

per

not en fieroquinto

GASTRONOMIA

DI

ARCHESTRATO

FRAMMENTI

TRADOTTI

DA DOMENICO SCINÀ



VENEZIA

GIUSEPPE ANTONELLI EDITORE

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Analects

Gastronomy, first canto

Archestratus was a Greek poet, born in Gela, Sicily, who wrote in the middle of the 4th century BC the first poem known in history about gastronomy, referring to various places in the Mediterranean where the best food of the epoch could be found. A sort of gastronomic guide with a singular sense of humor that, on many occasions, was disapprovingly criticized by various philosophers, such as Aristotle, Antiphanes, Lynceus of

Samos, Chrysippus of Solos, and Clearchus of Soli.

The poem is known by the name of Hedypatheia, whose meaning is “life of luxury”. It is made up of four cantos written in hexameter lines. This work has been published and translated into several languages, and this time we share with you, in a first installment, the first canto of this extraordinary creation of General Archestratus, to whom Athenaeum refers years later as follows:

“The poet Archestratus was a friend of one of Pericles’ sons. He had crossed countries and seas to find his most delectable products through his own experience, visiting the kitchens of the places where the pleasures of the table were born. His poetry, ‘the life of luxury’ is a source of knowledge and does not contain a single line that is not a description and culinary advice. Many cooks have acquired in it the foundations of an art that has led them to immortality.”

GASTRONOMY,

FIRST CANTO ¹.

HISTORY OF ANCIENT CUISINE

I do not envy of the lyrical poet
 The rhetorical flowers,
 From which he seems to make his food;
 Full of his matter (although empty)
 Speaks fasting the language of Gods.
 Virgil, the rival of the loving countryside
 Make the countryman the mountains
 Flatten, and teach him chess.
 Arid object! But happy subject
 Is the one I have chosen.
 I sing to the man at the table, and I will say the way
 To decorate food, and the secret
 To increase the pleasures of a banquet
 To forge bonds of friendship, always enjoying
 And in state of pleasant drunkenness, blundering.
 You, who paying no heed to my doctrine,

 Have, to this day, followed your tastes
 With no choice, no method, no science;
 And with your appetite ultimately guided
 Only by habit,
 You had not yet dreamed of the art that constitutes
 my study,
 Come to my school, dear children,
 And without any further ado
 My voice will pronounce serious lessons.
 Will I invoke any Gods, when I can be
 Enough for myself, when my matter
 Fires me up and inspires me?

But the deity who rules over the feasts
 Is not fair to disdain: come then, do not delay
 Mythological God, plump-cheeked God,
 As your happy face manifests,
 Smile at my plan, and make the verse worthy
 Of both, you and the universe,
 Since to the fine arts I would like
 With my poetic and divine streak
 To add another more beautiful, that of Cuisine.
 I will not talk about unhappy times
 In which mankind disdained the plow;
 And wandering without a coat, and without culture
 Everywhere he found a table,
 Do not ask me for useless fatigue
 About centuries in which chaos darkens
 With black vicinity, I do not go up as much,
 Nor is that my method, enough for the century
 Of Hesiod to ascend, contemporary,
 Worthy of the great poet who sang,
 The Trojans, Frogs, and the Gods;
 Then the debased cuisine,
 Despised, -what a shame!- didn't have
 Flattering prestige in its ornament;
 The man there without wariness, without art,
 Mulish got fed;
 And hunger seasoned the delicacies.
 Homer conveys to us
 Domestic trifles, that the genius
 With heroic actions could mix;

¹This is a rough translation of a version of the Spanish translation from the Greek. It is recommended for further study to refer to Arcestratus: Fragments from The Life of Luxury by Wilkins and Hill (1994)

But their sturdy heroes, their warriors,
 Whose courage and extraordinary feats
 We know by heart,
 And who governed Greece as they pleased,
 Would have despised,
 Our tasty Crab substances.
 Who does not know how humble they were
 In preparing their rustic meals?
 Patroclus's, and Peleus's son's
 Tables were never overloaded
 With a variety of dishes:
 In its greatest banquet, any roe deer
 Or Ram were enough for gluttony
 Of those who made Ilium to them surrender.
 To Ulysses wooed by Eumeo
 Two roasted Pigs presented,
 And offering a splendid meal
 Telamon's son with great care,
 It is said, ordered to cook a whole Ox.
 Milk, honey, and fruits of the earth
 Fed the Greeks for a long time:
 Less rustic tables Asia enjoyed;
 But the easterners, even wiser,
 And skilled cooks,
 Mixed their typical fool with more art,
 They left the model on their furnaces,
 They used fat, juices they squeezed
 And dishes they invented,
 That in the world were ignored until then.
 The Persians meanwhile to Greece pass

Their luxury, their cuisine, and their comfort of easy
 living.
 But in Lacedaemon a man could
 Stop the progress of good taste:
 Old Lawgiver, noble Heraclid,
 Curbed the hungry stomach,
 Regulated the appetites, to the laws
 Subjected them cruelly, and already at home
 No one could eat without crime.
 It was necessary that to the public they brought
 Figs, potage, wine, cheese, flour,
 His sauce — that famous sauce
 And appreciated among the Spartans
 With vanity perhaps, but austere thing
 Of Vinegar and pork fierce mix.
 They say that a glutton King, who had heard
 So much praise of this black brew,
 Wanted to try it one day: it was easy for him
 To find a smart cook;
 Finally he comes to his table; but, oh, surprise!
 Oh, cruel disappointment!
 Not well his palate such brew
 Came to touch when he threw wrathfully
 The foreign delicacy:
 And choleric he said, — is that how they deceive
 me?
 The poor frightened cook,
 Sir, answer, a seasoning is missing
 To my stew — And how did you forget?
 There is missing, Lord, if you allow me to say it,
 A preparation that you should use,

The exercise of the Spartan,
 And his tough Helots,
 And especially the bath in the Eurotas.

Ambitious for glory for so long
 Athens made in its happy enclosure
 The arts flourish, not despising
 The seductive talent of mixing
 To make a meal more tasty.
 Very esteemed men, of great genius,
 Knew how to apply to the cuisine
 The great alchemy and daring melic poets
 Managed to whet the appetite
 Of the compatriot, who estimated his zeal.
 Products from the land and the water
 Were material for this profound science,
 Seeing them offer in a stew
 A thousand barely known objects,
 Which, when mixed, surprised themselves.

Many wrote books about this,
 One about meat, another about legumes,
 And another about farinaceous products, herbs,
 fruits.
 Of these precious works, Will I the authors
 Maybe tell? Actides, Mitecus,
 Philoxenus, and Hegemon of Thasos
 With Timbron from Mycenae? especially
 Archestratus, poet and cook

Who was crowned with double laurels
 Shall I stop naming? Emulator of his,
 I sing about the cuisine, about the table.
 But, ha! If he acquired lasting glory—
 Will I - also by chance
 count on my future,
 Customary consolation
 From the author who in his life is despised?
 Of a thousand different things the amalgam
 Was known, cumin, thyme,
 Wild thyme and oregano,
 Were combined and other vegetables:
 Chickens, turkeys were then filled
 And the tender Lambs.
 He got to stew Lion in several ways:
 Saltwater and freshwater fish,
 And Conger, Grouper, Barbus and Herring
 Denatured and stuffed
 With a thousand simple tasty flavors
 In their hands they became nourishing.
 I will not say here the large number of sauces,
 The happy stuffings, and the juices
 And the genius guided by taste
 Too various inventions. Therion, wise,
 Exceeded in pastas especially
 And, solid, the flour between his fingers
 Turned into wafers, cakes,
 And wind fritters; from Cappadocia
 He stole the secret of making flaky pastry

Whiter than milk, mixing
 The honey from Mount Hymettus, which the Greeks
 Appreciated so much; which its land refuses today,
 And the unofficial bee seeks vainly
 In a enslaved country
 By the Gods and Flora abandoned.

Then, from Greece, the feasts
 Chaired grace, finesse,
 And the industry with waywardness; a King passed
 Decrees, which were seldom violated
 By his blessed vassals; sweet Kingdom!
 He made the table, sometimes
 He punished vice, and license;
 He ordered to drink; in this matter
 He was always inexorable:
 Who drank badly or did not drink,
 From the table, thrown fiercely
 To atone for the guilt, absent from there,
 Of stomach, for being weak, delinquent.
 But, who can name the Greeks
 without naming the Romans,
 People King, who controlled the destinies
 Of a hundred provinces that made tributary?
 Presto adjured his rustic manners
 And did not choose among farm workers
 His bosses, nor the wise law of the sensible Numa
 Regulated the customs:
 With immense, rich, fierce spoils,

They equaled their expense to their wealth,
 And although sad, so pilgrim
 The reign of Tarquinio flourished in art.

Among the Heroes, and Consuls of Rome
 I distinguish Lucullus ... his great name,
 Full of amazement, I bend my knee,
 His taste I praise, I admire his fortune:
 Without contemplating the victor of Tigranes,
 But Diana's illustrious glutton.

Mithridates and Amilcar surrendered
 In vain to his power, and he saw from Asia
 The Kings chained to their Chariot.
 What does being a great General do to Lucullus?
 His dinners gave his mark of honor to his fame
 Although there Cicero and the great Pompey,
 Honored at such brilliant banquets,
 Ignorant, the excess reproach.
 He found himself alone one day: a cook
 Proposed to reserve some dishes,
 But he answered him, There is nothing to spare:
 Lucullus is having dinner at Lucullus's house today,
 Satiated already with honors,
 And aged in the same victory
 He put his study and glory in feasting.
 From east to west
 The land offered him its products
 Which of its great cuisine yielded to art;

And whole Europe owes to his active zeal
the first cherry.

Armed squires were seen there,
And new butlers at the service
Of the great Lords; since then
Rich already the cook for his pay
Was not a reputed mercenary,
Formerly distinguished for its useful science
Equaled the Magistrate in regard.
Idolater of fine delicacies,
the famous Mark Antony,
When leaving a treat
dedicated to Cleopatra,
Drunk at the table, and great in his love affairs,
Gave away a City, and its surroundings
To the great Artist, who gave this Queen
With a delicate hand;
Honorable present of the Roman power.

To a thousand exquisite typical foods
Apicius's name was once linked;
He founded a sect, and there were a hundred
complaints
Against Apicius' followers, and their new sauces.
Of the Romans Caesars are known
The appetite, the son, and the feasts;
They say that one of them at a famous banquet

The substance ate from two Provinces:
Vitellius in his wavering government,
Of his short reign took advantage;
Nothing equaled the prodigious table
That one day as treat he gave to his brother,
Because on it there were, if it may be believed
Such crazy profusion, seven thousand birds,
And two thousand fish: everything was excess,
It is incredible the exorbitant expense
Of Ahenobarbus's son: he was a murderer,
briber, cruel, but from his belly
I distinguish the heart. He sat
At the table at the crack of the beautiful dawn,
And when at dusk the sun set, it would find him still
there.

Inheriting Nero' power,
Weak Claudius over glory preferred
A good plate of mushrooms. Retired
Tiberious in the Capreas, conserved
His habit, so odious to the Roman.
Caligula to his illustrious Horse Incitatus
a peerless banquet gave
And Geta's methodical appetite
That observed the alphabet on her table,
Will I forget? The great Dominican
To the august senate presents himself,
And informs about the serious circumstances of state

business;
 "Conscripted parents to come compel me:
 "I am not referring to the sake of the empire now,
 "Or to moving your zeal either,
 "And to ask for advice about the destination
 "Of the great Rome, and the conquered peoples,
 "To make peace, or to wage war;
 "Things, in which you only can be silent.
 "This is about a fish; judge prudently,
 "What sauce could be more timely."
 The Senate voted important case!
 And he gave the Turbot hot sauce.

I could decorate my songs,
 Say a thousand other known traits,
 Not uninteresting and I could
 Cite one hundred chronicles; but let us leave aside
 Old cuisine: enough already
 It has been said of the Greeks, and Romans;
 But the day is not enough, it is fair
 That our century eats. The cuisine
 The Poets disdain excessively
 Undoubtedly because of fear that if they stoop

To such a matter, they will dishonor their muse,
 Leaving their talent debased:
 The paths on earth do not know
 His noble Apollo, who flies to the clouds:
 Magnificent on horseback on the Pegasus
 The courts only inhabit in the Olympus;
 But I, a modest friend of quietude,
 Of rustic homes,
 Confine my muse to moderate ideas.
 Delille in noble, harmonious verses
 Has formed beautiful pictures of the field;
 He paints the man surrounded by streams,
 Of pleasant meadows, and in the forests
 In their sweet delusions embedded,
 And with a thousand various games in his House.
 I admire these rustic pleasures;
 But never the Man of the Fields
 I see eat, and if possible, I want
 Repair this unforgivable oversight.
 Deign my readers, if you regard
 My muse at this point,
 To forgive my verse for its matter.

Translated into Spanish by: Don Manuel Pedro Sánchez Salvador (1818).

Source: Arquéstrato. 1818. La gastronomía, o el arte de comer. Henrique Bryer, Bridge-Street, Blackfriars. London, England.