

The role of dietary restriction in the construction  
of identity in the Graeco-Roman world.

Submitted by Michael John Beer to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Classics,  
September 2007.

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Abbreviations.

<b>Ael.</b>	<i>VH</i>	<b>Aelian</b>	<i>Varia Historia</i>
<b>Apoll. Rhod.</b>	<i>Argon.</i>	<b>Apollonius Rhodius</b>	<i>Argonautica</i>
<b>App.</b>	<i>Rom. Hist.</i>	<b>Appian</b>	<i>Roman History</i>
<b>Apollod.</b>	<i>Bibl.</i>	<b>Apollodorus mythographus</b>	<i>Bibliotheca</i>
<b>Ar.</b>	<i>Av.</i>	<b>Aristophanes</b>	<i>Aves</i>
	<i>Thesm.</i>		<i>Thesmophoriazusae</i>
<b>Arist.</b>	<i>Hist. an.</i>	<b>Aristotle</b>	<i>Historia animalium</i>
	<i>Pol.</i>		<i>Politica</i>
	<i>Pr</i>		<i>Problemata</i>
	<i>Rhet.</i>		<i>Rhetoric</i>
<b>Arr.</b>	<i>Epict. diss.</i>	<b>Arrianus</b>	<i>Epicteti dissertationes</i>
<b>Ath.</b>	<i>Deip.</i>	<b>Athenaeus</b>	<i>Deipnosophistae</i>
<b>August.</b>	<i>De civ. D</i>	<b>Augustine</b>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>
<b>Cass. Dio</b>		<b>Cassius Dio</b>	
<b>Cato</b>	<i>Agr.</i>	<b>Cato Maior</b>	<i>De Agricultura or De Re Rustica</i>
<b>Catull.</b>	<i>Carmin.</i>	<b>Catullus</b>	<i>Carmina</i>

<b>Cic.</b>	<b>Cicero (Marcus Tullius)</b>
<i>Att.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Atticum</i>
<i>Cael.</i>	<i>Pro Caelio</i>
<i>Div.</i>	<i>De divinatione</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>De legibus</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Orationes Philippicae</i>
<i>Pis.</i>	<i>In Pisonem</i>
<b>Clem. Al.</b>	<b>Clemens Alexandrinus</b>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Protr. Beb.</i>	<i>To the Newly Baptized</i>
<b>Columella</b>	<b>Columella</b>
<i>Rust.</i>	<i>De re rustica</i>
<b>Deut.</b>	<b>Deuteronomy</b>
<b>Diod. Sic.</b>	<b>Diodorus Siculus</b>
<b>Diog. Laert.</b>	<b>Diogenes Laertius</b>
<i>Pythag.</i>	<i>Pythagoras</i>
<b>Dioscor.</b>	<b>Dioscorides</b>
<i>De mat. med.</i>	<i>De materia medica</i>
<b>Eur.</b>	<b>Euripides</b>
<i>Bacc.</i>	<i>Bacchae</i>
<b>Euseb.</b>	<b>Eusebius</b>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<b>FHG</b>	<b>Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum</b>
<b>Gal.</b>	<b>Galen</b>
<i>De al. fac.</i>	<i>De alimentorum facultatibus</i>
<i>QAM</i>	<i>quod animi mores corporis temperamentis sequantur</i>
<b>Gell.</b>	<b>Aulus Gellius</b>
<i>NA</i>	<i>Noctes Atticae</i>
<b>Hdt.</b>	<b>Herodotus</b>

<b>Hes.</b>	<b>Hesiod</b>
<i>Op.</i>	<i>Opera et Dies</i>
<i>Sc.</i>	<i>Scutum</i>
<i>Theog.</i>	<i>Theogonia</i>
<b>Hippoc.</b>	<b>Hippocrates</b>
<i>De prisc. med.</i>	<i>De priscina medicina</i>
<b>Hom.</b>	<b>Homer</b>
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
<b>Hor.</b>	<b>Horace</b>
<i>Ars. P.</i>	<i>Ars poetica</i>
<i>Carm.</i>	<i>Carmina</i>
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satirae</i>
<b>Iambl.</b>	<b>Iamblichus</b>
<i>VP</i>	<i>de vita Pythagorica</i>
<b>Joseph.</b>	<b>Josephus</b>
<i>AJ</i>	<i>Antiquitates Judaicae</i>
<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Contra Apionem</i>
<i>Vit.</i>	<i>Vita</i>
<b>Juv.</b>	<b>Juvenal</b>
<b>Levit.</b>	<b>Leviticus</b>
<b>LSJ</b>	<b>Liddell and Scott,</b>
	<i>Greek-English Lexicon</i>
<b>Lucian</b>	<b>Lucian</b>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>Somnium</i>
<i>Syr. D.</i>	<i>De Syria dea</i>
<i>Vit. auct.</i>	<i>Vitarum auctio</i>
<b>Macro.</b>	<b>Macrobius</b>
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Saturnalia</i>
<b>Mart.</b>	<b>Martial</b>
<i>Epig.</i>	<i>Epigrams</i>

**Opp.***Halieut.***Oppian***Halieutica***Ov.***Fast.***Ovid***Fasti**Met.**Metamorphoses***Paus.****Pausanias****Philo***In Flacc.***Philo Judaeus***In Flaccum**Leg.**Legatio ad Gaium***Pind.***Ol.***Pindar***Olympian Odes***Pl.***Leg.***Plato***Leges**Resp.**Respublica**Symp.**Symposium**Ti.**Timaeus***Plaut.***Aul.***Plautus***Aulularius***Plin.***HN***Pliny (the Elder)***Naturalis historia***Plut.***Alex.***Plutarch***Alexander**Brut.**Brutus**Cat. Mai.**Cato the Elder**Cic.**Cicero**De cap.**De capienda ex inimicis utilitate**De esu. carn.**De esu carnum**De Is. et Os.**De Iside et Oriside**De soll. an.**De sollertia animalium**De superst.**De superstitione*

<i>Inst. Lac.</i>	<i>Instituta Laconica</i>
<i>Lucull.</i>	<i>Lucullus</i>
<i>Lyc.</i>	<i>Lycurgus</i>
<i>Quaest. Graec.</i>	<i>Quaestiones Graecae</i>
<i>Quaest. Rom.</i>	<i>Quaestiones Romanae</i>
<i>Quaest. conviv.</i>	<i>Quaestiones convivales</i>
<i>Sol.</i>	<i>Solon</i>
<b>Polyb.</b>	<b>Polybius</b>
<b>Porph.</b>	<b>Porphyry</b>
<i>Abst.</i>	<i>De Abstinencia</i>
<i>VP</i>	<i>Vita Pythagorae</i>
<b>SHA</b>	<b>Scriptores Historia Augustae</b>
<i>Aurel.</i>	<i>Aurelianus</i>
<i>Hadr.</i>	<i>Hadrianus</i>
<i>Heliogab.</i>	<i>Heliogabalus</i>
<i>Sev.</i>	<i>Severus</i>
<i>Verus</i>	<i>Lucius Verus</i>
<b>Sen.</b>	<b>Seneca (the Younger)</b>
<i>Ben.</i>	<i>De beneficiis</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<b>Sext. Emp.</b>	<b>Sextus Empiricus</b>
<i>Pyr.</i>	<i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i>
<b>Stob.</b>	<b>Stobaeus</b>
<i>Flor.</i>	<i>Anthology</i>
<b>Strabo</b>	<b>Strabo</b>
<i>Geog.</i>	<i>Geographia</i>

<b>Suet.</b>	<b>Suetonius</b>
<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Divus Augustus</i>
<i>Calig.</i>	<i>Gaius Caligula</i>
<i>Claud.</i>	<i>Divus Claudius</i>
<i>Iul.</i>	<i>Divus Iulius</i>
<i>Ner.</i>	<i>Nero</i>
<i>Tib.</i>	<i>Tiberius</i>
<b>Syll<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</b>
<b>Tac.</b>	<b>Tacitus</b>
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i>
<b>Val. Max.</b>	<b>Valerius Maximus</b>
<b>Varro</b>	<b>Varro</b>
<i>Rust.</i>	<i>De re rustica</i>
<b>Vell. Pat.</b>	<b>Velleius Paterculus</b>
<b>Verg.</b>	<b>Virgil</b>
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i>
<b>Vitr.</b>	<b>Vitruvius</b>
<i>De arch.</i>	<i>De architectura</i>
<b>Xen.</b>	<b>Xenophon</b>
<i>An.</i>	<i>Anabasis</i>
<i>Lac.</i>	<i>Respublica Lacedaemoniorum</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>Memorabilia</i>

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## **Abstract.**

This thesis will attempt both to explore the phenomenon of dietary restriction within the context of Graeco-Roman antiquity and to prove that it existed in an intimate and causal relationship with the construction, maintenance and perception of cultural, political and religious identity. It will be the contention of this thesis that in the same way as social and ethnic groups may seek to utilise indigenous cuisines and particular modes of food consumption as social markers to define and negotiate notions of identity and as a way of asserting these notions within the context of a period of social transition, population migration and cultural hybridisation, so too may forms of dietary restriction serve an analogous function. The thesis will examine this phenomenon primarily through the literature of the Classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods. Its geographical background will be the Italian peninsula and the Greek speaking East. Chronologically the scope of the study will focus predominantly upon the first and second centuries A.D, a period rich in both cultural interaction and tension, but, owing to the particular cultural and philosophical strands that were current during this period, and the specific concerns of authors writing during this period, the material under contemplation will in fact range from the Homeric texts to Porphyry. These tensions throw into sharp relief the problems of defining the nature and limits of group and individual identity within a sprawling and heterogeneous ethnic melting pot. The thesis will examine such phenomena as vegetarianism, the taboos and anxieties surrounding the bean, the ambiguous status of fish, the dietary legislation of the Jewish people and the restrictions that were placed upon the consumption of alcohol. These particular instances of dietary restriction serve as examples of dietary flash points, when differing dietary ideologies act as potent illustrations of the simmering undercurrents of ethnic, racial and cultural tensions that existed in the ancient world.

All translations of Greek and Latin texts are the author's own, unless otherwise stated.

## Introduction

λιμῶ δ' οἴκιστον θανέειν.<sup>1</sup>

Why do people eat the foods that they do? It is a complex and problematic question that has been addressed at length by both anthropologists and cultural historians.<sup>2</sup> Peter Garnsey offers four potential factors for consideration in this area.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, he speaks of man's physical need to consume calories in order to keep the body alive. This is a relentless cycle into which man is inextricably locked: hunger, satiation, and then an eventual return to the tyranny of appetite. His second element is the issue of taste. People are partial to diverse sorts of foods and, as far as they are able, will select and consume the types of food in which they take pleasure. Taste is, of course, a highly personal concern and thus will vary from individual to individual. Garnsey notes that, whilst not an omnivorous entity, a human being possesses rather more choice than many other creatures, whose physiognomy restricts them to only certain types of victuals.<sup>4</sup> Often these animals exist in a kind of symbiosis with their environment, and are unable to exist in differing climatic conditions. Man, to a certain extent, is able to modify his diet according to whim and mood and may adapt himself to survive in numerous and varied environments. Garnsey moves on to his third point: the availability of food. He factors in here a number of variables: political, economic and climatic. Man is constrained by what he is able to grow, what is available to purchase, or what he is able to afford. During periods of political instability, social turmoil or when weather conditions are unfavourable, the production or transport of food may be affected. Resources may become in short supply or prices may fluctuate, increasing or restricting

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<sup>1</sup> 'To die of hunger is most pitiable'; Hom. *Od.* XII. 342.

<sup>2</sup> See Goody (1982) and Douglas (1966), (1984) to name but two of a long list.

<sup>3</sup> Garnsey (1999), 139.

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch uses this as argument with which to condemn man's carnivorous tastes in one of his vegetarian tracts, *Gryllus*. He asserts that man's far-ranging predilections are gratuitous and that it is his propensity for gastronomic exploration that leads both to moral decay but also the needless slaughter of animals. This thesis will examine this text in greater detail when it focuses on the subject of vegetarianism in antiquity. See 74-113.

access to them. Lastly, Garnsey indicates the influence of customs and norms that may be particular to each society: the established patterns of behaviour that facilitate the cohesion of communities and social clusters. Food preferences may be associated with an intricate and multifaceted network of mutual bonds and deeply-held ethics, which may wield a compelling authority over a community.

Garnsey applies these four principal axioms to societies in general, rather than merely to pre-industrial communities. They appear to offer a constructive route into an analysis of nutritional constraints. This thesis does not purport to submit a wide-ranging description of the complete range of diet in the ancient world, but rather is an inquiry into circumstances when it is curtailed or restricted, and how or even if this activity may be associated with the way in which groups or individuals fashioned personae. Garnsey's analysis of the factors that govern what people eat may prove useful in a survey of what they do not eat.

What may be deemed to be the foremost contributory features of the phenomenon of food avoidance, and the imposition of limitations to diet? In the modern industrialised western nations, the *raisons d'être* for such a custom may be numerous and diverse. Feasibly, one of the first things that may spring to mind is the present widespread popular preoccupation with body image, which arguably could be regarded as one of the principal methods by which modern occidental peoples attempt to achieve self-definition. Portentous government warnings about increasing levels of both juvenile and adult obesity (with the attendant health risks associated with this phenomenon), coupled with the recurrent presentation in the mass media of aspirational images of youthful, aesthetically-pleasing and affluent 'celebrities' have served to focus attention upon diet, at both a national and international level. A simultaneous longing to lose weight for enhanced health and increased longevity of life, a desire to eradicate feelings of insecurity and inadequacy about one's physical appearance and a yearning to emulate the aforementioned public figures has increased the popularity of regimes that seek to achieve dramatic weight loss through the reduction of consumption of certain foods or their complete banishment from the diet altogether. A pertinent example of such a regimen that has gained much attention (and some considerable controversy) is the Atkins diet, whose success may have much to do with the aforementioned aims: it aims at a dramatic and rapid weight loss, and has also enjoyed popularity with some of the very celebrities who are the targets of media adulation. The Atkins diet seeks to achieve

its aims through the elimination of carbohydrates from the diet, in favour of an increased intake of protein (which is, of course, high status and is often regarded as food for the wealthy).<sup>5</sup>

These diets do not appear to promote a gradual and stable weight loss over a prolonged period of time, coupled with a programme of regular physical exercise in order to ensure that the results of the regimen are not transitory but instead aim at a degree of permanence. They endeavour to obtain rapid results for an often uncritical consumer base, addicted to the 'quick-fix solution'. These diets are frequently marketed with quite aggressive techniques and are targeted at people whose previous attempts at weight loss have failed. These people often have an air of desperation about them. These diets may sometimes necessitate the purchase of numerous dietary supplements, some of which may involve a considerable financial outlay. The consumer may lack the patience or necessary levels of self-denial to await the results of a long-term programme of weight loss. Many people that embark on such diets may express the desire to reap the benefits of improved health that purport to be the ultimate goal of the dietary regime, but often place greater emphasis on the cosmetic and superficial results of the eating plans. They desire tangible, noticeable, and, above all, immediate proof of the results of their efforts, even if the effect on physical health is, in fact, detrimental.<sup>6</sup> Some of the diets that exclude certain groups of foods, or which require the increased consumption of other items, may give rise to some alarming side-effects. These may range from the merely unpleasant or inconvenient (constipation, lethargy, headaches, bad breath or flatulence) to the potentially hazardous (low blood pressure, blackouts). It has been suggested by critics of diets such as the Atkins that any weight loss achieved comes primarily from the body losing water and is merely temporary; rehydration leads to the weight being regained. Some critics have even linked the Atkins diet with an increased susceptibility to bowel cancer.<sup>7</sup>

In these diets, certain foods are regarded as being injurious to the self or at least to the objectives of the diet (rapid weight loss). This is not to say that these foods are

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<sup>5</sup> *The Sunday Times*, March 4 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Any detrimental physical side effects must, of course, be balanced against possible benefits for mental health: increased self-esteem or confidence that may be concomitant with weight loss.

<sup>7</sup> *The Telegraph*, June 19 2007.

harmful *per se*. Many nutritionists would deny that any particular food is detrimental, unless it contains toxins. The damage to health is done when a food is taken into the body in excess. Often these foods are filled with processed sugars or fats that are usually high in calories, but offer little long-term sustenance. They also tend to cause fluctuations in blood sugar level, which affects the body's energy supply and its ability to judge levels of hunger accurately. The foods are usually prohibited for the period of the diet, or, at the very least, rationed. Some nutritionists are sceptical as to the utility (or even safety) of these eating regimes, fearing that weight loss cannot be sustained (bodily weight may actually increase, owing to changes in the body's metabolic rates) when the specialist eating programme is abandoned. For those attracted to such diets, long-term health considerations may not weigh heavily in the mind. The short-term rewards of being able to drop a dress size, squeeze into an old pair of trousers or wear a bikini with impunity loom larger in the consciousness.

If all this sounds as if it is a diatribe against the dominance of the visual image in modern society, or the superficiality of modern consumers, it is not intended to be. The point is merely to draw attention to what seems to be one of the primary motivations as to why people may reject specific foods in contemporary society.<sup>8</sup> There are, of course, numerous other reasons why someone may wish to eschew certain foods. They may have, or believe themselves to have, extreme allergic reactions to certain foods, which may imperil their health. Particular food items may be prohibited if one subscribes to specified moral or religious codes. Jews and Muslims are prohibited by their faiths from consuming certain foods; some of those who follow a vegetarian or vegan diet feel compelled to do so by a moral distaste for the killing of animals or for the methods of slaughter. Social and cultural mores may have a role to perform: certain foods may be offensive to the community, or to elements within it. Peer pressure may preclude the inclusion of these foodstuffs in the diet. Some members of society may be of the opinion that their position at the poorer end of the economic spectrum precludes them from purchasing some foods. Minimal financial incomes tend to restrict choice and purchasing ability. Occasionally, food scares may impel some sections of the population to exclude particular foods from their diet. Recent illustrations of this in the United

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<sup>8</sup> This, of course, applies to modern industrialised nations. An entirely different set of criteria may need to be applied to poorer, or less secularised, nations.

Kingdom include concerns about salmonella in eggs in 1988, and the occurrence of B.S.E (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), so called ‘mad cow disease’ in the food chain, and its speculated connections with the degenerative variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in human beings.

This inventory of possible reasons is not meant to be exhaustive. It does, in many ways, bear marked similarities to the factors involved in food choice, as specified by Garnsey. This list is simply intended to indicate the sheer multiplicity of elements that one should take into consideration when examining the phenomenon. It is also indicative of an essential aspect that should be taken into account when investigating the occurrence of dietary restriction in an ancient context: it takes note of the fact that that dietetic curb may be deemed ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’. This is a significant detail, so perhaps it would be best to attempt to seek some clarification of this terminology. By voluntary dietary restriction is signified a conscious and deliberate resolution to restrict one’s intake of food (be that in terms of quantity or type of food). The converse of this is involuntary restriction. In this case, the limitation is imposed from without; the boundaries derive from external factors that, to a large extent, are beyond the individual’s control. This may mean that only certain foods are obtainable to a consumer; ecological or climatic conditions may limit the sort of foods that may be cultivated in a particular geographical zone. In addition, economic factors may have a role to play. Some groups or individuals may lack access to a varied assortment of goods owing to fiscal impotence. They do not possess the pecuniary resources to acquire foods from beyond their local vicinity, as frequently (although certainly not always) the additional expenses of transportation and storage can add greatly to the price of items. However, sometimes the converse may be true (at least in the United Kingdom): foreign foods are available throughout the year at relatively low prices, whilst locally grown produce, available through outlets such as farmers’ markets, sells at higher prices to a more discerning and wealthier (as well as more environmentally aware) *clientele*.<sup>9</sup>

There is always an element of risk when one attempts to draw any meaningful comparisons between ancient and modern societies: the chronological separation

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<sup>9</sup> The phrase ‘environmentally aware’ refers to the consciousness of the environmental damage inflicted by the process of shipping food vast distances to satisfy consumers who wish to eat foods that are not locally ‘in season’.

between the eras often renders any investigative results deceptive or even worthless. For example, with reference to the opening observations concerning the correlation between modern diets that demand the exclusion of individual foods, and the desire of substantial portions of the population to realise speedy weight loss: there is little definitive evidence in Graeco-Roman culture to support the existence of such a phenomenon within that society, at least in the sense of the existence of a perception of a negative body image and a desire to achieve a similar body shape to that of celebrated public figures, in the belief that the attainment of such corporeal results will somehow facilitate the assimilation of other desirable personality traits.<sup>10</sup> Statesmen, soldiers or philosophers may have been viewed as venerable figures, possessing qualities that may have been judged laudable or worthy of emulation. Those merits did not apparently include defined muscle tone or a ‘six pack’.

It is perhaps worth noting here the somewhat differing stances to corporeal aesthetics between the Greek and Roman (male) consciousness. A number of extant Latin texts disparage the perceived pernicious and destructive consequences of prolonged contact with Greek cultural practices, the cult of physical exercise in the gymnasium being one facet of this supposed corrosive influence:

Ceterum abolitos paulatim patrios mores funditus everti per accitam  
lasciviam ut quod usquam corrumpi et corrumpere queat in urbe visatur,  
degeneretque studiis externis iuventus, gymnasia et otia et turpis  
amores exercendo.<sup>11</sup>

The dominant influence of the Roman foundation myth ( the idea that their civilisation was tempered and forged in the intense heat of armed conflict by a race of soldier/farmers) meant that the Romans tended to view physical robustness and vigour

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<sup>10</sup> This may mean that such a desire for physical emulation did not exist (or was negligible), or that we lack surviving evidence for such concerns.

<sup>11</sup> Tac. *Ann.* XIV.20: ‘For all that, native traditions, gradually vanishing, have been totally ruined by lewdness brought in from abroad. Everything corruptible and corrupting is able to be seen in the city, and our young men, because of foreign pursuits, degenerate into devotees of the gymnasium, leisure and indecent passions’.

attained by these activities as deserving of praise, whilst a sculptured abdomen obtained by physical exercise in the gymnasium (very much a pursuit associated with Greek culture) ran the risk of being regarded as analogous with both an ostentatious display of disproportionate narcissism and with pederasty. A fixation with the quest for corporeal beautification may have been perceived as a contemptible pursuit, diverting one's efforts from the cultivation of the intellect or success in the practical sphere. It also possible that it was considered by some of the Latin authors that a preoccupation with one's physical beauty and its development and augmentation was egocentric, solipsistic and somewhat at odds with civic duties.

Some of the other reasons for dietary limitations may be more pertinent to the assessment of this occurrence in antiquity, in particular the issue of food production. People living in the industrialised west possess a lifestyle that is greatly removed from those who existed some two millennia ago. Modern man has distanced himself from his agrarian roots and has come to rely increasingly on elaborate and complex technology, and the ability to purchase his foodstuffs on the open market. Increasingly sophisticated systems of credit have assisted in this process of alienating us from our foodstuffs. Farmers are becoming ever more harassed and marginalized figures, who feel aggrieved that the general public appears to care little how its food reaches the dinner table and just desires to pay the lowest price possible. When it does tend to express an interest in such matters, it is frequently accompanied by feelings of squeamishness or revulsion when confronted with the actualities of modern agricultural techniques. It has been the subject of creative speculation by both filmmakers and novelists as to how mankind, now so reliant on machines to regulate its life and to cushion it from the raw inclemency of nature and the unpleasantness of manual labour, would survive if compelled by natural catastrophe, economic meltdown or global nuclear warfare to revert to a predominantly agrarian society, operating on a much reduced scale. In the wave of this 'post-apocalyptic' speculation that was particularly evident in the 1970's (as a result of both the tensions of international political instability and a burgeoning 'eco-consciousness'), popular mainstream dramas such as Terry Nation's *Survivors* (BBC, 1975-1978), and situation comedies such as *The Good Life* addressed these fears.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Survivors* explored the implications of the virtual annihilation of mankind by the accidental release of

## Some problems concerning methodology, chronology and geography.

Before making any attempt at an exploration of the principal issues raised by the concept of dietary restriction in ancient societies, it may be necessary to issue an initial caveat. The scope and remit of this thesis unfortunately precludes the possibility of a complete and comprehensive nutritional survey of all the various communities and cultures that existed within the Graeco-Roman world. The geographical and chronological span of such a work would require a volume far greater in length than this current study. It should be noted, however, that the aim of this work is not to provide a mere compendium of ancient alimentary customs: a catalogue of regional foods, the diverse ways in which they were prepared and the multiple contexts in which they were consumed.<sup>13</sup> Instead this thesis will choose rather to focus attention upon instances of food choice where an element of explicit denial of certain foods or food groups is evident. It will attempt to establish an unequivocal connection between such deliberate and conscious food restrictions (as opposed to an accidental or inadvertent limitation to diet, brought about by environmental factors or through famine or disruptions to the food supply, although this thesis will make some reference to such instances) and the formation of individual and group identity in Graeco-Roman culture. It is not the claim of this thesis that dietary restriction is the only factor, or indeed the most important one, in the process of the formation and consolidation of identity in Greek or Roman culture, merely that it is a significant contributory element that has hitherto been either largely neglected or dismissed as being of only minor interest.

There have been extensive studies conducted into the manner in which the acquisition, preparation and ingestion of foodstuffs have been inextricably linked with the religious and cultural development of societies, both ancient and modern.<sup>14</sup> It has

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an artificially engineered virus. The five percent of the population that survived were obliged to revert to a pre-industrial life.

<sup>13</sup> For an example of this approach, see Dalby (2003).

<sup>14</sup> For an examination of the relationship between diet and the consolidation of cultural identity by minority groups in a modern context, see Douglas (1984) for studies of the dietary patterns of three contemporary ethnic groups in the United States (a Sioux community in South Dakota, black families in

often been asserted that food is able to act as one of the most potent forces of unification and cohesion (or conversely of dissonance and hierarchical separation) amongst social and ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup> The immense symbolic power of communal eating has perhaps receded in much of modern Anglo-Saxon society, where the dictates of predominantly consumerist and urban lifestyles and the fragmentation of the nuclear family unit have greatly increased the prevalence of solitary eating. This is less evident in countries such as Spain, Italy, France or Greece, although, arguably, patterns of eating in these countries are beginning to remodel themselves along the lines of northern European countries. The phenomenon can perhaps most clearly be observed in the form of such activities as 'snacking', the 'working lunch' (a sandwich hurriedly consumed by the white collar worker whilst seated at his or her office desk, whilst work continues),<sup>16</sup> and the immense popularity of processed convenience foods, capable of being heated within a few minutes by a domestic microwave oven. This in itself may perhaps be said to constitute a form of dietary restriction, in that the dictates of the modern mechanised ethos may exert pressures upon the individual (either emanating from employers, or perhaps self-imposed by the employee) to minimise the amount of time spent eating during the working day. In such circumstances, the act of food consumption can be divorced from notions of gastronomic pleasure or conviviality and be reduced to the simple utilitarian act of refuelling the body, an operation to be conducted so as to impact as little as possible upon the performance of the worker.<sup>17</sup> In this modern landscape,

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Tennessee, and Italian-American families in Philadelphia). In a classical context, one could cite such examples as Detienne and Vernant's examination of the Hesiodic myths and the symbolic importance of animal sacrifice (1979), the studies of Peter Garnsey and John Wilkins, or works that examine the relationship between man and environment, such as Sallares (1991) or Horden and Purcell (2000).

<sup>15</sup> For example, the Jewish dietary regulations acted as a badge of distinct ethnic and religious identity for Jews scattered in the Diaspora. See Douglas (1966); Grimm (1996). The laws, followed with differing degrees of assiduousness, could also serve to divide and separate sects, such as the Essenes, within Judaism. See pages 171-198.

<sup>16</sup> 'Working lunch' has to some extent been replaced in recent times by the sardonic slang term 'al desko', a pun on the Italian word 'alfresco'.

<sup>17</sup> Although it is often thought that solitary eating is an exclusively modern phenomenon, there is some evidence that it also occurred in the ancient world. Athenaeus provides us with several examples of usage of *μονοφαγεῖν*; *Deip.* 8e.

man has been removed, by varying degrees, from the means of food production.<sup>18</sup> Meat and dairy produce are purchased from the environment of the supermarket, where foods are packaged in such a way that the products bear little resemblance to the items that they once were. This may mean the transformation of parts of the animal carcass into amorphous lumps of shrink wrapped frozen flesh, or the fashioning of the meat into novelty shapes (sometimes of other animals) in an obvious marketing ploy aimed at the parents of fussy eaters.

There would be few people in many modern societies that would have seen the inside of an abattoir, or that would have much beyond a vague inkling of what goes on within its walls, let alone have experienced, first-hand, the butchering of an animal. Perhaps many would have absolutely no wish to do so. Those who advocate a vegetarian diet often attempt to make explicit a link between the sanitised sale and consumption of meat, and wholesale and wilful ignorance on the part of the general public about modern methods of animal husbandry and its attendant systems of slaughter. A BBC documentary film, entitled *Slaughterhouse: The Task of Blood*, was transmitted in July 2005. Directed by Brian Hill, it graphically and unflinchingly depicted the workings of an abattoir in Oldham, Greater Manchester. Subsequent newspaper reviews and viewer correspondence were quick to point out what was felt to be both the disturbing nature of the slaughter of the animals, and the perceived callousness and brutality of the workers employed at this particular establishment. The recent transmission of a programme by the BBC, entitled *Kill it, Cook it, Eat it*, attempted to both quantify and rectify this negative response.<sup>19</sup> Over three programmes, a small selection of animals (cows, sheep and pigs) were shown being slaughtered. The carcasses were butchered and then some of the flesh was cooked and presented to members of an invited audience. Many viewers found the programme disturbing and upsetting, in spite of the fact that all the animals featured were organically raised and well-treated (not the result of intensive factory

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<sup>18</sup> This is a simplified portrait of the modern industrial landscape, and it is not intended to deny the existence of relatively isolated peasant communities that do not conform to this pattern. Furthermore, there are many societies in the modern world that still adhere to predominantly rural and agricultural modes of existence.

<sup>19</sup> Transmitted March 5th to 7th 2007 on BBC3. The fact that it was transmitted at 10.30pm seems to indicate that the programme's content was deemed too disturbing and controversial for earlier transmission.

farming) and the abattoirs featured were judged to be exemplary. The fact that this process happens thousands of times every day around the world, and *is the way the vast majority of people obtain their meat* clearly had little impact upon many who saw the programme. The legislation that was passed in February 2005 to outlaw the hunting of foxes with hounds in the United Kingdom once again highlighted the tensions that often exist between inhabitants of town and country, with rural advocates of traditional blood sports arguing that the urban dweller is a mere passive consumer, who has little or no comprehension of the realities of the rearing, culling and slaughter of food animals.

This work will attempt to examine the way in which the phenomenon of dietary restriction occurred within the context of Graeco-Roman society and the manner in which these restrictions (either voluntary or involuntary) profoundly affected the way in which identity was perceived and asserted. Much of what has been written upon the subject of dietary restriction in antiquity has been somewhat piecemeal. Scholars such as Gallant and Garnsey have looked at the way in which ancient dietary patterns would have had an intimate and causal relationship with the widespread lack of dietary resources in the area of the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup> These works have attempted to establish that food practices and the choice of diet would have been based upon an almost continual state of deprivation (if not near-famine) for the vast majority of the population. Garnsey has acknowledged both the relative lack of food taboos within Graeco-Roman culture, and how limitations in diet could serve to emphasise ‘separateness’ and ‘difference’, and that this was particularly important for minority groups that sought to avoid being subsumed by mainstream Graeco-Roman culture.<sup>21</sup> However, I wish to take this a stage further. I propose that dietary restriction becomes something more than an actual physical dietary practice; a tangibly quantifiable and measurable phenomenon. In many works of ancient literature, it becomes a literary tool to grapple with ideological tensions and anxieties, not of the minority cultures, but of the elite culture itself. It frequently serves to act as a self-reflexive *critique* of Greek and Roman elite identity. This ‘literary dietary restriction’ was frequently at odds with its real-life counterpart, and the locus of its concern was neither physical survival, nor a

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<sup>20</sup> See Gallant (1991); Garnsey (1988), (1998), (1999).

<sup>21</sup> Garnsey (1999), 83. Again, see Douglas (1984) for the assertion of ethnic identity through patterns of food consumption in modern American society.

retreat from dire poverty but, frequently, existential angst.

The term 'dietary restriction' perhaps needs to be defined. By this term is signified the practice of adopting a dietary regime that excludes certain individual foods, or groups of foods. This could be for a variety of reasons: medical, philosophical, religious or moral. As has been previously stated, these restrictions could be voluntary or involuntary. Both circumstances arise from quite different sources, and although, at times, the categories blur and overlap, it will be necessary to treat them separately. It will also be important to examine what is meant by 'identity' within an ancient context, to briefly look at other contributing factors to its construction and to the role of diet. The assertion of this thesis will be that these restrictions placed on diet (which, in some cases, may have involved cultural prohibitions or legal sanctions) had a role to play in self-definition at least the equal of that played by what people *did* eat.

Perhaps the most significant remark one may make initially about dietary restriction in an ancient context is that in the Jewish dietary laws, one may discern a prime and obvious example of a widespread and well-known ancient dietary restriction, functioning as both a method of self-definition, and as a way that outsiders could define them.<sup>22</sup> The legislation acts both as a set of cultural markers that offer a series of practices that render the Jewish people distinct and separate from others, and a method of maintaining purity by avoiding external behavioural and physical contamination. This thesis will examine the phenomenon of Jewish dietary legislation in much greater detail at a later point.<sup>23</sup> However, it will suffice to note at this stage that it was a phenomenon that was greeted with varying degrees of hostility, even incredulity, by Graeco-Roman commentators. It will be one of the tasks of this thesis to examine why the instance of dietary restriction in the Graeco-Roman context was of a relatively sporadic and temporary nature compared with the Jewish experience. And yet, in spite of the divergent nature of Graeco-Roman dietary restriction, it too may be said to have contributed to the formation of cultural and ethnic identity.

The importance of dietary restriction comes from the fact that it is perfectly possible for a denial or refutation to be a positive affirmative action rather than a mere negation of the default. For example, one would not necessarily consider the adoption of

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<sup>22</sup> See Douglas (1966); Grimm (1996).

<sup>23</sup> See 171-198.

a vegetarian or vegan diet as a mere negation of the cultural norm of meat-eating.<sup>24</sup> It may be an explicit rejection of the processes and ideologies that lie behind the consumption of meat. Vegetarianism may be seen as a proactive choice; an affirmation of individual choice and personal politics. To illustrate this, let us make a brief autobiographical diversion. I myself was a vegetarian for a number of years. I ceased to eat meat and fish when I was eighteen or nineteen years old (although I continued to eat dairy products and occasionally some fish), and this state of affairs endured for a period of five or six years. I then gradually re-introduced both meat and fish back into my diet. I initially abstained from flesh for largely moral reasons, believing to be unjustified the slaughter of animals for the benefit of man. I also felt that a vegetarian diet was a healthier one. As time progressed, other factors came into play. I felt that the choice of a vegetarian diet (which was certainly much less prevalent than it is today) was governed, to a certain extent, by a desire on my part to make a statement about the kind of person I was (or, at least, the kind of person I wished to be perceived to be). Vegetarianism seemed to be associated (at least in popular opinion) with a vaguely left-wing, avant-garde, counter-cultural lifestyle. It was this self-image that I wished to promote, and I wanted to pledge my allegiance, at least dietarily, to the cause. I eventually abandoned this excursion into a meat-free lifestyle when I began to feel that it had become an empty and meaningless dogma that restricted my freedom to choose what I wanted to eat. I was forced to accept (albeit somewhat painfully) that I had become more attached to the public posturing than to the plight of suffering animals. Vegetarianism had, for me, become a badge of social status, a means of self-identification and, truth be told, a somewhat gauche method of attention seeking.

I introduce this autobiographical element not as a testament to authorial vanity. I merely hope to illustrate that there may exist a multiplicity of possible reasons for becoming a vegetarian (at least in the modern world). It also may help to illustrate how a dietary restriction may be used to act as a social marker, with which to make an assertive statement as to the nature of one's identity and personal beliefs. A vegetarian diet could symbolise or embody a particular credo. In my own case, vegetarianism was a method of differentiating myself from those whom I considered to be leading a less

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<sup>24</sup> For recent examinations of varying attitudes to vegetarianism in antiquity, see Gilhus (2006), Newmyer (2006); Osborne (2007).

‘self-aware’ existence. In retrospect, diet was being used as a tool to declare and assert my own (perceived) superiority over others. Frey offers a neat summary of this, collating what he sees as the principal objections, both moral and otherwise, to eating meat.<sup>25</sup> For the latter, he suggests dislike for the taste of meat; aesthetic distaste for the sight and smell of animal flesh, particularly in its raw form. He also mentions religious objections, which may not necessarily be the same as moral objections:

It is not so much moral as religious conviction which motivates their complete abstinence [from meat], though it is doubtless true that their moral precepts may in the end come to be moulded around and so reflect their religious convictions’.<sup>26</sup>

Acts of nutritional self-denial (partial or complete, temporary or permanent) can make powerful statements about the individual self. The contention of this thesis will be that this principle was equally applicable to areas of the Graeco-Roman world, and there are many clear examples of this principle at work.

The phrase ‘involuntary dietary restriction’ may also require some clarification. The term, in the context of this study, is meant to indicate a process that derives not from social or religious legislation, but may be said to emanate from what could be termed ‘external’ factors. This is less clear-cut than may be first supposed, as there is some considerable overlap between what may be thought of as human constructs, and those deemed to be ‘external’ elements. A primary factor could usefully be labelled ‘environmental’, by which is indicated the constraints placed upon individuals and communities by landscape, location and climate.<sup>27</sup> This geophysical dimension dramatically affects the type and quantity of crops and livestock that are sustainable in any given environment. Economic factors will also have an important role to play here.<sup>28</sup> They will also dictate the types of crops that may be cultivated, stored or sold, and will determine food production and storage based upon strategies for survival. A

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<sup>25</sup> Frey (1983), 7-10.

<sup>26</sup> Frey (1983), 8.

<sup>27</sup> For studies in a classical context, see Sallares (1991) and Horden and Purcell (2000).

<sup>28</sup> Garnsey (1999), 22-33.

second factor may be tentatively termed 'hierarchical'. In this instance, nutritional intake would be largely regulated by one's level of prosperity or social position within society. A valid counter assertion to this may posit that social status is very much an artificial human construct, the result of legislation or social norms. It is a malleable and fluid state, and is not some rigid and inflexible framework beyond the control of man.

This is a legitimate objection, but it does not entirely hold water. In some cases, one's social position was largely determined by fixed and virtually unchangeable notions of gender, birth and age. In a modern context, one may think of the unyielding limitations of the Indian caste system. The *cursus honorum* of the Roman patricians may have seemed less rigid, offering the possibility of advancement and wealth to those prepared to jump through various hoops, but it was a social ladder that was hermetically sealed in a very privileged bubble.<sup>29</sup> In a patriarchal society that privileged the wealthy freeborn male, women were prisoners of their own gender, and ex-slaves were treated with suspicion, if not outright hostility. The tensions that exist between the *nouveaux riches* and 'old money', the disdain the aristocrat may feel for the lottery winner, finds antecedents in the pages of Roman literature. The wealth of Trimalchio only serves to illustrate the disparity between his fortune and his lack of breeding. In the court of Claudius, the great wealth and influence of Pallas and Narcissus ( freedmen, and *Greek*) aroused suspicion and resentment.<sup>30</sup> Interlopers always faced an invisible wall of condescension. As is evident, money certainly went some way in helping to at least partially demolish this wall. However, it could only go so far in mitigating the almost overwhelming weight of tradition and the conservatism engendered by the principle of male hereditary privilege. Thus, one could assert that there were certain factors such as gender or ethnicity that acted as forces of constraint that were extremely problematic, if not impossible, to overcome. Roman society needed fluidity and a certain degree of mobility to ensure that the society retained its dynamism and did not stagnate.<sup>31</sup> However, it depended upon a certain amount of strict hierarchical segregation to enforce authority. At the lower ends of society, where money would have been scarce, this

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<sup>29</sup> See Hopkins (1965).

<sup>30</sup> Suet. *Claud.* 28; Hopkins (1965), 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> See Hopkins (1965) for social mobility within the elite stratum of Roman society during the early imperial period, 12-26.

'hierarchical' factor would have undoubtedly proved a far more unmanageable obstacle. Hence its status as a predominantly external aspect remains. Translated into dietary terms, this virtually impregnable wall of social exclusion meant a system of dining that was inevitably shaped by hierarchical concerns and the demonstrable exercising of political, economic and social power. The negotiation of power between *patronus* and *cliens* may be characterised by the proffering of a dinner invitation, or perhaps the leftovers from an aristocratic banquet. At a higher level, the emperor could exercise and reaffirm his autocratic power at the dinner table, displaying *largesse* where appropriate or signalling disfavour with a deft seating arrangement or the serving of different qualities of food and drink to his more (or less) distinguished guests.

Also to be considered are the 'voluntary' factors in the area of dietary restriction, by which is meant those factors that have their origin in the customs and behavioural modes of human societies (with the caveat of the previous paragraph). Conscious food choices could manifest themselves in many spheres: in moral censure, relating to religious or cultural transgressions (perhaps of explicit taboos or tacitly acknowledged social codes); the control and curbing of dietary intake for philosophical or ideological motives; specialist regimen as prescribed by medical practitioners for the prevention or cure of mental and physical ailments; special diets for certain professions or activities. Of course, it may also be argued that some of these factors may be deemed to constitute instances of involuntary restriction: customs and cultural norms may exercise an overwhelming power over action. The weight of tradition or religious scruples may exercise an influence that overrides personal choice. It may be necessary to concede that, in this instance, the line between voluntary and involuntary restriction is somewhat blurred. Restriction could indicate the removal of certain foods from the diet, either temporarily or permanently, or indeed the complete absence of food altogether. Consideration of these matters will illuminate the critical role that food restriction played in the way certain ancient peoples constructed and maintained their sense of identity, both individual and communal. It will also become evident that a dichotomy existed between the actual practice of dietary restriction and its ideological treatment in the ancient texts. The phenomenon is notable in the way that it seems to provide a locus of concern for many Greek and Roman writers. The fact that these writings emanate from the wealthy male ruling elite may indicate that such concerns act as useful tools with which to think about their own cultural anxieties. For those engaged in the daily

struggle to obtain sufficient food to survive, such issues would surely have been entirely redundant. Wealth, however, brought both abundant food and the leisure in which to indulge in some ideological navel gazing. Greed, extravagance and alien foods become potent metaphors for the problems that were perceived to have arisen from social and economic transformation. Dietary restriction may transcend its significance as a physical alimentary practice to become a useful way for the educated elite to voice concerns about racial, ethnic and religious identity and to critique prevailing social norms. Such concerns could even trickle down to the masses; the mocking of the powerful or the corrupt is often characterised in ancient Greek comedy by dietary greed.<sup>32</sup>

## Methodology.

It will be necessary, given the potentially enormous scope of this project, to specify the parameters of the inquiry, both geographically and chronologically. The selection of starting and finishing points presents its own difficulties. The term ‘Graeco-Roman’ is rather nebulous. It could be interpreted as stretching from Bronze Age Mycenaean culture to the Byzantine era. Clearly such a chronological span would be impossible to cover adequately. Whichever point is chosen to initiate or terminate this investigation could be dismissed as a purely arbitrary decision. Equally, if one attempts to examine ‘segments’ of history in isolation, one runs the risk of negating (or even ignoring) the influence of gradual, long-term cultural or political trends.

A dilemma of an analogous nature is evident when one contemplates the thorny problem of geography. The territories that may be characterised as being part of this ‘Graeco-Roman’ world (and, as yet, this term has yet to be adequately defined) are not homogeneous in nature. The ancient world comprised a multiplicity of communities and races with a vast number of different political arrangements and cultural ideologies as well as a diverse range of climates and languages. The issue of the fragmentary nature of the ethnic and cultural landscape is not necessarily helped by the gathering of these entities under the aegis of empires (be they that of Rome, Athens or Macedonia): imperial rule may have brought a measure of political standardisation, perhaps elements

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<sup>32</sup> See Wilkins (2000).

of cultural homogenisation. Yet if these imperial systems ensured political hegemony, many communities still enjoyed much religious and cultural autonomy. Occupied territories they may have been, but often the vibrancy and dynamism of local custom endured. Thus, whilst this diversity offers valuable material for the scholar, it does mean that it is virtually impossible to apply any sort of general principle to these sprawling and tortuous political beasts, apart from the principle that it is impossible to generalise. The geographical quandary also rears its head when one attempts to mark the edge of imperial territory. The physical and cultural boundaries blur and cloud the issue of what constitutes 'inclusion' and 'exclusion'. To consider the Greek culture of Asia Minor is to look at a territory that must have experienced as much cultural and political influence from Persia as it did from the Greek mainland.<sup>33</sup> Custom and ideology would have been no great respecter of political boundaries. Any study must acknowledge that cultural hybridisation will inevitably occur at the peripheries. The influence of those outside must count as much as those within.

However, some limits must be imposed. An examination of each territory on an individual basis would be an endeavour that lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, the utility of such an approach is unclear, at least within the context of this investigation. A catalogue of instances of dietary restriction may be of great interest, but it is not the aim of this thesis. Given the caveat that generalisation is an unwise policy, nonetheless it is beholden to the scholar to attempt to synthesise facts from a wide area and hypothesise in terms of general principle, as well as showing a concern for detail at the micro level. It also seems likely that if one is to undertake a study that involves an examination of notions of identity, then these matters will be thrown into sharp relief when there is an intermingling of cultures. This cultural clash is liable to give rise to self-reflection on what separates cultures (and what may unite them), as well as providing opportunities for the assertion of identity in the face of alien value systems. Identity may become crystallised if it is felt to be vulnerable to influence from other traditions. If this is the criterion, then it would appear to preclude those isolated rural settlements, far removed from the great urban centres of population. These small communities may offer models of aboriginal alimentary purity, but their relative cultural isolation may mean that the inhabitants may not be forced into self-reflection in this

respect. It is in the cities, perhaps, with their ebb and flow of immigration, whose populations were both cosmopolitan and transient, where culture is in an almost continual state of flux, that one may find the crucible where identity is forged.

The above analysis appears to point to the cities as the focus of concern.<sup>34</sup> Again, there surfaces the problem of the sheer diversity of cities. There would be difficulties reconciling studies of population centres in Gaul with those of North Africa or Syria. It may be necessary to approach this matter in a slightly different way in order to achieve a successful resolution. It was suggested earlier that one of the prominent attributes of dietary restriction appears to have been the way in which it appears as a concern for many ancient authors. Another concern that arises from numerous texts (particularly, although not exclusively, during the second century A.D.) is an exploration of the nature of cultural identity. The particular context for these observations is the tangled and ambiguous relationship between Greek and Roman culture. They existed in a state of almost permanent tension; a love-hate liaison that gave rise to sentiments of both inferiority and superiority on both sides. The second century AD was a period when the Roman empire was at its greatest extent. The fusion of races and religions made some writers question what it was to be Roman or what it was to be Greek. The latter tendency was exacerbated by the ambitions of those involved with the ‘Second Sophistic’, which attempted to re-ignite Greek cultural and national pride.<sup>35</sup> Writers such as Athenaeus and Plutarch attempt to celebrate the cultural diversity and vitality of Graeco-Roman culture, whilst subtly challenging the dominance of Latin culture.

It is the literature of this period that holds the key to the problem of geography and chronology. If one addresses the issue through the prism of these literary figures, it is the landscape of Italy and the eastern Mediterranean that comes into view. The Graeco-Roman worldview, with some degree of conceit, largely dismisses the mores of Germany and Britain, preferring to focus instead upon the cultural influence of those who matter: themselves. The territories outside the Mediterranean and the Aegean are very much relegated to a position of inferiority. In a sense this attitude is entirely natural. Greek and Roman cultures, owing to their geographical proximity, had enjoyed

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<sup>33</sup> See Bengtson (1968); Cook (1962); Cartledge (1993); Mitchell (2007).

<sup>34</sup> See Noy (2000) for immigrant groups in Rome; Gruen (2002) for the Jewish Diaspora, particularly in Rome, Alexandria and Asia.

<sup>35</sup> For overviews of this phenomenon, see Bowersock (1974); Goldhill (2001); Whitmarsh (2005).

a long tradition of intermingling, and the cultural debt owed to Greece by Rome (often grudgingly) was undeniable. There had been numerous Greek colonies established in Sicily and the south of the Italian peninsula. This shared history extends into the realm of culinary matters. The shared culture of vine, olive and cereal distinguishes them from the milk, meat and beer of Northern Europeans. An Athenaeon survey of all things dietary inevitably privileges those cultures with a Greek cultural tradition, or those cultures that had enjoyed extensive cultural interaction with the Greek world, such as the Persians and the Egyptians. This would exclude the cuisines of Britain or Germany.

If these literary texts point to the geographical area of study, they also help to formulate a methodology to establish a chronology. The writers of the Second Sophistic often concerned themselves with establishing what constituted 'Greekness' by comparing the contemporary state of affairs with the greatness of the past. By utilising an evocation of Greece's historiographical and mythical past, they sought to reaffirm an identity that was often felt to be submerged by Latin dominance. A Greece conquered and subdued by its Italian neighbours looks back with nostalgia to an era when it was Greece that exercised cultural and political hegemony. Plutarch, in his biographies of great Roman and Greek statesmen, offers them in the form of parallel lives, inviting explicit comparisons. These biographies are pervaded by a nostalgia not merely for the glories of the Greek past, but perhaps also for Republican Rome. When Pausanias offers a guide to the sights of Greece, or Athenaeus a survey of food and its literary treatment, it is not a contemporary picture that is offered, but a retreat into the past.<sup>36</sup> There is a deliberate, albeit sometimes subtle, exclusion of reference to Roman culture, politics or philosophy.<sup>37</sup> This past is a vast landscape, which jumps from recent past to the recesses of time. An Athenaeon appraisal rather resembles a computer search engine and seems to make little attempt to distinguish between historiography, drama, comedy or myth. All is offered up in an amorphous mass of data. Athenaeus' intellectual tastes radiate out to encompass it all with little evident discrimination. In this literary arena, Homer exists next to Aristophanes, historiography jostles up against erotic poetry and scatological

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<sup>36</sup> David Braund argues for an interpretation of the *Deipnosophistae* that places emphasis upon both the time of its composition and its Roman context; Braund (2000), 3-22.

<sup>37</sup> Rebecca Preston examines the way that Plutarch in the *Greek and Roman Questions* deliberately de-emphasises Roman cultural influence in order to assert Greek identity; Preston (2001), 86-119.

humour. To adopt the chronological concerns of an Athenaeus may prove to be the answer. This methodology avoids enforcing rigid barriers of time, artificially segmenting history into neat segments. It offers the possibility of pursuing these issues thematically, and rejects a purely linear approach. The justification for the use of older material is the explicit importance it has for these later writers, who often use Homer or Euripides as sources of actual history or paradigms for moral behaviour. Latin writers, too, construct an ideological map of their antecedence, locating virtue in rusticity rather than in the urban environment.

There are those that may argue against this methodology, and who would object to the exclusion of evidence from smaller rural communities or to the lack of material concerning the western and northern provinces of the Roman empire. It could be argued that the urban centres are special, extraordinary cases that reflect examples of hybridisation, not autochthonous culture. However, they are open to foreign cultural influence, and thus become arenas for the articulation and defence of identity. Closed and aboriginal communities do not generally offer these possibilities. An exception is Sparta, which occupied a special place in the minds of both Greek and Latin writers who frequently saw in it a symbol of purity and a rejection of the perceived decadence that was thought to riddle society like a cancer during the Roman period.<sup>38</sup>

## Sources.

The predominant concern of this thesis will be the way in which ancient literature treats dietary restriction and its impact on matters of identity. It is not intended to provide statistical documentary evidence of actual practice. However, there will be occasions when archaeological evidence will be pertinent to our investigations. There will be occasions that material evidence such as coinage is cited (although it may be possible to argue that the imagery of coins is itself a text that may be interpreted). It would be most unwise to suppose that literary texts, even if they purport to be historiographical in nature, rather than works of creative fiction, offer the scholar documentary evidence of custom. These are works that derive from the male elite and inevitably are self-reflexive

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<sup>38</sup> See 232-264.

in their concerns. When patrician writers use literary light to illuminate the lives of the lower orders, it is a ray that may distort its subjects, displaying caricature, mockery or vituperative insult. One may detect condescension, disgust, even pseudo-paternalism, but perhaps only occasionally does one see reliable documentary evidence of the lives and practices of ordinary people. The refined world of the symposium or the imperial court banquets of a Nero or an Elagabalus emphatically did not reflect the eating habits of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the empire. As always, the usual caution must be observed with regards to the conventions of ancient historiography: its didacticism, its frequent lack of identifiable sources and its use of fictional speeches. The hyperbole and exaggeration of comedy may present analogous problems with regards to the presentation of behavioural data. Sallares has raised objections to the use of ancient literary texts as evidence for historical practice and has advocated the separation of the study of literature and history at university level.<sup>39</sup> However, for the purposes of this thesis, such concerns may prove to be less of a problem than is first supposed. Since this study is concerned more with the literary ideologies surrounding dietary restriction rather than actual practice, the vagaries and potential inaccuracies of literary representation are not an obstacle. In this respect, Gowers' work on the representation of food in Roman literature is useful in negotiating this hazardous minefield.<sup>40</sup> She notes:

The literary medium need not be seen as an obstruction; indeed, the kinds of evasions and prejudices that seem to cloud it can be illuminating in themselves.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sallares (1991), 416-7. See also Gallant (1991); Garnsey (1988).

<sup>40</sup> Gowers (1993).

<sup>41</sup> Gowers (1993), 2.

## Identity.

The construction of identity is, at its heart, a matter of an *imaginaire* rather than a fixed *reality*.<sup>42</sup>

Identity is a particularly troublesome and vague concept, and it is extremely difficult to arrive at a satisfactory definition. Identity may operate on multiple levels, which may act in an agreeably harmonious synthesis or may produce internal and external tensions, occasionally seemingly irreconcilable. Facets of identity may exist separately and independently of each other, surfacing only in the relevant context. We may subtly adjust aspects of our personality to adapt to a particular context; we project the face we wish others to see. Identity may be constructed on a varied set of foundations, depending on the importance placed upon that base by different communities or individuals. A person or people may perceive itself as being essentially defined by a set of characteristics: myth, shared culture, consanguinity, religion, language.<sup>43</sup> It may see itself as possessing a national consciousness or perhaps a local one (the perception of existing as a constituent part of a tribe, *polis* or spiritual community). Alternatively, these characteristics may not be so much self-perceived as externally imposed. Identity may not always be conceived of as existing as a collective entity; the individual may possess a consciousness of self which is unique and divorced from others.

Classical scholars have not been shy in attempting to grapple with the issue of identity in an ancient context. A number of recent studies have identified the fluid and complex nature of identity in the ancient world.<sup>44</sup> The problem of isolating and analysing forms of identity is exacerbated as societies expand and populations intermingle and become increasingly hybridised. It is likely that the ancients could conceive of identity existing in layers, operating at both a macro and micro level. Scholars may see the fragmented communities of the classical Greek world as having been divided and differentiated by dialect or political ideology, but united by a general religious creed (even if actual ritual differed). Each community may have seen itself as

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<sup>42</sup> Miles (1999), 4.

<sup>43</sup> And, of course, dietary custom.

<sup>44</sup> See Cartledge (1993), Hall (1989), Hall (1997), Huskinson (2000), Goldhill (2001).

differentiated from others but may have had some sense of the Herodotean notion of 'Greekness', somehow contrasted with the Other, the 'barbarian'. The term 'Greece', of course, should be used with a measure of caution. It is debatable whether this sense of collective national consciousness existed beyond the pages of literature. Aristotelian and Herodotean notions of *to Hellenikon* attempt to capture and render concrete the elusive concept of what it meant to be 'Greek', but run the risk of oversimplifying the picture by failing to take into account local idiosyncrasies:

But not only did he [Herodotus] have to omit political institutions or structures from his definition in order to do so, when there were well over a thousand separate Greek political communities who could never form more than local, short-lived, and usually imposed interstate ties. He also had to create the fiction of genetic homogeneity and gloss over important differences of dialect, religion, and mores within the broadly 'Hellenic' world. In other words, *to Hellenikon* was no less of an ideological construction than, say, Christendom was in the Middle Ages or 'the Arab World' is today.<sup>45</sup>

This phenomenon is also recognisable within the context of the Roman empire. The term 'Roman' becomes, at one level, meaningless, if used ethnographically. It is unclear whether it is intended to signify an inhabitant of the city of Rome, a citizen of the geographical expression that was the empire, or was a label for a particular set of cultural allegiances. However, to be a 'Roman citizen' still remained important in legislative terms: it indicated legal status and judicial rights. If originally it was used in a specific and limited way to mean those who dwelt on the seven hills, Caracalla's declaration of universal citizenship in 212 A.D. meant that those who could be termed 'Romans' ran into the millions.<sup>46</sup>

The empire encompassed a large number of disparate territories, all of whom would have possessed their own unique indigenous cultures and for whom the only uniting bond with other nations would have been a place beneath the imperial yoke. These territories may have willingly ceded political autonomy or may have been forcibly

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<sup>45</sup> Cartledge (1993), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Giessen Papyrus No. 40, col. I; 212 A.D; Cass Dio. LXXVII. ix-x.

coerced into relinquishing it, but may have retained much cultural independence. The inhabitants of Roman Egypt, Syria or Sicily (who already had been subject to Greek influence, as well as Carthaginian) may have expressed indigenous culture through literature, art and religions in order to prevent it being smothered or even obliterated by an imposed ruling culture. They may, as Huskinson asserts, have looked back to past glories in order to survive potential cultural annihilation from above.<sup>47</sup> An aggressive assertion of self-identity was often necessary to avoid this. The Jews, both at home and in the Diaspora fused the enactment of particular religious rituals (dietary restriction, fasting, circumcision, the observance of the Sabbath) with a quest for political autonomy in order to retain some sort of independence in the face of frequent hostility.<sup>48</sup>

On the question of the nature of identity in antiquity, scholars have often found themselves falling into one of two camps. The first may be referred to as the argument from essentialism.<sup>49</sup> This position attempts to see some elements of identity as immutable, ‘fixed’ by unchangeable factors such as race. This position argues that traits of personality are forged by biological determinants that render them specific and separate from other races. This stance may be labelled as ‘racist’ in the true sense of the word.<sup>50</sup> It is certainly not unusual for Greek or Roman writers to see in themselves certain traits that they attributed to biological factors and that signified their superiority to other races.<sup>51</sup> There is frequent reference to a ‘Greeks versus barbarians’ polarity, which sees Greek self-definition as an antithesis of those values assigned to those regarded as non-Greek (βάρβαροι).<sup>52</sup> Roman ideology also tended towards an ideological framework that opposed ‘Roman’ values (it was not always clear what these values were) to those regarded as inferior. The famous Virgilian proclamation of the Roman destiny to triumph in the political arena asserts Roman supremacy in an astute

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<sup>47</sup> ‘...where indigenous groups claimed a distinctiveness in terms of their past, usually as a survival strategy in the face of a majority culture’; Huskinson (2000), 11.

<sup>48</sup> See pages 171-198.

<sup>49</sup> Huskinson (2000), 10-15.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see Diller (1937) for a discussion of Greek racial mixture. Such arguments will inevitably serve the purposes of conservative historians writing with a nationalist agenda, in as much as they will often lead to an assertion of the supposed *inherent* superiority of one race over another.

<sup>51</sup> See Isaac (2004) for a survey of ‘racist’ views in classical antiquity.

<sup>52</sup> Cartledge (1993), 51-77.

piece of Augustan propaganda.<sup>53</sup> Often, this sense of *romanitas* was a rhetorical construction; a notion of a set of traditional virtues (piety, abstemiousness, conservatism) as embodied by heroic archetypes from the early days of the Roman republic. In particular, these values were seen at their best in the practical sphere, in which, of course, Romans regarded themselves as being naturally supreme. If the Greeks were masters of philosophical abstraction and creators of artistic masterpieces, then it was Rome that saw itself as excelling in the arts of engineering, architecture and military affairs.<sup>54</sup> It was their sense of the practical that had devised adequate sewage systems and the construction of great roads. A frequent motif in Latin literature is the perceived contrast between the 'traditional' Roman virtues of *pietas*, sober industriousness and a devotion to the adherence to the *mos maiorum*, as embodied by those famed soldier/farmers of Republican legend such as Cincinnatus, and the effete decadence of the Greek speaking peoples.<sup>55</sup> Such literary stereotypes appear in literature that spans a vast period of time. Even in texts that appear considerably later, such as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, one finds such clichés being employed. Often those who display any blatant philhellenism are treated with scorn or suspicion. Nero's fondness for Greek culture is invariably seen as a weakness, a flaw in his character that threatens to devalue the currency of the imperial office in the eyes of both Romans and foreigners.<sup>56</sup> This particular emperor did not cut a soldierly figure, but even those with more impressive martial credentials could find their reputations tainted if they displayed excessive Hellenistic tendencies:

inbutusque inpensius Graecis studiis, ingenio eius sic ea declinante ut a

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<sup>53</sup> Verg. *Aen* VI. 847-853.

<sup>54</sup> Strabo *Geog.* v.iii.8.

<sup>55</sup> See Wardman (1976) and Isaac (2004) for examples of the kinds of prejudice exhibited by Latin authors towards the Greeks. This was by no means a one-way traffic. Greek writers were often scathing about their Roman masters. One may contrast Juvenal's vitriolic verbal attacks on Greek immigrants to Rome, with a rather more subtle critique of Roman values from Plutarch in the structure of his *Greek and Roman Questions*. See Preston (2001), 86-119.

<sup>56</sup> Nero's predilection for Greek culture is linked with his *penchant* for performing on stage. Both activities are shaming for a Roman aristocrat. Thus, the aptness of his appearance on stage at Neapolis; Suet. *Ner.* 20.

nonnullis Graeculus diceretur.<sup>57</sup>

The second position on the matter of identity may be termed ‘relational’.<sup>58</sup> This viewpoint holds identity as fluid and malleable, rather than unchanging. Identity does not consist of an inventory of essential characteristics that belong to a certain group of people throughout time. Instead, it may exist on multiple levels, and is an artificial construct that is plastic; it can, and indeed does, alter according to context. It morphs and changes with altering circumstances. This is not necessarily to involve the conscious donning of a series of masks (as this may imply that this shift in identity is the result of fraudulence or the exercise of a degree of artifice; a disguising of one’s ‘true’ nature’). Rather, the phenomenon may just be a shift of emphasis, when a choice is made to accentuate a certain facet of self. Thus, a man may be simultaneously all of the following: male, free(d)man, citizen, husband, father. He may carry this perception of himself or they may be roles that others place upon him. He may be Jewish, he may be a Hellenistic Egyptian, he may speak predominantly Greek and yet think of himself as Roman. These aspects need not be contradictory; they may co-exist comfortably. They are also subject to change through circumstance or over time. Thus a non-citizen may eventually gain citizen rights, a husband may become a widower, a pauper may come into substantial wealth. Even the status of gender is liable to change. This sometimes may have meant an actual physical transformation, either through surgery or through the use of costume.<sup>59</sup> It could also signify cases where gender becomes blurred, such as hermaphroditism or eunuchism.<sup>60</sup> Fluidity of gender roles may have been less extreme. One may think of the special hierarchical significance of homosexual liaisons and the codes that governed them. Acceptable in many areas of Greek culture, but frequently less so in Roman, these relationships could be broken down as such: the ‘male’ partner was older and was the penetrator; the younger man assumed the ‘female’ role of the

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<sup>57</sup> SHA *Hadr.* 1.5: ‘He immersed himself zealously in Greek studies, his talent in this direction such that some called him ‘little Greek’.

<sup>58</sup> Huskinson (2000), 10-15.

<sup>59</sup> SHA *Heliogab.* 26.7; Suet. *Calig.*

<sup>60</sup> For the myth of Hermaphroditus, see Ov. *Met.* 4. 285-388.

penetrated.<sup>61</sup> Gender clearly signified something more complex than mere anatomical detail:

Gender is not a fixed bodily state, but a shifting cultural category in which biological sex may or may not be a determining factor, and the assignment of individuals into particular cultural categories is primarily determined by differences in hierarchy.<sup>62</sup>

These approaches to identity may seem initially irreconcilable, although both stances possess some merit. The essentialist approach seems to rely less on anthropological study and more on a reliance upon ancient stereotypes and a degree of cultural vanity. It may possess some relevance when considering smaller, relatively isolated communities with a lower level of interaction with external cultures. In such cases, there may be some case for local customs, traditions or character traits that would have remained unaffected by contact with other cultures, and which could be regarded as distinctive and unique. However, such a case could surely not be made for the state of affairs to be found in the second or third century A.D., when communities displaying such a level of autochthonous purity would have been difficult to locate. Nonetheless, this did not prevent many writers using it as a way of reacting to the great upheavals of population and the intermingling of different communities during this period. The enormous territorial span of the empire surely militates against any theories based around racial isolation. The essentialist position seems incapable of taking into account the pervasive influences of multiculturalism. However, what it does indicate is that whilst supposed 'racial' diversity is perhaps an unwise basis for identity differentiation, there is no doubt that, perceptually, it frequently provided the foundation for ideological definitions of identity. Fierce local racial loyalties may have provided a focal point for self-definition.

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<sup>61</sup> This is very much the view of Dover (1978); for an alternative view of the politics of Greek homosexual intercourse, see Davidson (1997b), 167-182. Davidson rejects Dover's analysis as overly simplistic: 'Power was often described in gender terms and of course sex was linked to power in more profound ways, but this was a subtle and complex relationship, an intricate nexus of exchanged values involving love, gifts, desirability and favours, not a rigid 'zero-sum game' that the penetrator always won', 169.

<sup>62</sup> Montserrat (2000), 154.

The assertion of national identities has been a characteristic of the latter part of the twentieth century. One may think of the fracturing of the Soviet Union, and the resultant internecine conflict. The removal of Soviet control in Yugoslavia led to its fragmentation and to violent clashes between different ethnic and religious groups in the Balkans. Simmering tensions that had existed for years had not been eradicated by centralised control and re-erupted when that authority was removed. At a lower level, pleas for linguistic recognition may be seen (merely within Europe) in tensions between the Flemish and Walloon communities in Belgium or the struggles of Welsh-speakers to retain their linguistic identity. Both these latter examples illustrate the desire for indigenous cultures to avoid being marginalized and submerged.

The *pax romana* often disguised sentiments of dissidence towards imperial control. There is no doubt that vibrant local cultures continued to exist long after the Romans had established political control, although how far these customs remained 'uncontaminated' and resisted the process of transformation and hybridisation is uncertain. The case for the fluidity of identity is perhaps not as compelling as some scholars have made out. The 'relationist' argument does not go all the way to providing an adequate template for this investigation.

Still the concept of identity remains frustratingly elusive. If the modern scholar finds the situation confusing and contradictory, there is no reason to suppose that the ancients found it any less so. One of the principal themes of this thesis will be the relationship between the two primary cultural frameworks operating around the Mediterranean: the Greeks and the Romans. As the two most eminent cultural superpowers, they were locked in a battle for intellectual and artistic supremacy. This relationship may be characterised usefully as a love/hate one. Greek intellectuals felt some measure of shame at their state of political and military impotence, having been conquered by the Romans and then incorporated within an alien culture that they regarded as less sophisticated and less civilised than themselves.<sup>63</sup> Yet, at the same time many, such as Polybius or Plutarch could express admiration for their conquerors. There was a similar ambiguity at play in the attitudes of Latin writers towards all things Greek. Greece was the cradle of civilisation, the home of science, philosophy and aesthetics. Yet, they had displayed weakness by allowing themselves to be subjugated by a foreign

power. The wealth generated by the conquest of the Greek territories had, in the opinion of Roman moralists, both fuelled the rapid growth of empire and at the same time sowed the seeds of decadence and corruption.<sup>64</sup> This ambivalence, at least according to Plutarch, existed even in the early days of Roman territorial expansion. The elder Cato, convinced of the viability of a life of austerity and self-sufficiency in keeping with traditional Roman myths, was purported to have loathed all things Greek. Yet, even this eminent xenophobe was not immune from the insidious effects of cultural leakage:

ἄλλως δὲ παιδείας Ἑλληνικῆς ὀψιμαθῆς γενέσθαι λέγεται, καὶ  
 πόρρω παντάπασιν ἡλικίας ἔληλακῶς Ἑλληνικὰ βιβλία λαβῶν  
 εἰς χεῖρας βραχέα μὲν ἀπὸ Θουκυδίδου, πλείονα δ' ἀπὸ  
 Δημοσθένους εἰς τὸ ῥητορικὸν ὠφεληθῆναι. τὰ μέντοι συγγράμματα  
 καὶ δόγμασιν Ἑλληνικοῖς καὶ μεθρημνηυμένα πολλὰ κατὰ λέξιν  
 ἐν τοῖς ἀποφθέγμασι καὶ ταῖς γνωμολογίαις τέτακται.<sup>65</sup>

How much of this particular anecdote is a result of Plutarchian cultural *vanitas* is unclear. Nonetheless, it neatly illustrates the tensions at play between the two cultures. It is evident, then, that pinning down the fundamental rudiments of identity may be most problematic. It does seem that the defence of identity is at its most vigorous when it feels threatened, or is at risk from extermination. It may fight to preserve its integrity, or, as a stratagem for survival, allow itself to merge with the occupying culture so as to avoid complete absorption. New hybrids may arise from this process of synthesis.

It is time to address the issue of how this problem of cultural identification might relate to culinary custom. The problem of identity seems to be very much one of control, and the way minority elements retain and assert their autonomy in the face of mass majority culture, and entrenched cultures attempt to resist, or at least, cope with the influx of unfamiliar customs and ideologies. In modern societies, with the

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<sup>63</sup> See Goldhill (2001), Whitmarsh (2005).

<sup>64</sup> The implication from this viewpoint is that the inclination to conquer was more of a compulsion.

<sup>65</sup> Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 2: 'Further than this, it is said, he did not learn Greek till late in life, and was quite well on in age when he started to read Greek books; then he profited in oratory a little from Thucydides, but most from Demosthenes. At any rate, his writings are styled with Greek opinions and stories, and many translations from the Greek are among his apophthegms and maxims'.

transmigration of populations across the globe, either for economic reasons or in flight from war or natural catastrophe, one may see pockets of immigrant communities who, whilst achieving some level of integration with the culture of their new homelands, also cling to many of their traditional customs.<sup>66</sup> This may sometimes mean physical ghettoisation. This attachment to tradition provides some way of offsetting feelings of dislocation and homesickness that may be experienced by immigrants. Tolerance from both sides means that these communities may often exist harmoniously side by side (although this is not always the case). The major populations of antiquity (Rome, Athens, Alexandria) would have contained many disparate immigrant groups, all bringing with them religious values, attitudes and many forms of material culture. These immigrants often attracted scorn, at least from those who chose to place their thoughts in writing.<sup>67</sup> Their alien nature and strange practices could invite the stern disapproval of the authorities.<sup>68</sup> However, in general, Roman culture seemed elastic in the way it could comfortably accommodate foreign customs and religions.<sup>69</sup> Seemingly incongruent cultural and religious systems were able to comfortably amalgamate with each other with seemingly minimal disruption. The Romans erected temples to their own gods in occupied territories, as well as imposing the mandatory observance of the rites of the imperial cult. In return, they looked to the pantheon of local deities and found correspondences. As long as the nature of these gods did not conflict with Roman religious sensibilities and the rites associated with them were not deemed abhorrent, they could be safely accommodated within the Roman religious framework. There was little problem in this area for Greeks and Romans, owing to the similarities between the

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<sup>66</sup> See Douglas (1984).

<sup>67</sup> For example Juvenal's insults against Rome's Greek community. Tacitus is equally scathing; Tac. *Ann.* XV. xx-xxi; XIV. xlvii. He also rails against the Christians; XV. xlv.

<sup>68</sup> The examples of persecution are too numerous to allow the enumeration of them all. A few must suffice. For the persecution of Christians: Suet. *Ner.* 16; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* V. i (during the reign of Marcus Aurelius); SHA *Sev.* 18.1. For Jews, see Suet. *Tib.* 36. For suppression of the Bacchanalia in 186 B.C., see Livy XXXIX. 8-18.

<sup>69</sup> A number of foreign religious cults found popularity in Rome as the empire expanded; Livy XXV.1.6. The most prevalent included the cults of the Magna Mater, Mithras and Isis: 'The propagation of the Oriental religions, with the development of Neo-Platonism, is the leading fact in the moral history of the pagan empire'; Cumont (1956), xv.

two religious systems. The monotheism of Judaism and Christianity proved rather more tricky.

It may be surmised that food (and modes of eating) was one of the customs used to assert identity, and was often associated with religious rites. As Garnsey asserts:

In Graeco-Roman society, food was a marker of ethnic and cultural difference.<sup>70</sup>

The way in which food is prepared, presented and consumed is often inextricably linked with other cultural identifiers. Not only is food often consumed in a communal setting, thus forging personal connections between individuals, it is frequently linked with other customs, such as religious exhortations or prohibitions.<sup>71</sup> This leads us naturally to the subject with which this thesis is concerned: dietary restriction. This too is associated with issues of control. Just as an assumption of a particular diet may serve as a method of connecting with core notions of cultural identity, so too is the *exclusion* of foodstuffs. Just as many sufferers of *anorexia nervosa* justify their refusal to eat as a means of assuming control over their lives ( they may feel powerless in the face of external factors, but they feel that they are able to regulate what passes their lips), minority cultures may impose their own rules for what they will or will not eat. The grounds for food restrictions may be numerous: fear of foreign cuisines; cultural prohibitions on what is acceptable for people to eat; medical reasons. Religious doctrines often stipulate the manner of eating (or not eating). The Jewish peoples of the Diaspora looked to the strict biblical dietary regulations that governed their existence. These laws mapped out those food groups deemed as acceptable to notions of ritual purity, and those that would allow 'contamination'. The laws were one part of a range of practices designed to ensure that the Jews were distinctive and separated from the Gentiles.<sup>72</sup>

These criteria may prove to be of use when examining the behaviour of groups or communities, and may also serve as an expedient tool for looking at individual

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<sup>70</sup> Garnsey (1999), 6. He goes on to add: '...food, then, stands as a pointer to distinction of status, power and wealth, of group-separateness and -belonging, and of cultural differences in general', 7.

<sup>71</sup> Also the importance of such things as utensils, recipes that are handed down from mother to daughter; all methods of achieving cultural stability and continuity; see Douglas (1984).

<sup>72</sup> See pages 171-198.

behaviour. The issue of control is again significant. It is no less valid to posit that individual identities could be successfully articulated as well as the collective. Similar negotiations of power may take place; the will to self-determination comes up against the pressures and constraints of the mainstream. The question of how the individual interacts with and participates in society may be approached in a similar manner to how one may judge the behaviour of communities. Dietary restriction may operate on the individual as well as the collective basis. It will be the task of this thesis to establish the implications of dietary restriction for identity on both the macro and micro level.

This thesis will firstly examine the way in which environmental and economic factors placed dietary restrictions upon huge swathes of the population within the Graeco-Roman world. A brief survey of the basic diet of these peoples (restricted by the aforementioned factors) will provide a necessary framework for subsequent discussions of dietary restriction.<sup>73</sup> Then, I shall proceed to examine one of the most prominent (and problematic) examples of this practice in Greek and Roman antiquity: abstinence from meat.<sup>74</sup> As Pythagorean ideology is so central to considerations of this phenomenon, the subsequent chapter will concern itself with another example of dietary restriction closely linked with (but certainly not exclusive to) the Pythagorean school: the taboo surrounding beans.<sup>75</sup> A further chapter will examine ideas about fish (which, within an ancient context, needs separate treatment from meat).<sup>76</sup> I then propose to examine the Jewish dietary laws, a system of dietary restrictions, enshrined in a written code and practised by Diaspora Jews living across the Roman world, yet which provoked bemusement and hostility from those outside the Jewish community.<sup>77</sup> The final chapters of this thesis will look at alcohol, and controls on diet by the state.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See pages 44-73.

<sup>74</sup> See pages 74-113.

<sup>75</sup> See pages 114-141.

<sup>76</sup> See pages 142-170.

<sup>77</sup> See pages 171-198.

<sup>78</sup> See pages 199-231; 232-264. These final two chapters illustrate how dietary restriction could be deemed to be susceptible to both individual judgement (alcohol) and state control (expenditure on food).