Greece & Rome (2023), 70.1 20–37 © The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association
doi:10.1017/S0017383522000213

VITELLIUS AND THE SHIELD OF MINERVA*

In 69 CE, the emperor Vitellius presented to dinner guests his 'Shield of Minerva', a platter filled with pike livers, pheasant and peacock brains, flamingo tongues, and lamprey milt. Just as Vitellius' passion for food has been distorted into gluttony, so the Shield of Minerva has been misrepresented as a culinary abomination and the worst of the emperor's excesses. Modern scholarly reception of the Shield owes much to hostile ancient sources, but is also influenced by some modern culinary preferences. Critical reading of our sources reveals the dish as a mix of ingredients carefully chosen for their gustatory and visual appeal and for their political and military symbolism. Vitellius' association of the platter with Minerva evokes her status not only as a martial deity, but also as a goddess of craft. The Shield of Minerva is revealed to be an intellectual exercise, not a symbol of gluttonous self-indulgence.

Keywords: Vitellius, gastronomy, Suetonius, Tacitus, Cassius Dio, food, luxury, intellectual, shield, Minerva

'He was a man who indulged his greed without restraint, but also without regard to the moment or propriety' (Suet. *Vit.* 13.3); 'his passion for feasting was disgraceful and insatiable' (Tac. *Hist.* 2.62); 'he feasted day and night, bingeing without limit, all the time vomiting up everything' (Dio 65.2.2). The emperor Vitellius, who ruled for only eight months, is well known for gluttony.[1] The cost of preparing banquets for him ruined his hosts, so

* I am grateful to John Griffin, Nicole Nowbahar, Selena Ross, and Kate Stevens for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article; workshopping our research in the meetings of our '*officina*' has been a bright spot during 2020–1. I would also like to thank the anonymous reader for their valuable suggestions and Andrej Petrovic for his guidance through the submission and review process.

[1] On Vitellius and his reign, see especially C. Murison, *Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Careers and Controversies* (Hildesheim, 1993); B. Richter, *Vitellius. Ein Zerrbild der Geschichtsschreibung: Untersuchungen zum Prinzipat des A. Vitellius* (Bern, 1992); G. Morgan, *69 AD. The Year of Four Emperors* (New York, 2007); and E. Keitel, '"*Foedum Spectaculum*" and Related Motifs in Tacitus "Histories II–III"', *RhM* 135 (1992), 342–51, and 'Feast Your Eyes on This: Vitellius as a Stock Tyrant (Tac. *Hist.* 3.36–39)', in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and*

Tacitus tells us (*Hist.* 2.62 and 2.95), while Vitellius himself managed to spend nine hundred million sesterces in only a brief period. According to Dio, one million of that was spent on a vessel that, Suetonius relates, was filled with pike livers, pheasant and peacock brains, flamingo tongues, and lamprey milt; Vitellius called it his 'Shield of Minerva'.

My purpose in this paper is to demonstrate first that our ancient sources have misrepresented the Shield of Minerva – both the vessel and the foods served on it – as the worst of the emperor's excesses and a culinary abomination.[2] A new critical reading of those sources reveals that the foods were not simply a farrago of luxuries, but instead were carefully chosen for their gustatory and visual appeal, and they represented not just the breadth of empire, but had political and military symbolism specific to Vitellius. Contemporary changes in culinary tastes may explain our ancient sources' scorn for the emperor's choice of foods; more recent changes can explain modern negative reactions to those foods. Second, I argue that the outsized vessel was a technical feat and that Vitellius' association of it with Minerva evokes not just her status as a martial deity, but also her role as a goddess of craft, including pottery. This new reading offers a corrective to modern scholarly reception of the Shield that owes much to hostile ancient sources, but is influenced too by some modern culinary preferences.[3]

There are three ancient accounts of the Shield. The fullest is in Suetonius (*Vit.* 13), who notes that the enormous size of the serving platter caused Vitellius to call it his 'Shield of Minerva' and lists the foods served on it; it is this account that will be my main focus. This paper proceeds from the position that Suetonius' list is accurate. While we should be slow to accept the judgment of the *Historia Augusta* (SHA *Prob.* 2.7) that Suetonius (along with other biographers) wrote 'not so much with style as with truth' (*non tam diserte quam vere*) nevertheless the holistic nature of the list – as I explain below – suggests

Roman Historiography (Hoboken, NJ, 2007), 441–6. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

[2] The most thorough examination of negative accounts of Vitellius' appetites is Richter (n. 1), especially pp. 232–56.

[3] Ancient accounts are in Suet. *Vit.* 13, Dio 65.3.3, and Plin. *HN* 35.163–4; these are discussed further below. According to C. Déry, 'The Art of Apicius', in H. Walker (ed.), *Cooks and Other People* (Totnes, 1996), 112, it was a 'gastronomic monstrosity of a dish'. C. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 53, uses the dish as an example of the Roman 'taste for surrealistic comestibles'. C. Grocock and S. Grainger, *Apicius. A Critical Edition*, second edition (Totnes, 2020), 357, express the opinion that 'a mixture such as this seems entirely unappealing to us and we suspect it was equally so to the guests who had to eat it'.

that it was not changed by the biographer.[4] The briefer account in Cassius Dio (65.3.3) contains only a summary of the types of foods and makes no mention of the appellation 'Shield of Minerva', but provides additional detail about the material and fate of the vessel. I will engage with Dio more fully in the second part of the paper, along with the Elder Pliny (*NH* 35.163–4), who refers briefly to the technical feat of the vessel, but also relates contemporary scorn for it.

The emperor Vitellius was characterized as a glutton. Suetonius tells us (*Vit.* 13 and 10) that he ate too much, too often, and at any time, and he regularly imposed himself on others' hospitality; such was his appetite that he stole food from altars, ate at cook-shops while travelling, and even finished leftovers from earlier meals. On marching to Rome with his troops, Vitellius drank neat wine to counter the stench (and perhaps sight) of his enemies' corpses.[5] Suetonius claims (*Vit.* 16) that, as Vespasian's army finally approached Rome, Vitellius fled to his father's house, with only two attendants: his chef and pastry cook.[6] In a similar vein, Cassius Dio (65.2–5) tells us that Vitellius would vomit up food in order to eat again; he ate so much from so far afield that supplies ran low, and though dining mostly at others' expense (with different hosts needed for each meal, such were the costs), his own outlay still came to 900,000,000 sesterces.

Suetonius (*Vit.* 13) describes a banquet that the emperor hosts:

Hanc quoque exsuperavit ipse dedicatione patinae, quam ob immensam magnitudinem clipeum Minervae πολιούχου dictitabat. In hac scarorum iocinera, phasianarum et pavonum cerebella, linguas phoenicopterum, murenarum lactes a Parthia usque fretoque Hispanico per navarchos ac triremes petitarum, commiscuit.[7]

He outdid this too with the dedication of a *patina*; on account of its enormous size, he was wont to refer to it as his Shield of Minerva, city-protector. On it he brought together the livers of parrotfish, the brains of pheasants and peacocks, the tongues of flamingos, milt of lamprey; these had been sought from Parthia right over to the Spanish straits, by admirals of the fleet and triremes.

[4] On Suetonius' sources, see A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars* (London, 1983), 59–66; D. Shotter, *Suetonius, Lives of Galba, Otho & Vitellius* (Warminster, 1993), 32–5, has a useful summary pertinent to the *Vitellius*.

[5] B. Baldwin, *Suetonius* (Amsterdam, 1983), 285, notes that the biographer's father, Suetonius Laetus, had been a supporter of Otho and had survived Bedriacum. The tenor of the son's note on Vitellius' consumption of wine at such a moment – and indeed the tone of his account as a whole – may be hostile at least in part because of his father's influence.

[6] Tacitus (*Hist.* 3.84), however, does not specify who, aside from his litter-bearers, accompanied Vitellius.

[7] I am following Kaster's 2016 *OCT* text of Suetonius.

Cassius Dio (65.3.3) has a description of the same banquet:

Μίαν γοῦν ποτε λοπάδα πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι μυριάδων ἐσκεύασε, γλώττας τε καὶ ἐγκεφάλους καὶ ἥπατα καὶ ἰχθύων καὶ ὀρνίθων τινῶν ἐμβαλών. καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀδύνατον ἦν κεραμεᾶν τηλικαύτην γενέσθαι, ἀργύρου τε ἐποιήθη καὶ ἔμεινε πολὺν χρόνον ὥσπερ τι ἀνάθημα, μέχρις οὗ Ἁδριανὸς αὐτὴν ἰδὼν συνεχώνευσεν.

Indeed, he once had prepared a single dish that cost one million sesterces, putting into it tongues, brains, and livers, of fish and birds. And since it was impossible for such a large vessel to be made from clay, it was made from silver and was kept for a long time as some sort of offering, until Hadrian learned of it and had it melted down.

The term *patina* (rendered as λοπάς in Dio) may be used to refer both to a food preparation and a serving vessel; this paper considers first the food, then the vessel.[8] *Apicius* has recipes for preparations named *patinae*, most of which comprise multiple ingredients combined in a base of egg custard and thus resemble a crustless quiche or frittata.[9] While it is possible that the ingredients that Suetonius lists and Dio summarizes were prepared in a similar manner, since the precise mode is impossible to ascertain from either source, I will focus on the ingredients.

At first reading, the list of ingredients in Suetonius resembles other accounts of typical luxury foods. For example, Aulus Gellius (*NA* 6.16) preserves the following list from Varro's satirical Περὶ Ἐδεσμάτων (*On Edibles*): 'a peacock from Samos, a woodcock from Phrygia, cranes of Media, a kid from Ambracia, a young tunny from Chalcedon, a lamprey from Tartessus, codfish from Pessinus, oysters from Tarentum, cockles from Sicily, a swordfish from Rhodes, pike from Cilicia, nuts from Thasos, dates from Egypt, acorns from Spain' (trans. Rolfe).[10] In *Satires* 2.8, Horace has Nasidienus serve (along with various wines,

[8] I have preserved this ambiguity in my translation of Dio's λοπάς. Similarly, a casserole may refer to a deep cooking vessel or the dish typically prepared within it. The term λοπάς is not a simple rendering of *patina*: it describes a dish that is similar, though perhaps with higher sides. See A. Donnelly, 'Cooking, Cooking Pots, and Cultural Transformation in Imperial and Late Antique Italy', PhD thesis, Loyola University (Chicago, 2016), 70–4.

[9] *Apicius* 4.2.1–16, 20–4, and 26–37; these recipes contain such ingredients as brains, fig-peckers, roses, fish, sea-anemones, sea-urchins, chicken, udders, and oysters. My italicisation of *Apicius*, which follows Grocock and Grainger (n. 3), reflects the uncertainty of the attribution of the entire collection transmitted under that name to one historical individual.

[10] On this list, see most recently I. Goh, 'Peacocks, Pikes, and Parasites: Lucilius and the Discourse of Luxury', in B. Breed, E. Keitel, and R. Wallace (eds.), *Lucilius and Satire in Second-Century Rome* (Cambridge, 2018), 258. A. Andrews, 'Greek and Latin Mouse-Fishes and Pig-Fishes', *TAPA* 79 (1948), 233–6, points out that *mus marinus* is used for variously mussels, turtles, and a type of fish.

fruits, and vegetables) Lucanian wild-boar, oysters, plaice, turbot, lamprey, crane's legs, foie gras, shoulder of hare, blackbird, and pigeon. Horace points out that only the shoulder of the hare is served, which is nicer than if one eats it with the loin, and that the pigeons are presented without their rumps; the meal also features crane, but only its legs, which seem to have been the choice part.[11] Petronius' Eumolpus provides another list (119.33–8), comprising Sicilian mullet (brought to the table alive), oysters from the Lucrine Lake beds, and pheasants from Phasis.[12] Finally, the Younger Pliny (*Ep*. 1.15) castigates a friend for his poor taste: he prefers another man's vulgar meal of oysters, sows' wombs, and sea-urchins to the simple and refined meal on offer from Pliny. These lists reveal that luxury in food has four key elements: a preference for fish and birds over meat; inclusion of offal and/or discrete parts of an animal; exotic non-native foods imported over long distances or now farmed in Italy; and an abundant variety.[13]

A fifth element can be added: luxury dishes contain a combination of multiple luxury ingredients, ready prepared for easy consumption. So, according to Seneca (*Ep*. 95.26), 'I recall that there was talk of a most la-di-da dish into which a fast-casual place, one that was stumbling towards bankruptcy, was heaping up whatever it is that fancy types eat to while away their days. There were Venus-shells[14] and thorny-oysters, and oysters cut right around to where they are eaten, and standing out among these were sea-urchins, completely taken apart, and mullets, totally filleted, were strewn over'. Seneca repeats

[11] On cranes as food, see J. Witteveen, 'On Swans, Cranes, and Herons: Part 2, Cranes', *Petits propos culinaires* 25 (1987), 50–9, esp. p. 52, who suggests that the legs might be especially prized.

[12] That the fish is still living when brought to the table suggests that Eumolpus is thinking of the mullet, though the Latin *scarus* is usually the parrotfish. On the mullet, a prized fish, see A. Andrews, 'The Roman Craze for Surmullets', *CW* 42 (1949), 186–8, and J. Higginbotham, *Piscinae. Artificial Fishponds in Roman Italy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), 48–50. Seneca (*NQ* 3.18.5–7) mocks diners who want to see the colours of mullets change as they expire.

[13] In an oft-cited list (SHA *Heliogab*. 18–21), Elagabalus is described as consuming camels' heels, cocks-combs, and tongues from peacocks and nightingales; to his Palatine guards, he served mullet offal, flamingo brains, partridge eggs, thrush brains, and the heads of parrots, pheasants, and peacocks. This passage is a pastiche of passages in Suetonius' earlier biographies: much of Vitellius' feasting is repeated and redoubled, now with many more ingredients and multiple huge vessels (*lances ingentes*), and Elagabalus' dining room has a revolving ceiling, just like Nero's (Suet. *Nero* 31.2). Even as pastiche, this list confirms that to serve an excess of offal derived from fish and fowl reflects a lack of self-control and is cause for censure.

[14] Identification of this shellfish is difficult, thanks to the allusiveness of the name and the imprecision of non-scientific nomenclature for seafoods. For suggestions, see M. Jones, 'Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art III: Erotic Animal Imagery', *Folklore* 102 (1991), 202. Seneca may have little interest in precision, preferring instead to get mileage out of a culinary term that has erotic implications and, therefore, also morally dubious connotations.

his objection to foods prepared for easy consumption later in *Ep*. 110.12: 'You are not achieving something great by being able to live without kingly accoutrements, by not longing for thousands of boar or the tongues of flamingos and those other portents of the luxury that sees a person scorning whole animals and choosing certain portions individually.'

These five elements and some of the same foodstuffs appear also in the Shield of Minerva. But closer investigation reveals that the ingredients share additional characteristics: they are all brightly or lightly coloured; they are all velvety and unctuous in mouthfeel; and they are all imported or recently farmed.

The first item in Suetonius' list is *scarorum iocinera*.[15] A secure identification of the fish is elusive: older translations sometimes render *scarus* as pike, and while the wrasse tends to be favoured by modern translations, the mullet may also be found. The Mediterranean parrotfish, *Sparisoma cretense*, a species in the wrasse family Scaridae, is a likely identification.[16] The Elder Pliny (*HN* 9.62) accords first place to it among fishes, with lamprey livers coming in second (*HN* 9.63); not long after, however, Martial (13.84) claims that only its guts taste good.[17] Yet the Mediterranean parrotfish (modern Greek σκάρος) is still served today, its flavour perhaps similar to that of Atlantic cod.[18] Pliny reports (*HN* 9.62) that one of Claudius' freedmen, Optatus, a prefect of the fleet, began farming the eastern Mediterranean fish so as to stock the seas along Italy's western coast.[19] While the flesh of the Mediterranean parrotfish is praised, no ancient (or modern) source except Suetonius mentions its liver. It perhaps shares the rich flavour and dark red colour of red mullet liver.[20]

[15] On this and the ingredients that follow, A. Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World, From A to Z* (London, 2003) is essential.

[16] J. Wilkins and S. Hill, *Life of Luxury. Europe's Oldest Cookery Book* (Totnes, 1994), 49, identify the fish as *Euscarus cretensis*, the parrotfish, which is today generally known as *Sparisoma cretense*. On ancient accounts of the parrotfish, see Higginbotham (n. 12), 51–2.

[17] According to Dalby (n. 15), 362, Martial's assertion may reflect a decline in popularity for the parrotfish.

[18] On the taste, appearance, and general history of the parrotfish, especially the Red Sea parrotfish, see G. Gambash, G. Bar-Oz, E. Lev, and U. Jeremias, 'Bygone Fish: Rediscovering the Red-Sea Parrotfish as a Delicacy of Byzantine Negev Cuisine', *Near Eastern Archaeology* 82 (2019), 216–25.

[19] Archestratus describes parrotfish from the waters around Chalcedon and Byzantium (fr. 13; Athenaeus 320b) and Ephesus (fr. 41). Macrobius 3.16.10 also refers to farming around Italy.

[20] According to C. Hargreaves, 'Fish Delicacies: From Cheeks and Tongues to Livers, Roes, Skeletons, Skin, and Scales', *The Independent* (newspaper) 15 September (London, 2015), 'The king of fish livers is that of red mullet, traditionally cooked inside the creature, as with woodcock.

Suetonius moves from fish to fowl for the next items: brains of pheasant and peacock. *Avis phasiana*, the pheasant, was well known as a luxury food.[21] Originating in Phasis (in modern Georgia), it seems to have been imported into Italy in the first century CE and may have been farmed only very recently at the time of Vitellius' banquet.[22] There is no mention in our ancient sources – besides Suetonius – or indeed in modern sources of the consumption of pheasant brains. Today, generally only the meat, gamey in flavour, is presented, though in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the bird might be served with its head.[23]

By Varro's time, the peacock was being farmed in Italy and was known both for its plumage and apparent suitability for eating.[24] Martial (13.52) laments that a bird with jewelled wings should not be handed over to the cruel cook. Yet peacock, served with its plumage, was found at the grandest banquets: Cicero asserts (*Fam*. 9.18 and 9.20) that he had eaten plenty of them when hosted by Hirtius, though he declined to reciprocate. Adopting the conceit of a turn towards fashionable gastronomy as a distraction from political turmoil, Cicero uses his consumption of many peacocks as an example of his new tastes.

Suetonius specifies that the brain of the peacock was consumed at Vitellius' banquet. Brains appear in plenty of recipes in *Apicius*, especially *patinae* and other mixed dishes, and although their source is not specified, they probably come from pigs, cattle, and sheep.[25] Peacock brains, by contrast, were more likely a delicacy. According to one diner, they are 'great, mild and not very gamey at all – I eat them with a little olive oil and a sprinkle of crunchy salt'.[26] They may

Bristol fishmonger Matthew Smith describes eating red mullet liver as a "mini taste explosion" and says that he always has a waiting list of customers wanting red mullet complete with livers'. Esteem for red mullet liver is also reported by Galen, *Alim. Fac.* 717.

[21] Petr. *Sat*. 93; Mart. 13.45, 13.72; Plin. *HN* 10.132, 19.52.

[22] According to I. Köster, 'Flamingos and Perverted Sacrifices in Suetonius' *Life of Caligula*', *Mnemosyne* 74.2 (2021), 308, pheasant was perhaps still imported when Varro wrote (Varr. *R.R.* 3.9.18), but was farmed in Italy by the latter part of the first century (Mart. 3.58 and Plin. *HN* 10.132).

[23] According to Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, no. 1041, 'If the head is left on…bring it round under the wing, and fix it on to the point of the skewer'.

[24] On the farming of peacock, see Varro *DRR* 3.6–7 and Köster (n. 22), 308–9. Peacock rissoles appear in *Apicius* 2.2.6. Pliny (*HN* 10.133) claims that Apicius had a recipe for peacock tongue, though it is not included in *Apicius*.

[25] *Apicius* 4.2.1, 4, 9, 21, and 33 contain brains.

[26] A. Bergo, 'How to Cook a Peacock', *Forager Chef* (blog) <https://foragerchef.com/cooking-a-peacock/>, accessed 18 November 2022.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383522000213 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be similar to the soft creamy brains of woodcock, which are more regularly eaten.

Veronika Grimm points out that peacock, as a rare bird that is fattened, would have been very expensive; to serve only one tiny part of it would have been an example of the most extreme and absurd luxury.[27] Indeed, this point might be made of every item in Suetonius' list: offal may be a luxury precisely because, if served by itself, it suggests that the rest of the animal was not needed and perhaps even discarded; a substantial meal of offal implies a high proportion of waste. Yet, at the same time, according to Witteveen, the peacock was not good eating.[28] Diners who privileged its plumage over the meat are criticized by Lucilius 761–2W (= 716–17M) and Horace (*Sat.* 2.2.23–30), but may have actually had the right priorities.[29] Vitellius' choice to serve just the brains may not have been born of luxury, but of real gastronomic discernment: they tasted better than the rest of the bird.

The most notorious item on the list is flamingo tongues. Indeed, they were notorious even before Vitellius' banquet: according to Pliny (*HN* 10.133), 'Apicius, the most lavish spendthrift of all the big spenders, has informed us that the tongue of the flamingo has an especially fine taste'.[30] For Seneca (*Ep.* 110.12), they are symbols of luxury, and Martial (13.71) notes waspishly that the flamingo's tongue gives gluttons satisfaction. The visible part of a flamingo's tongue is pink and spiky, an arresting sight served on the vessel; according to Galen, however, cooks served the tongue along with a substantial amount of surrounding tissue.[31] The tongue as a whole has been

[27] V. Grimm, 'On Food and the Body', in D. Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (Hoboken, NJ, 2006), 359.

[28] J. Witteveen, 'Peacocks in History', *Petits propos culinaires* 32 (1989), 31–2.

[29] On the role of the peacock in these poems, see Goh (n. 10). D. Scully and T. Scully, *Early French Cookery* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), 321–3, and D. Sutton, '"Four and Twenty Blackbirds Baked in a Pie": A History of Surprise Stuffings', in M. McWilliams (ed.), *Wrapped and Stuffed Foods* (Totnes, 2013), 285–6 and 291, describe medieval entremets, in which peacocks were skinned (unplucked) and roasted, then served inside their plumage. G. Lehmann, 'The Late-Medieval Menu in England: A Reappraisal', *Food and History* 1 (2003), 71, dates this style of entremet to the fifteenth century. In 1971, the Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi hosted a banquet to celebrate 2,500 years of the Persian Empire. The French dish *Paon à l'impériale paré et entouré de sa cour* was on the menu: imperial peacock prepared and surrounded by its court, i.e. quails; yet only the quail are consumed, while the peacock remains uncooked. On the banquet, see R. Steele, *The Shah's Imperial Celebrations of 1971* (London, 2020).

[30] There are recipes in *Apicius* for flamingo meat (6.2.21 and 22), but not the tongue.

[31] Galen, *Alim. Fac.* 6.

described as delicious, rich, and oily.[32] Köster suggests that flamingo would have been farmed by the time of Gaius.[33]

For the final item, Suetonius returns to the water. Lamprey, a meaty fish, was an expensive Roman delicacy, though its appeal is known best through a much later anecdote: Henry I of England is said to have died from a surfeit of lampreys.[34] These creatures are native to the western and central Mediterranean, and according to Pliny (*HN* 9.169), the best lampreys were found around Sicily, though from the late Republic they were farmed. Anecdotes tend to dwell not on their taste, but on the habits of their owners: some affected to pamper the animals (Plin. *HN* 9.171–2), while Vedius Pollio (9.77) notoriously (and improbably) killed enslaved members of his household by feeding them to his lampreys. *Murenarum lactes* are lamprey milt, i.e. the testes, containing sperm.[35] The milt is milky white in appearance, with a delicate and smooth mouthfeel and a mild, slightly fishy taste.[36] Lampreys spawn from mid-Spring to mid-Summer, and the milt would therefore have been available to be served on the Shield.[37]

This is no mere laundry list of luxury foods. While Vitellius serves flamingo, pheasant, parrotfish, and lamprey, all standard luxury fare, he has omitted certain notable foods, namely oysters, urchins, sows'

[32] G. McCall, *Letters from the Frontiers* (Philadelphia, PA, 1868), 172–3.

[33] Köster (n. 22), 309, n. 44.

[34] The phrase 'surfeit of lampreys' derives from Robert Fabyan's *New Cronycles of Englande and of Fraunce* (1516) I. ccxxix. f. cli: 'But Ranulph sayth, he toke a surfet by etynge of a Lamprey & therof dyed'. Henry of Huntingdon vii.43 is the fullest account; a text and translation are in D. Greenway, *The History of the English People, 1000–1154* (Oxford, 1996), 490–1.

[35] Dalby (n. 15), 192, points out that *murena*, though often translated as lamprey, may sometimes be the moray eel. Suetonius, however, is most likely referring to the lamprey. Aristotle (*Gen. an.* 762b21) and Pliny (*HN* 9.160) claimed that eels reproduced asexually, presumably since no one had been unable to observe their genitalia or to see them mate: eels' sexual organs develop only in their final metamorphic stage, as they swim out to sea to mate, and are thus seldom seen. Unless Suetonius is claiming that Vitellius somehow served eel milt, *murena* should here be translated as lamprey. Indeed, Pliny uses *murena* for the lamprey at *HN* 9.76–7, but *anguilla* for the eel at 9.74–5 and 160.

[36] Though lamprey milt (or indeed any part of it) is rarely consumed today, the milt of cod, tuna, and carp is routinely eaten: Japanese shirako is cod milt, Sicilian lattume derives from tuna sperm, and Romanian lapți comes from freshwater fish, such as carp. A description of lamprey milt (and the rest of the creature) is available in E. Lowie, 'The Sea Lamprey Society Gathered to Eat the Most Gruesome Animal in History', *Vice Magazine* (online, 19 August 2017), available at <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8qkve3/the-sea-lamprey-society-gathered-to-eat-the-most-gruesome-animal-in-history>, accessed 18 November 2022.

[37] G. Kearn, *Leeches, Lice, and Lampreys* (Dordrecht, 2004), 318–38, discusses the life stages and habits of the various types of lamprey. C. Murison, 'Some Vitellian Dates: An Exercise in Methodology', *TAPA* 109 (1979), 197, argues that Vitellius arrived at Rome sometime from the end of June.

wombs, and mullet.[38] The remaining ingredients have an aesthetic unity and balance: they would all feel soft, creamy, unctuous, and oily in the mouth. That unctuous mouthfeel connoted rich fat, and fattiness was highly prized, so much so that birds were fattened to increase their fat, richness, and therefore appeal.[39] Their colours are a striking mix of bright and light reds and whites. The colours and flavours of the foods fall into contrasting pairs: the parrotfish liver and flamingo tongue, both red, were strong in flavour; the pheasant and peacock brains and lamprey milt, all white, were mild.

There may be military significance to these ingredients: senior military officials tended to wear white military cloaks, and indeed Tacitus tells us (*Hist*. 2.89) that Vitellius' most senior officers were dressed in shining white for his triumphant entry into Rome. Centurions and lower-ranked soldiers generally wore red.[40]

The ingredients were politically important too, as scholars have noted. For example, Suetonius claims that the meal comprised ingredients sought out from Parthia, in the east, to the Spanish straits in the west, though his reference to deployment of triremes and assistance of admirals of the Roman fleet to gather foodstuffs may be a hostile echo of his earlier story (*Calig*. 45–6) of Gaius' misuse of the fleet apparently to collect seashells.[41] More positively, Emily Gowers regards the ingredients as representing the empire on a plate.[42] Indeed, the mix of ingredients may be the assertion of an empire-wide political unity under Vitellius.

We can go further and argue that the ingredients had a more direct political and military significance for Vitellius. His earlier service as proconsul of Africa may be represented by the inclusion of flamingo, originally from North Africa; support from the eastern provinces of

[38] Petronius' Eumolpus claims (*Sat*. 93.2.8) that parrotfish had supplanted mullet among fashionable eaters, but even if true, it is unclear whether this was a motivation for Vitellius.

[39] M. Corbier, 'The Ambiguous Status of Meat in Ancient Rome', *Food and Foodways* 3 (1989), 234–7.

[40] G. Sumner, *Roman Military Clothing. Vol. 1, 100 BC–AD 200* (Oxford, 2002), 17–36, who surveys literary evidence, visual evidence (such as mosaics), and the few extant examples of ancient textiles.

[41] On that story, which is also recounted in Dio 59.25, see most recently D. Woods, 'Caligula's Seashells', *G&R* 47 (2000), 80–7. Richter (n. 1), 247, interprets the reference to Parthia differently, arguing that the use of military resources to secure foodstuffs from the Parthian Straits is a way to misrepresent ('*vernebeln*') the goals of Vitellius' planned Parthian campaign.

[42] The notion of the ingredients (and vessel) as standing for the empire is emphasized by E. Gowers, *The Loaded Table. Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford, 1993), 20, 36, and 207.

Syria and Judaea, which had been essential to Vitellius' elevation to the imperial throne, may be reflected in the choice of the Phasian peacock, standing broadly for the East.[43]

Yet, as we have seen already, contrary to Suetonius, the ingredients did not have to be gathered from across the empire: by the reign of Vitellius they were all accessible in and around Italy from Roman farms or around Italian coastlines.[44] The ingredients could, then, also be a celebration of contemporary Roman farming and fishing methods, which had domesticated exotic luxury and made it available close to home. Such a celebration may have been especially important to Vitellius, whose father had brought (at least) two new foods to Italy.[45]

Luxury was falling out of favour with elite diners, and contemporary changes in taste may have contributed to the hostility of our ancient accounts towards Vitellius' feast. According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 3.55), 'Luxurious dining, which was practiced at enormous expense over the century from the end of the Actian war through the conflict by which Servius Galba came to power, gradually died out'. He traces the decline to Italian elites' rejection of the fine living that had aroused intrigue under the Julio-Claudians and to the growing numbers of provincial elites at Rome, whose style of living was simpler. Petronius-Encolpius' scornful reaction to Trimalchio's dinner, with its trompe l'oeil presentations, myriad dishes, and costly ingredients, is one example of that decline. Another comes in Seneca's contemporary complaint (*Ep.* 95) that, in the face of an upheaval in moral standards, people have taken a pick-and-mix approach to philosophical remedies; he advocates instead for simplicity, by choosing one philosophical regime and sticking to it. He finds an analogy to the moral mess of the times and his solution to it in recent culinary trends: there had recently been a fashion for combining too many luxury ingredients in

[43] On Vitellius as proconsul of Africa, see Suet. *Vit.* 5; on support from Syria and Judaea, see Tac. *Hist.* 2.73.

[44] I am grateful to Kate Stevens for this observation.

[45] Pliny (*HN* 15.83) tells us that Lucius Vitellius was the first to cultivate the Syrian Cottan and Carian figs at his Alban estates; he also (*HN* 15.91) introduced pistachios to Italy, while a subordinate, Flaccus Pompeius, brought them to Spain. Lucius Vitellius and Pompeius were perhaps acting in concert, aiming to discover whether pistachios would be better suited to Vitellius' Alba or Pompeius' Tarragona. Lucius' brother, Aulus Vitellius, earned praise from Suetonius (*Vit.* 2) for his culinary interests and sophistication: he was 'supremely elegant and celebrated for the distinction of his dinners'. The emperor's brother, Lucius, hosted an enormous arrival banquet (*cena adventicia*) to celebrate his brother's arrival at Rome as emperor in 69 CE, serving two thousand of the choicest fish and seven thousand birds (*Vit.* 13). The Vitellii seem to have been gastronomic enthusiasts.

one dish, but doctors have now begun reacting to those, presumably by prescribing a simpler and more refined diet.

Our ancient sources, members of the senatorial and equestrian elites, were influenced by and exploited a new taste that emerged in response. Elite diners could now distinguish themselves by adopting a new style of dining that privileged simple, native, rustic, and low-cost fare and hearkened back to a (partly imagined) rustic Italian culinary simplicity.[46] For example, the Younger Pliny's offer (*Ep.* 1.15) of a meal of olives, vegetables, snail, eggs, and barley-drink with honey-wine and snow is a faux-humble boast of his elite tastes. Contemporary readers who also adopted this new style may have regarded Vitellius as a man whose eating habits, perhaps the result of his family's only recent accession to elite rank, were vulgar and out of date.[47]

A similar shift in culinary taste would happen centuries later and continues to influence some scholars today. Late medieval banquets featured trompe l'oeil presentations, numerous courses, and a wide array of animals. In the mid-seventeenth century, these gave way to simpler and more refined meals, which highlighted the fineness and flavour of individual ingredients that were balanced across the fewer successive courses of the meal; around the same time, fewer types of animals began to be eaten, with exotic animals (such as peacocks) now regarded as specimens of scientific interest rather than culinary options.[48]

Offal, which was routinely consumed by Romans and indeed even regarded as luxurious, predominates among the ingredients on the Shield of Minerva. But over the twentieth century, offal has become unappealing in taste and appearance to many European and north American consumers, who have increasingly become accustomed and acculturated to purchasing bland and unidentifiable cuts of muscle prepared and packaged for easy cooking. Moreover, while Roman

[46] On Roman taste and its changes over time, see especially C. Feldman, 'Roman Taste', *Food, Culture & Society* 8 (2005), 13–18, and C. Feldman and P. Jones, 'Simplicity and Performance in Roman Agrarian Foods', in H. Meiselman (ed.), *Handbook of Eating and Drinking. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cham, 2020), 93–109.

[47] At *Vit.* 1–2, Suetonius professes neutrality on the contested longevity of the family's elite status. On Suetonius and the family origins of Vitellius, see P. Garrett, '*Sit in medio*: Family and Status in Suetonius' *Vitellius*', *Acta Classica* 61 (2018), 53–68.

[48] On this shift, see for example K. Albala, *The Banquet. Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (Urbana, IL, 2007), viii–ix, and A. Guerrini, 'A Natural History of the Kitchen', *Osiris* 35 (2020), 20–41.

meals, including the Shield, drew from a wide variety of meats and fishes, many modern consumers have more limited tastes: chicken, beef, and pork dominate, with consumption of fish remaining steady, though restricted to fewer species, and consumption of birds other than chicken in decline.[49] The dining preferences that emerged in seventeenth-century Europe are still followed by many in Europe and North America, and these have inclined modern readers towards revulsion at the Shield's wide variety of offal. Most scholars of the ancient Mediterranean (still) number among such consumers, with their restricted tastes.[50]

Suetonius comments that it was because of the vessel's enormous size that Vitellius was wont to refer to it as his Shield of Minerva. The Elder Pliny (*HN* 35.163) supplies further information:

At, Hercules, Vitellius in principatu suo |X| HS condidit patinam, cui faciendae fornax in campis exaedificata erat, quoniam eo pervenit luxuria, ut etiam fictilia pluris constent quam murrina.

But dear God, Vitellius, during his reign, had a *patina* made that cost 1,000,000 sesterces, and in order to make it an oven had been constructed in an open space, since luxury has reached such a point that even something made of clay can cost more than myrrhine.

Pliny has been expounding on his preference for pottery because it is natural and modest, not luxurious. Having noted that Apicius made a dish that cost 100,000 sesterces, he moves to Vitellius who spent 100 times more.[51] Clay is an inexpensive material, though, as Pliny notes, the *patina* that Vitellius had planned was so large that an oven had to be constructed specifically for it. Pliny may be referring here to the oven in which the vessel was fired. Regular ovens for firing clay are recorded with a diameter up to 1.8 m, which gives us a

[49] For a recent review of trends in meat and fish consumption in the United States, for example, see C. Daniel, A. Cross, C. Koebnick, and R. Sinha, 'Trends in Meat Consumption in the USA', *Public Health Nutrition* 14 (2011), 575–83, and G. Shamshak, J. Anderson, F. Asche, T. Garlock, and D. Love, 'US Seafood Consumption', *Journal of the World Aquaculture Society* 50 (2019), 715–27. J. Strong, 'The Modern Offal Eaters', *Gastronomica* 6 (2006), 30–9, surveys the decline of offal.

[50] Albala (n. 48), viii–ix, observes that scholars have tended to take a positivist approach to culinary history, allowing their own tastes (informed by later culinary trends) to inform their evaluations of earlier cuisines.

[51] On the suggestive, rather than precise, nature of large numbers, see W. Scheidel, 'Finances, Figures, and Fiction', *CQ* 46 (1996), 222–38.

minimum diameter for the vessel.[52] Alternatively, Pliny is referring to the source of heat on which the vessel's contents were cooked.

Both Pliny and Suetonius specify the vessel as a *patina*, i.e. a 'flat cooking dish with a raised rim', for which the lower part of a tagine is a useful modern analogue.[53] A *patina* could be sizable: *Apicius* 8.6.11 uses one for cooking a kid.[54] In 1999, in the Moroccan city of Safi, a tagine with a diameter of 6.3 m was made for a feast of 12 tonnes of sardines; a fire underneath cooked the meal.[55] The tagine was prepared outdoors; Pliny specifies that Vitellius' oven was also constructed in an open space. The Safi tagine is in the *Guinness Book of World Records*; Vitellius' *patina* could similarly have been recognized as a technical tour de force.

Vitellius seems to have been guided in his choice of material for the serving vessel by the technical limitations of its size. Though Pliny specifies clay, according to Dio (65.3.3), 'since it was impossible for such a large vessel to be made from clay, it was made from silver and was kept for a long time as some sort of offering, until Hadrian learned of it and had it melted down'. Fabrication of two vessels, one ceramic (to which Pliny refers), the other silver, reveals the emperor as technically minded: he may have realized that an enormous vessel made of clay, a relatively poor conductor of heat, did not serve well as a cooking dish (Dio exaggerates that manufacture from clay was impossible); silver, however, is a great conductor, better than even copper. The second, silver vessel would have performed excellently, though its cost would have been enormous.[56]

The size of the vessel was a source of reproach. Pliny tells us that it was the impetus for a witticism by Licinius Mucianus (*HN* 35.164): 'It was because of this *patina* that Mucianus, in his second consulship,

[52] E. Murphy and J. Poblome, 'From Formal to Technical Styles: Production Challenges and Economic Implications of Changing Tableware Styles in Roman to Late Antique Sagalassos', *AJA* 121 (2017), 80.

[53] Dalby (n. 15), 102, s.v. cooking utensils.

[54] A. Donnelly, 'Cooking Pots in Ancient and Late Antique Cookbooks', in M. Spataro and A. Villing (eds.), *Ceramics, Cuisine, and Culture* (Oxford, 2015), 143.

[55] J. Dardar, 'The World's Biggest Tagine and Other Unusual World Records', *Morocco World News* (online newspaper) (Rabat, Morocco, 25 October 2020) <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2020/10/323626/the-worlds-biggest-tagine-and-other-unusual-world-records/>, accessed 18 November 2022.

[56] Bronze *patinae*, which would have outperformed clay, are attested in *Apicius* 4.2.15 and 16. While cost prevents its widespread use in the kitchen today, silver cookware is available. According to Pliny (*HN* 33.145), oversized silverware became fashionable over the first century; I owe the reference to K. Vössing, *Mensa regia. Das Bankett beim hellenistischen König und beim römischen Kaiser* (Munich and Leipzig, 2004), 366, n. 1.

when he was delivering a lament, reproached the late Vitellius for his "pond-like *patinae*" (*patinarum paludes*)'.[57] Mucianus, orating in favour of the new Flavian regime, mocked Vitellius for his outsized tableware. But *patina* can refer to both the vessel and the food served on it, an equivocality that Mucianus may be exploiting in order to mock the emperor secondarily for serving the kinds of creatures found in a swamp.[58] Though Suetonius, Dio, and Pliny mention only one outsized vessel, Mucianus uses the plural, suggesting that Vitellius had a penchant for large tableware.[59]

According to Suetonius, Vitellius declared the vessel his Shield of Minerva. The declaration was apt: *patinae* resemble the rounded shields of Minerva that are well attested on coins of the first and second centuries CE.[60] Moreover, with its unusual size, Vitellius may have had in mind one or both of the enormous statues of Athena: the Athena Promachos and the Athena Parthenos.[61] Images of the Athena Promachos, which perhaps measured 7–10 m, on later coins suggest the presence of a large circular shield resting against the goddess' legs.[62] If Pliny is right that the Athena Parthenos was 26 cubits

[57] On Mucianus, who was a frequent source for Pliny, see B. Baldwin, 'Pliny the Elder and Mucianus', *Emerita* 63 (1995), 291–301, and R. Ash, 'The Wonderful World of Mucianus', *BICS Supplement* 100 (2007), 1–17. A close ally of Vespasian (Tac. *Hist*. 2.74–7), Mucianus made impactful military and political contributions to the Flavian cause; on his role in 69 CE, see especially J. Nicols, *Vespasian and the Partes Flavianae* (Wiesbaden, 1978), 71–4, 105–6, and 113–18.

[58] According to the *TLL* (s.v. *palus*^{2}, p. 179, ll. 38–40), *palus* could be used to stand for and connote the kinds of (unappealing) creatures (*animalium palustrium*) found in a swamp, such as ducks, coots, and toads.

[59] Mucianus' use of the plural may alternatively have been for rhetorical effect; it also allowed for the creation of two bacchiacs, a meter found most often in Plautus at moments of high drama and thus apt for a melodramatic and comedic dig. On bacchiacs, see the helpful summary in M. Deufert, 'Metrics and Music', in M. Fontaine and A. Scafuro (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy* (Oxford, 2014), 488–91.

[60] Grocock and Grainger (n. 3), 78, supply illustrations of *patinae*. No Vitellian coins depict Minerva or a representative Palladium, but there are numerous examples from other reigns; see especially C. Gmyrek, *Römische Kaiser und griechische Göttin. Die religiös-politische Funktion der Athena/Minerva in der Selbst-und Reichsdarstellung der römischen Kaiser* (Milan, 1998), 43–4. Those that date closest to 69 CE and depict the shield's shape most clearly include *RIC* II^2 1 195 (Vespasian) and *RIC* II^2 1 720 (Domitian); a coin of Galba, *RIC* I^2 247/307, shows a Palladium.

[61] Shotter (n. 4), 181. Pausanias (1.28.2) claims that the tip of Athena's spear and the crest of her helmet could be seen by those sailing from Sounion.

[62] See B. Lundgreen, 'A Methodological Enquiry: The Great Bronze Athena by Pheidias', *JHS* 117 (1997), 191, and C. Cullen Davison, B. Lundgreen, and G. Waywell, *Pheidias. The Sculptures & Ancient Sources* (London, 2009), vol. I, 277–96. The coins are BM 1922,0317.82; Kroll 280; BM 1902,1201.3. There are good images in H. Gehrke, 'From Athenian Identity to European Ethnicity: The Cultural Biography of the Myth of Marathon', in T. Derks and N. Roymans (eds.), *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity. The Role of Power and Tradition* (Amsterdam, 2009), 93.

(or nearly 12 m) in height, then her shield may have had a diameter of 5 m.[63]

Invoking her status as goddess of defensive warfare, Vitellius applies to Minerva-Athena the widely attested epithet πολιοῦχος – city-defender.[64] The emperor may have conceived of himself similarly, as the victor in a civil war that saw him defeat Otho and restore the imperial throne to stability.[65] But Minerva may have added significance: as Athena Ergane, she is also a goddess of crafts, specifically of technology, including pottery.[66] So, for example, a hymn attributed to Homer has potters pray to Athena for her protection against technical mishaps, such as fallen stacks of pots within a kiln, excessive heat, and cracks in a kiln.[67] Vitellius' astute guests may have picked up a verbal play identified by Shotter, between πολιοῦχος (city-defender) and πολύχοος (big-pourer, capacious), that would also have drawn their attention to the technical skills required to create his enormous *patina*.[68] They may also have appreciated the nice example of religious

[63] Plin. *HN* 36.18. On the shield, see Cullen Davison, Lundgreen, and Waywell (n. 62), vol. I, 94–110, and vol. III, 1,291–3, figs. 6.38–40.

[64] Hdt. 1.160.8, Pl. *Leg*. 921c2, Aristid. *Or*. 37.13, Paus. 3.17.1, and Alciphron *Rhet*. 3.15.3–4. The collocation Παλλὰς πολιοῦχος is attested at Ar. *Eq*. 581 and Pind. *Ol*. 5.10.

[65] See Z. Yavetz, 'Vitellius and the "Fickleness of the Mob"', *Historia* 18 (1969), 564–6, on Vitellius' efforts to promote an image of convention and stability and on his support for Nero, to whom he may have wanted to appear a successor (though Nicols [n. 57], 165, is not convinced). On connections between Vitellius and Nero, see further R. Carré, 'Vitellius et les dieux', in E. Smadja and E. Geny (eds.), *Pouvoir, divination et prédestination dans le monde antique* (Besançon 1999), 43–79, and E. Cizek, 'Le "populisme" de Vitellius et le philhellénisme', in Yves Perrin (ed.), *Neronia 7. Rome, l'Italie et la Grèce: hellénisme et philhellénisme au premier siècle ap. J.-C.* (Brussels, 2007), 82–93.

[66] Minerva is attested in this role on a votive altar of 31 BCE (Capitoline Museums A 2823–26): set up by artisans, it depicts on its four sides a Palladian aegis, a statue of Minerva, artisanal tools such as saws and plumb bobs, and a round concave shield. Minerva-Athena's other activities include shipbuilding (e.g. Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 1.18–19, 519–59, 723–4; 2.1187–9) and the development of the plough (Hes. *Op*. 429–31), both of which are further examples of her wide-ranging practical intelligence, for which she is known as πολύμητις ('inventive') (e.g. *Hom. Hymn Ath* (28) 2). Ov. *Fast*. 3.809–48 echoes these themes, on which see further M. Detienne and A. Werth, 'Athena and the Mastery of the Horse', *History of Religions* 11 (1971), 164.

[67] The hymn, which was probably composed in the fifth century BCE, is transmitted in a biography of Homer that was attributed to Herodotus. A text is available is West-Merkelbach's *Fragmenta hesiodea*, no. 302; a translation and notes are in M. Milne, 'Appendix III: The Poem Entitled "Kiln"', in J. Veach Noble (ed.), *The Techniques of Painted Attic Pottery* (New York, 1965), 102–13. There is a recent discussion of (and bibliography on) textual issues in C. Faraone, 'A Collection of Curses against Kilns (*Homeric Epigram* 13.7–23)', in A. Yarbro Collins and M. Mitchell (eds.), *Antiquity and Humanity. Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy* (Tübingen, 2001), 435–49.

[68] Shotter (n. 4), 181, whose attractive suggestion is supported by textual uncertainty in our manuscripts: πολιούχου is the reading of one of the two *edd pr.* of 1470, while the other prints πολιχοιου; the archetype manuscript ω has ΤΟΝΔΥΧΟΥ (according to Kaster's *OCT*).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383522000213 Published online by Cambridge University Press

polysemy that brings together two of Minerva-Athena's aspects, as goddess of both war and craft.[69]

The *patina* came to define the emperor. Suetonius claims (*Vit.* 17.2) that, as Vitellius was dragged to his death, members of a hostile crowd mocked him as *patinarius* ('*patina*-man').[70] Modern translations of *patinarius* ('glutton', 'greedy guts', 'fatty') have been influenced by Suetonius and others' depiction of Vitellius as a man of enormous and indiscriminate appetite and by their hostile reports of his Shield.[71] Yet the Shield of Minerva – the serving vessel and foods

[69] Further connections between Vitellius and Minerva are elusive. If Murison (n. 37), 181, is correct in dating Vitellius' arrival at Rome to sometime from the end of June, a connection to the festival of the *Quinquatrus*, held in honour of Minerva and marked by feasting, is unlikely: it was celebrated in March (Ov. *Fast.* 6.649–710), while an associated event, the *Quinquatrus minusculae* or *minores*, was held on 13 June (see P. López Barja de Quiroga, 'The *Quinquatrus* of June, Marsyas and Libertas in the Late Roman Republic', *CQ* 68 [2018], 143–59). Vitellius' banquet may have been connected to the *Epulum Minervae*, a feast held on 13 September at which members of the Capitoline triad were present in statue form (on which see *CIL* 1^2 1, pp. 328–9, and Val. Max. 2.1.2); but our sources make no comment. They make no mention either of a connection to Minerva Augusta, an epithet attested in the Julio-Claudian period for her as an imperial tutelary deity; see J. Girard, 'La place de Minerve dans la religion romaine au temps du principat', in *ANRW* II.17.1 (1981), 217. According to Carré (n. 65), 74, Vitellius' reference to a shield of Minerva may be a nod to Herodotus' account of Pisistratus' return to Athens, accompanied by Athena; it may also be an appeal to his Batavian auxiliaries, who were crucial at Bedriacum and who worshipped Belisama, a Gaulish deity syncretized with Minerva (pp. 76–9). More generally, as Girard (n. 69), 212–14, observes, Minerva was worshipped – sometimes syncretized with a local deity – in Roman Spain, Gaul, and Britain, among soldiers and civilians; while there is nothing to rule out these connections, there is no strong support for them either. Two coins featuring the bust of a helmeted Minerva, *RIC* 1^2 37 (*BMC* 1 37) and *RIC* 1^2 38, have been dated to 68 and 69, but lack attribution to an emperor. The shield on the temple to Minerva at Aquae Sulis (Bath) has been identified by E. Cousins, 'An Imperial Image: The Bath Gorgon in Context', *Britannia* 47 (2016), 99–118, as a victory shield; it is roughly contemporary, according to T. Blagg, 'The Date of the Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath', *Britannia* 10 (1979), 101–7, but cannot be connected with certainty to Vitellius.

[70] He was also called *incendarius* ('fire-starter') because his men had overwhelmed a group of Flavian supporters by setting light to the Capitolium where they had taken shelter (Suet. *Vit.* 15.3). Tac. *Hist.* 3.72 is unsure whether the Vitellians or Flavians started the blaze.

[71] Kline, Rolfe, and Edwards have 'glutton'; Graves translates it 'greedy guts'; finally, Shotter offers 'fatty'. According to the *TLL*, *patinarius* describes *qui patinis deditus est (masc. pro subst. de Vitellio dicitur propter immodicam gulam infami; respici vid. etiam patina, quam fieri iussit)*, 'the person who is addicted to *patinae* (the masculine form as a substantive is used to describe Vitellius, who was notorious for his unrestrained appetite; see also "*patina*", which he ordered to be made)'. Coins minted under Vitellius and two statues securely identified as the emperor depict a man whose heavy-set appearance also helped fuel claims that he ate without restraint or discernment: of the 176 Vitellian types listed in *RIC* I^2, almost all depict Vitellius with a double chin and many show him with full cheeks and/or jowls; the statues, one in the Bardo Museum, Tunis (inv. 1784), and the other in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, offer a similar presentation. As M. Bradley, 'Obesity, Corpulence, and Emaciation in Roman Art', *PBSR* (2011), 1–41, has explored, visual representations of fat may have elicited a range of responses from ancient viewers, among them the perception of gluttony (p. 2), but also discernment of physical strength and concomitant military experience and skill (p. 30) and admiration of apparent 'affluence and authority' (p. 2). Suetonius and Dio's claims of Vitellius' gluttony may have been inspired or at

served upon it – was not a symbol of gluttonous self-indulgence; it was instead a political and intellectual exercise. It was also a gastronomic tour de force and serves as a salutary reminder to scholars to distance themselves from their own tastes when approaching those of other times and places.

SERENA CONNOLLY

Rutgers University, USA

serena@classics.rutgers.edu

least encouraged by visual representations of the emperor, though of course his physical condition may have had no connection to his eating habits. Modern translators seem to have followed their lead.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383522000213 Published online by Cambridge University Press