bracara Augusta site, Roman period. Property of Dom Diogo de Sousa Regional Museum of Archaeology (MDDS) - Braga (Portugal), photo: Manuel C. Santos.*

Generally, dolia and amphorae were transported by land, sea or rivers using various modes of transportation, such as carts, pack animals, boats and ships. The size and shape of the vessels often determined the mode of transport. For short distances, carts pulled by oxen or horses were used. For longer distances, pack animals like mules and donkeys were used to carry smaller vessels, over rough terrain. For sea transport, amphorae and other types of pottery were packed into larger containers, such as wooden crates or baskets to protect them from damage during the transport, and then loaded onto boats and ships.



*Ceramic pot/ pithos of local production, height: 43,5 cm. Gomolava site, Roman period - 1st century AD, Property of Ruma County Museum (Serbia), Photo: Slobodan Maksić.*

Wine and oil production was the main reason for the development of the two specialized storage and transport containers: the amphora and the pithos (dolium). The historical geography of these vessels tracks origins of wine and oil production. It starts from the 2nd millennium BC at the eastern Mediterranean and developed across the entire Mediterranean basin during the 1st millennium BC.



*Local and Cisalpine Gaul wine and oil amphorae. Late 2nd century BC-1st century AD  
Exhibition Made in Rome and Aquileia-Aquileia (Italy). ph. Photo: Gianluca Baronchelli*

Amphorae were wheel-made, of uniform size and volume, often with pointed-bases that made them less vulnerable during transport, with handles and narrow neck. Their shape was adjusted to the stacking, leaning and tying in the holds of the ships or hoisted on the shoulders of the human porters. Their narrow neck was closed with the stopper and sealed with clay. It is important to stress that one of the basic unit of the Roman liquid measuring system was the amphora (amphora/-ae quadrantal). The name comes from the ceramic vessel. Its equivalent is a cubic Roman foot, or 8 congii, which in the modern metric system would be 25.79-26.2 liters.

Their bigger terrestrial cousins were larger clay storage vessels (Roman dolia, Greek pithoi). Their height could be over half a meter, and their volume capacity from 100 to 2000 liters. Their production required potting specialization. Such jars could be set deep in the ground or left free-standing. They were sealable and vermin-resistant way to storage goods at a reasonable stable temperature. They are linked with wine production, but also with storing oil, cereals and other products. Their capacity was adjusted to Roman metric system mainly related to dry goods whose basic unit was mondius (mondius/-i). One mondius was the equivalent of 2 whole and 2/3 congii, or 8.732/ 9.28 liters.

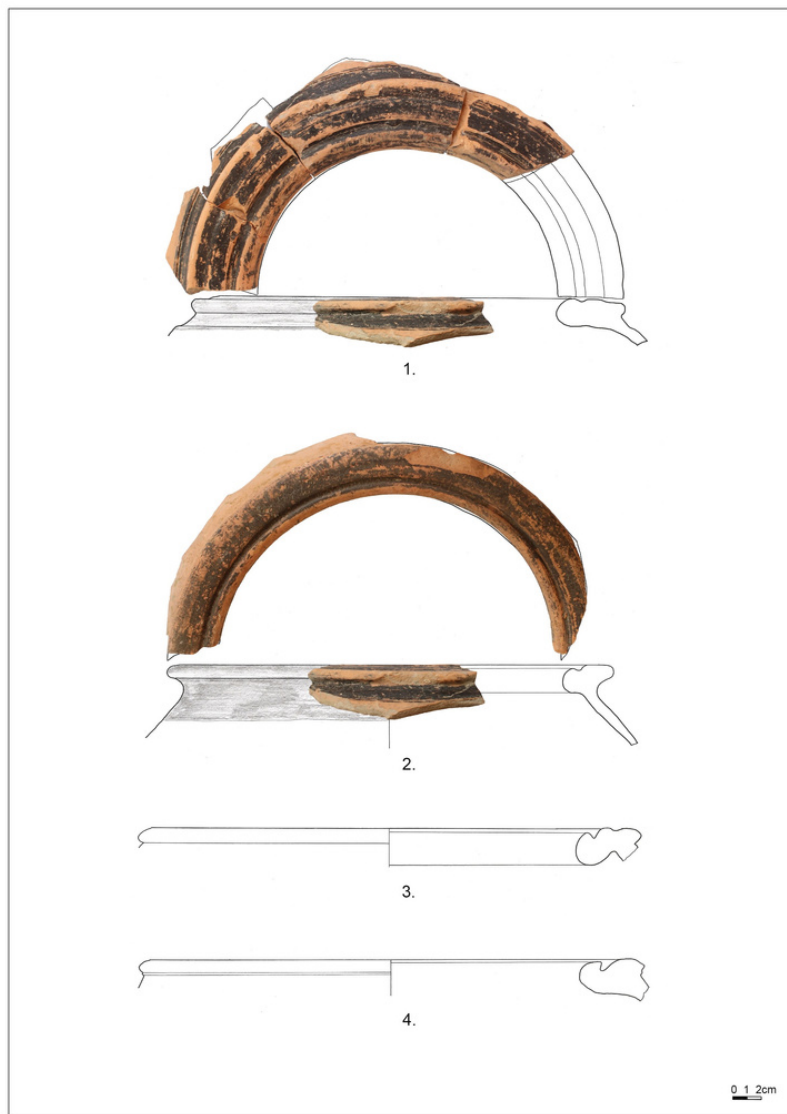


*Local wine amphora with stamp Q. NVMERI - 1st century AD  
Exhibition Made in Rome and Aquileia-Aquileia (Italy). Photo. Gianluca Baronchelli.*



*Jug/ amphora of local production, Late 2nd - 4th century AD, height: 36,8 cm  
Bracara Augusta site, Roman period, late 2nd-4th century  
Property of Dom Diogo de Sousa Regional Museum of Archaeology (MDDS) - Braga (Portugal), Photo: Manuel C. Santos.*

The results obtained from comparison of pottery from different regions of the Roman Empire contribute to the knowledge of Roman-provincial culture, which, precisely in this period, combines the specificities of local development and the general characteristics of Roman civilization.



*Ceramic pitoi of local production with resin coating on the rim against vermins.*

*Sirmium, Roman period - 1st/2nd century AD.*

*Property of the Museum of Srem (Serbia), Photo: Risto Drašković*



*A late Roman dolium from the Roman villa of Veranes (Gijón - Ruta Vía de la Plata - Spain)*



*Late Antique dolium with a lid that was found in the collapse of storeroom in a house in Mérida. (Ruta Vía de la Plata - Spain)*