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## EATING AND DRINKING IN ROMAN BRITAIN

What were the eating and drinking habits of the inhabitants of Britain during the Roman period? Drawing on evidence from a large number of archaeological excavations, this fascinating new study shows how varied these habits were in different regions and amongst different communities and challenges the idea that there was any one single way of being Roman or native. Integrating a range of archaeological sources, including pottery, metalwork and environmental evidence such as animal bone and seeds, this book illuminates eating and drinking choices, providing invaluable insights into how those communities regarded their world. The book contains sections on the nature of the different types of evidence used and how they can be analysed. It will be a useful guide to all archaeologists, and those who wish to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of these materials and how best to use them.

HILARY COOL is a professional archaeologist who, for the past ten years, has run her own business providing post-excavation services to the professional sector. She is also a director of Barbican Research Associates, a company specialising in writing up backlog sites. Her publications include *The Roman Cemetery at Brougham, Cumbria* (2004) and (with J. Price) *Roman Vessel Glass from Excavations at Colchester 1971–1985* (1995).

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***For Mike**  
who has patiently lived with me and the Romans for a very long time*

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## *Preface*

I decided to write this book as it combined three of my great interests in life – food, drink and Roman Britain. Whilst few people would be surprised at the first two, a passion for the third would raise eyebrows in many archaeological circles. For much of my professional life just as real men didn't eat quiche, so real archaeologists didn't do Roman Britain. For Classical archaeologists, the province of *Britannia* was a distant excrescence, far from the 'proper' archaeology of the Mediterranean lands. Within British archaeology, it was seen as the preserve of arcane specialisms pursuing their own agendas far from where the theoretical action was. Whilst theory has now come to Roman Britain, it is still an uncomfortable place for many. Modern tastes wish to do away with anything that recalls colonialism, whilst rising nationalisms prefer not to engage with periods when Britain was self-evidently part of a wider world. Prehistory is still a safer, more comfortable and purer world for archaeologists to play in.

This is a great pity as Roman Britain is a very strange place, much stranger than the many popular books written about it would lead one to think. It is fully worthy of being studied in its own right, but that has to be done on its own terms. This involves knowing how to interpret all the data relating to it. The problem with Roman Britain is that there are just too many things. Too much pottery, too much metalwork, too many animal bones. People tend to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume. They deal with it by picking out the occasional morsel, and hoping the rest will go away. This book is offered as a kind of hitchhiker's guide to those who would like to explore this material, but who lose the will to live when faced with the reams of specialist reports that even a minor excavation can generate. It shows, I hope, how these reports can be used to explore different facets of the past. I have chosen to explore eating and drinking

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*Preface*

because not only does it interest me but, as the celebrated gourmet and bon viveur Brillat-Savarin said ‘Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are’. Where better to start exploring Roman Britain?  
*Bon appetit!*

## *Acknowledgements*

A book like this depends on the work of the specialists who have sorted, identified, analysed and published the multitude of items on which it is based. Their names are mentioned in the footnotes, but I would like to put on record my thanks here, and my apologies too if I have misrepresented them.

Over the years I have benefited from discussions with many people. Those who have kindly answered questions specifically to do with this book include Richard Brewer, Peter Davenport, Brenda Dickinson, Jerry Evans, Andrew (Bone) Jones, Ruth Leary, Scott Martin, Quita Mould, Stephanie Ratkái, Paul Sealey and Vivien Swan. Special thanks are due to Ruth and Scott, who made the results of currently unpublished work available to me; and to Bone for reading the sections pertaining to fish. Jerry has been particularly generous with unpublished work and useful discussion. I'm sure he won't agree with what I've made of it all, but I hope he'll enjoy the result. Alex Smith and Oxford Archaeology kindly allowed me to refer to the results of the Claydon Pike excavations in advance of full publication and provided additional details.

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The final stages of preparing the manuscript have been enlivened by listening to the Test Match Special commentary of the thrilling 2005 England – Australia Ashes series. It has been most distracting – many thanks to the players of both teams and the commentators.