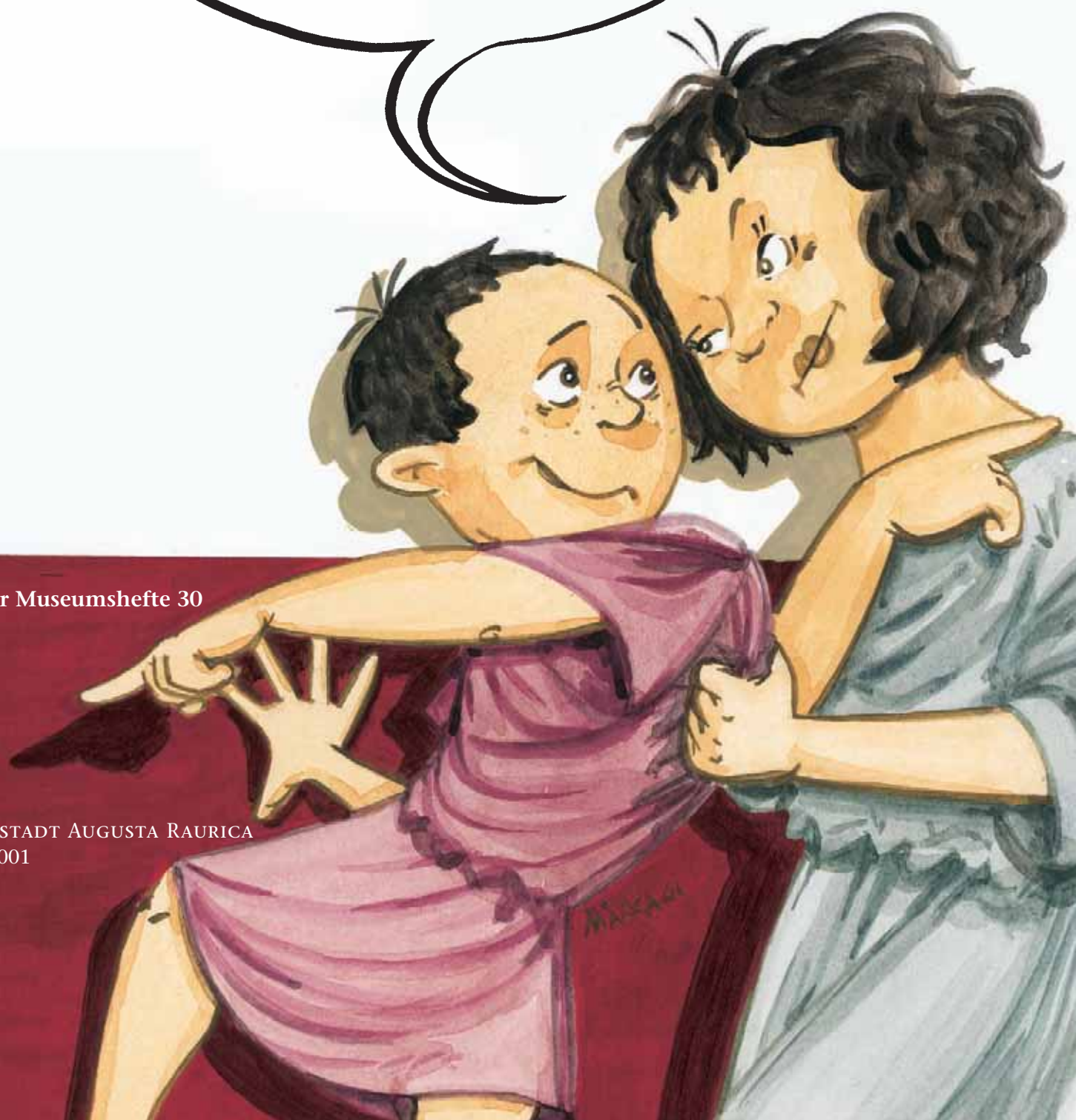


COME AND SEE
THE ROMAN HOUSE!



Augster Museumshefte 30



RÖMERSTADT AUGUSTA RAURICA
Augst 2001





Welcome to the DOMUS ROMANA, the Roman House

Prittusa: Hello! I'm called Prittusa.

Tetto: And I'm Tetto. We are brother and sister.

Prittusa: This is our house – or rather, we work for the family that owns the house.

Tetto: So you'd like to know what life is like here. Well, we've always got lots of work. The old servant woman, Septima, can't do as much as she used to. But actually we don't have a bad life. Our master and mistress treat us fairly. Only the daughter, Araurica, is always thinking of new tasks for us to do and hasn't much patience with us. The elder son, Albanus, is seldom at home. After school he is always off somewhere with his friends – either he goes to the baths or to the amphitheatre, when there are gladiator contests on the programme. And then there is Quintus, who's just a baby and cries a lot.

Prittusa: Our master is an important man in the town. He sits on the town council and hopes to become mayor one day. He makes himself popular in the town by financing lots of theatre productions. His wife organises grand dinners for his colleagues and business associates, and hires a professional cook specially for the occasion.

Tetto: But come with us! We'll show you the house.







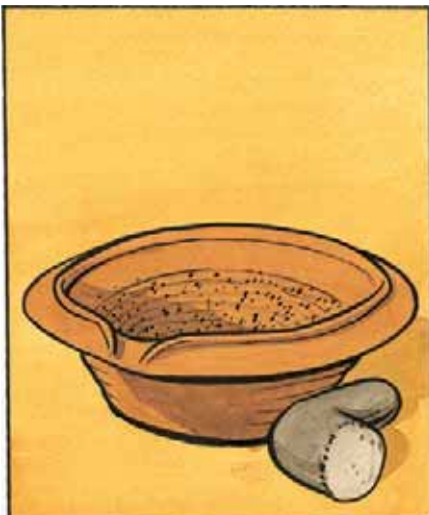
CVLINA – kitchen

You should see what it's like here when the master brings his business colleagues home for dinner. We have so little space – it gets really chaotic! The cook will be shouting for fish sauce, and then honey and pepper for some dish or other. Septima comes back from the baker with pastries. Tetto runs in with water from the local well and spills half of it on the floor – he's in a terrible hurry because he needs a pee!

So that the guests can eat nicely with their fingers, everything is cut into small pieces. We're at it all day long; there are always so many dishes! It gets hot when both cooking hearths are lit. Then I'm glad if I don't have to grind any flour – it's very hard work, you know! What I like best is crushing spices with the mortar and pestle, or fresh herbs which I fetch from the garden. They smell really wonderful! But by the time all the dishes are ready it will be terribly smoky in here. Afterwards, upstairs in bed, I sometimes feel like a piece of ham in the smokehouse!

Have a seat on the toilet. Would you mind having a pee in full view of everyone?

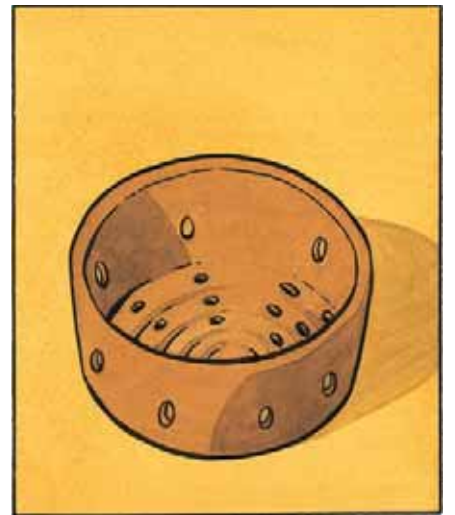




Mortar and pestle



Mill



Cheese mould

OECVS – formal dining room



It's a lovely room, isn't it? I really like the little dancing women on the walls. When the master brings his business colleagues to dinner in the summer, the room is lit by oil lamps and all the doors are decorated with garlands. Only the men lie on the dining sofas. The mistress sits in the chair – she says it's more respectable and more comfortable!

The mistress is very proud of her crockery. She displays the finest pieces in the cabinet, so that the guests can admire them. During the meal there are only small bowls with sauces on the table, and of course also spoons, plates and beakers for everyone. We put the plates and bowls of food on the bench until it's time for us to hand them round.

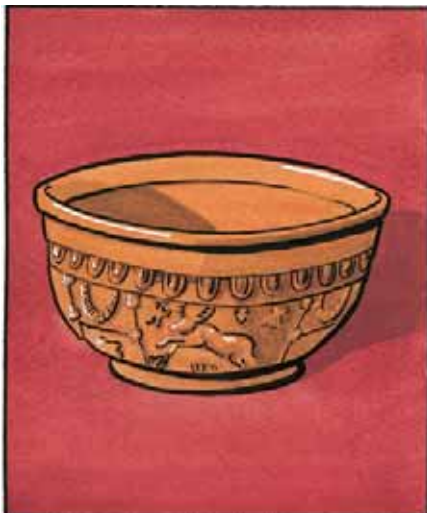
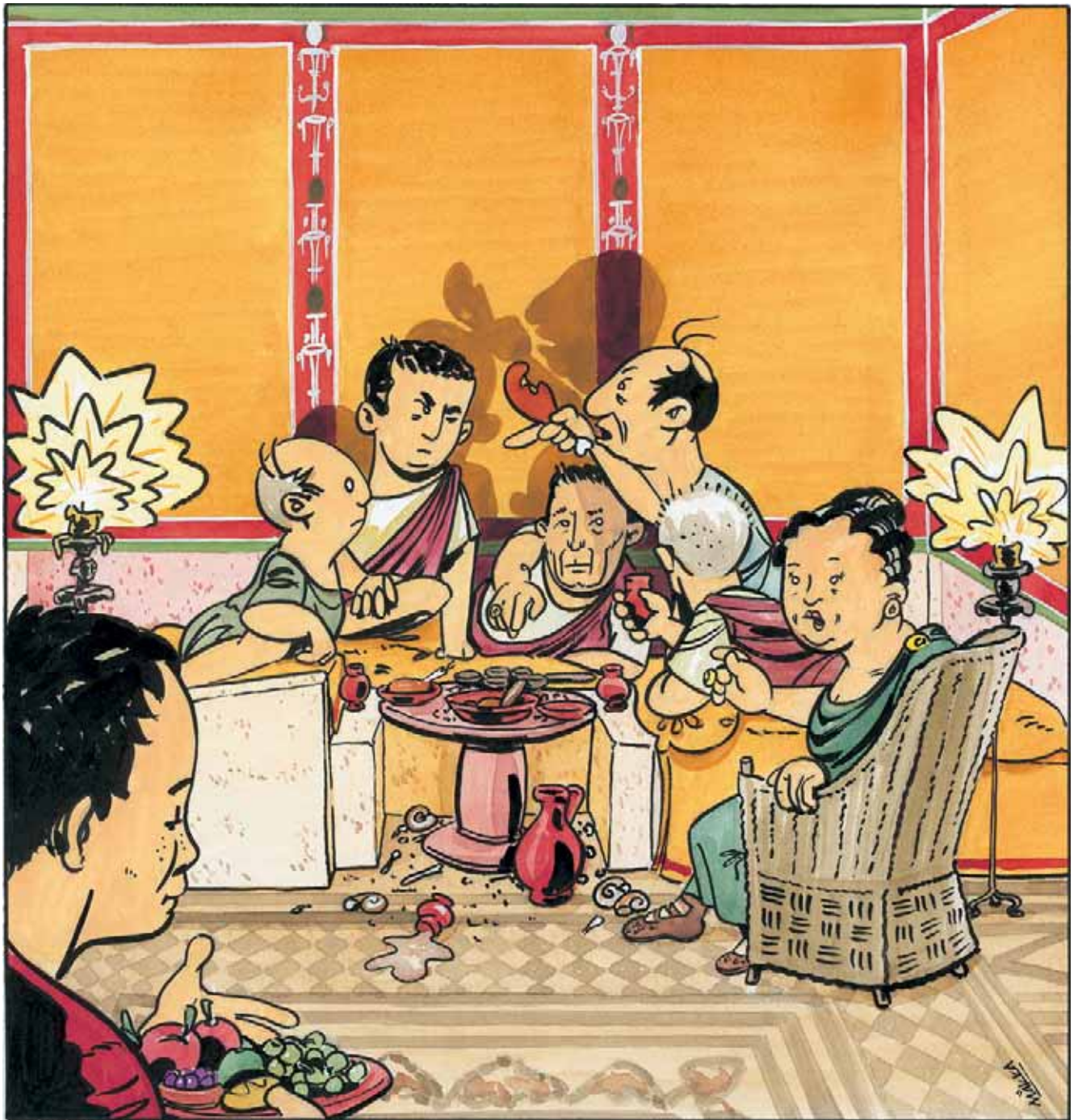
We are also constantly handing round the jugs and bowls for washing – eating with your fingers makes you pretty sticky. The floor gets messy too – when they've gnawed their chicken legs and slurped their oysters, the guests just drop the bones and shells on the floor.

There's always some entertainment arranged for between courses and after the meal – there are board games and dice ready and sometimes music, dancing girls or even acrobats are laid on. I take my time clearing the table on purpose, so that I can watch at least for a few moments.

Take your shoes off and lie down on the dining sofa. Could you eat comfortably lying down?

Try the board games! You will find the rules on the last page.

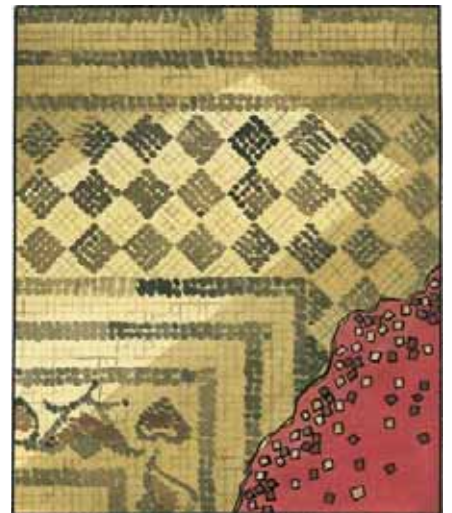




Bowl made of Samian ware



Samovar, used to keep drinks warm



Mosaic



BALNEVM – bath

In the afternoon, the family often bathes. Sometimes guests come too. In that case, the women bathe first, by themselves.

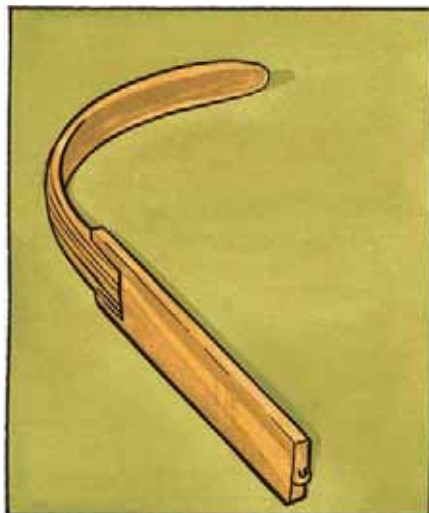
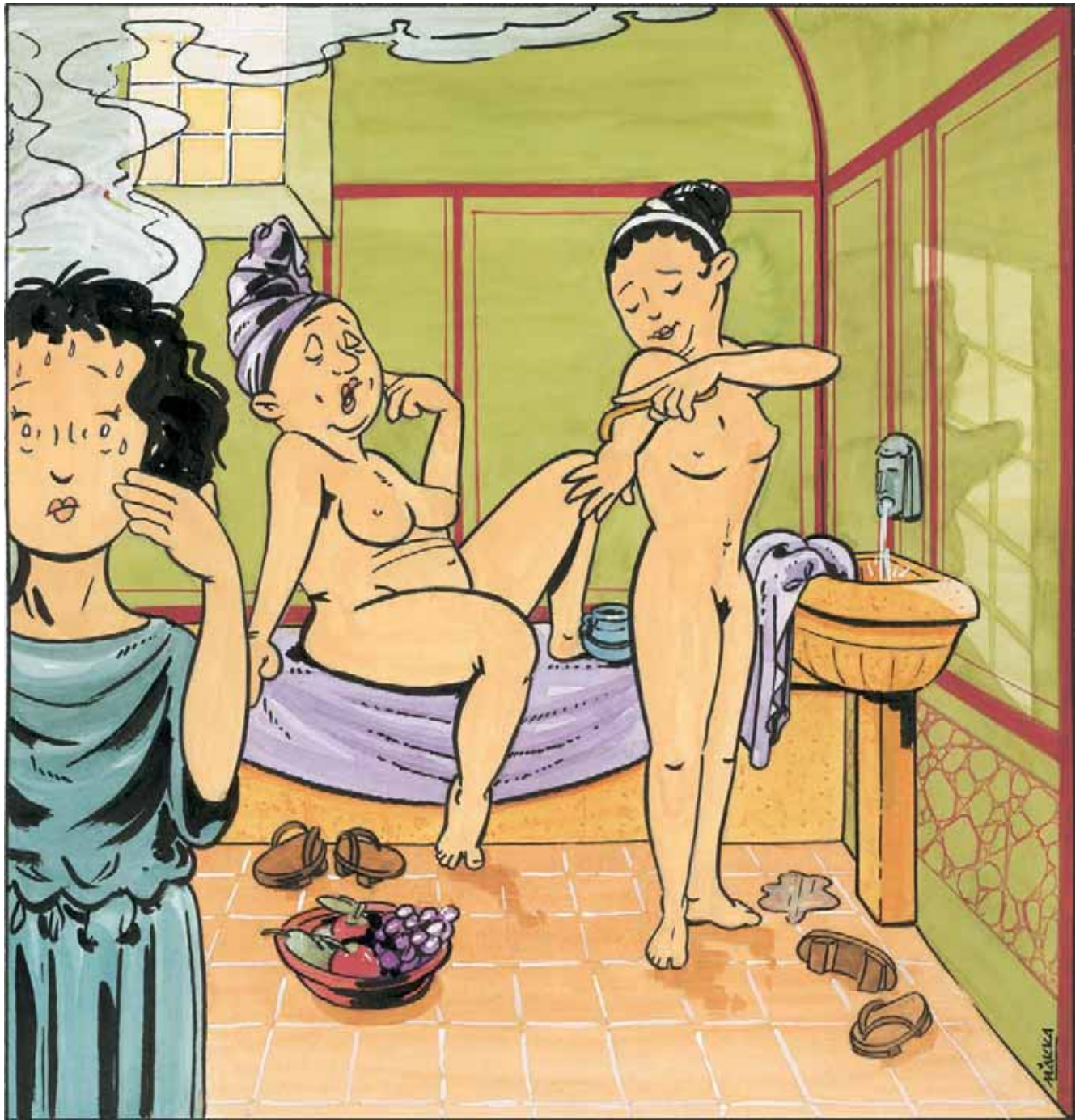
What's relaxation for them means a lot of work for us. Tetto has to keep the fire for the underfloor heating going the whole day. In the APODYTERIVM, the changing room, I decorate the goddess Venus with flowers. Then I help people to undress; I fold their clothes and lay them on the shelf.

In the TEPIDARIVM, the warm bath, people play board games and chat. I hand round nibbles to eat and enjoy listening to the gossip! Then everyone rubs oil on their skin and goes to the CALDARIVM, the hot bath. There they sit quietly for a while in the tub. What a lot of steam there is in there! The floor is so hot that you have to put on wooden sandals. Then, back in the warm bath, I help to remove oil, sweat and dirt with the body scraper. Usually there's someone who would like a massage as well. To freshen up – *brr* – everyone finally takes a dip in the cold water tub in the FRIGIDARIVM, the cold bath. Do you see the dolphins and swordfish on the ceiling? I wonder if real ones in the sea feel cold too.

Finally I help everyone to get dressed, do their hair and put on their make-up. Instead of clearing up, what I'd really like to do then is have a bath myself!

Try on the clothes! Can you manage to walk in the wooden sandals?

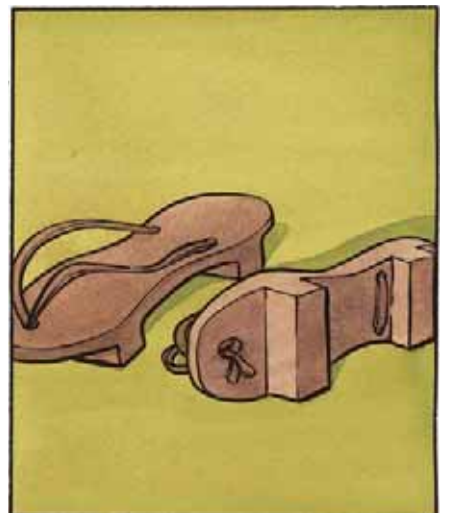




Body scraper



*Underfloor heating system
(hypocaust)*



Wooden sandals

CVBICVLVM DIVRNVM – living room



In the morning the mistress checks that the household is running smoothly. Then she retires here and weaves clothes for the family. If we're lucky, Tetto and I get their cast-offs.

Just now, the mistress is teaching her daughter Araurica to spin. She says that every respectable woman should know how to spin. She even wants to have her spindle with her in her grave after she dies. Araurica isn't very good yet, though, and doesn't enjoy spinning either. What she likes best is playing with her brother Quintus. He's still a baby. During the day he has his nap over there in the cradle.

In the afternoon the mistress rests for a while on the bed and gives Araurica some writing practice by dictating to her the menu for the next day. Sometimes she tells her exciting stories about the gods and heroes of Rome. Unfortunately, I usually only get to hear bits of the story. The god Jupiter seems to be constantly falling in love and makes his wife, Juno, quite mad with jealousy!

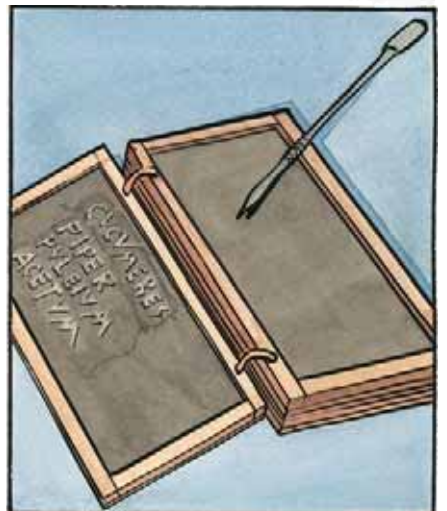




Spindle



Loom



Writing tablet and stylus

CUBICVLVM NOCTVRNVM – bedroom



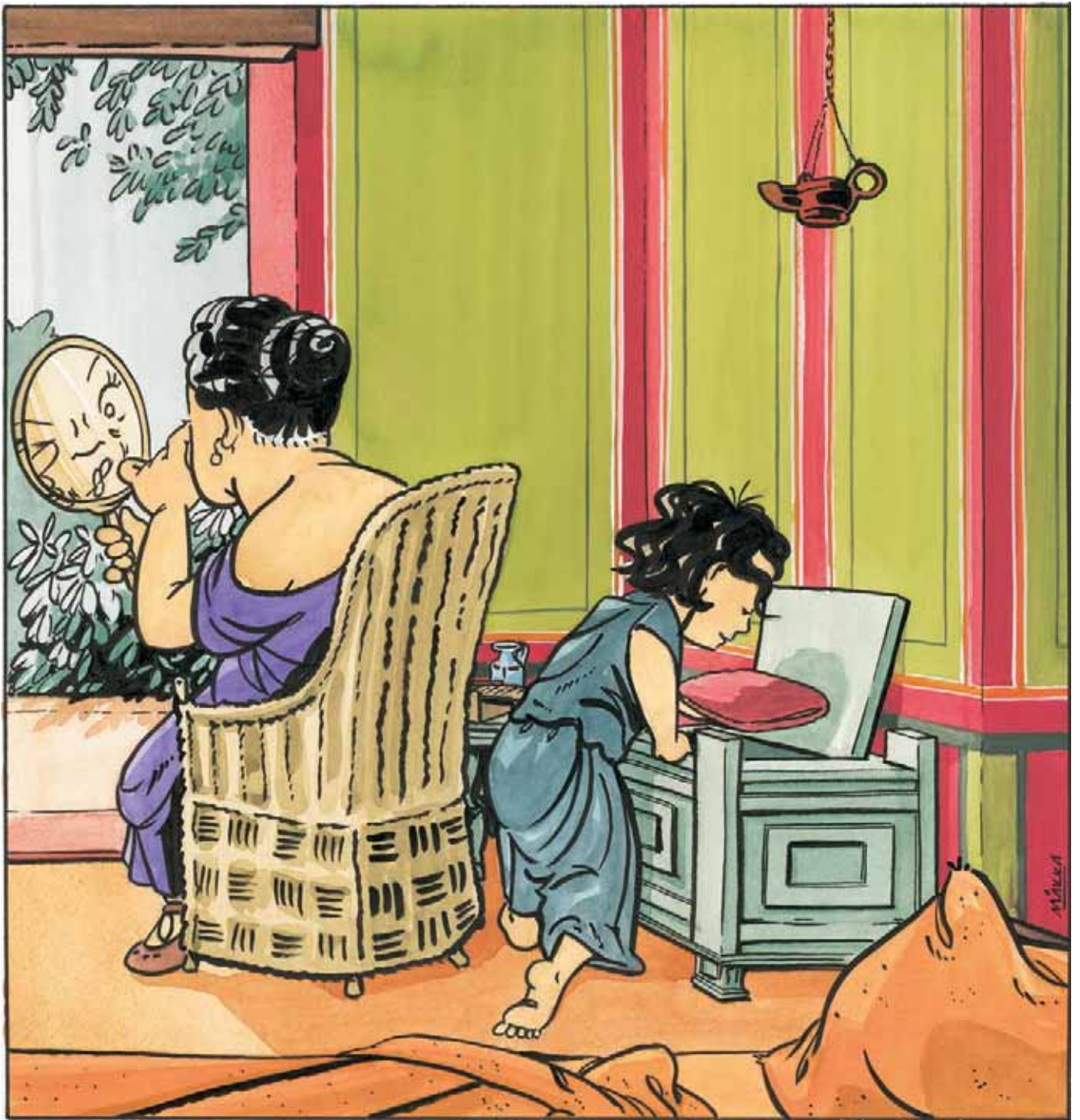
This is where our master and mistress sleep. The children's beds – like ours – are upstairs.

When they get up in the morning, the first thing the master and mistress ask for is a chamber pot. After she's dressed, I bring the mistress her make-up box and mirror. She takes a long time over her make-up, sitting at the small table. She cares about her appearance, you see, even though people are now saying that the white lead face powder could be poisonous. At the moment the fashion is for a very fancy hairstyle with lots of little plaits. Of course she needs my help for that. I'm already really good at getting the waves at the front.

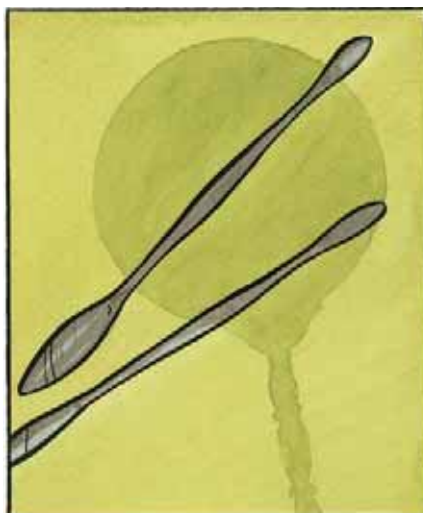
Clothes and bed linen are kept in the chest. It's an art in itself, folding up the master's huge toga so that it lies flat in the chest! It's best if two people do it.

In the summer, oil lamps like that one are hardly used, because people go to bed as soon as it gets dark and get up again when the sun rises. In any case, they don't give much light.

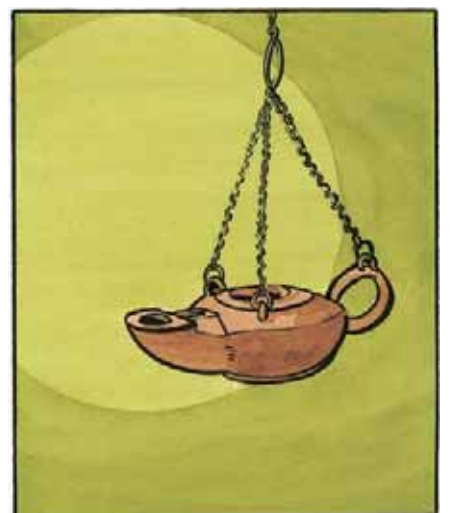




Lantern



Spatulas for preparing make-up



Oil lamp

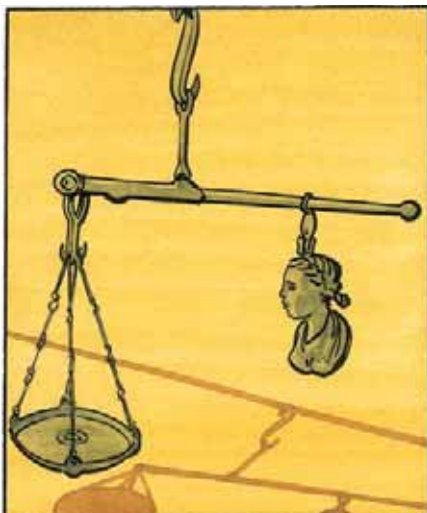
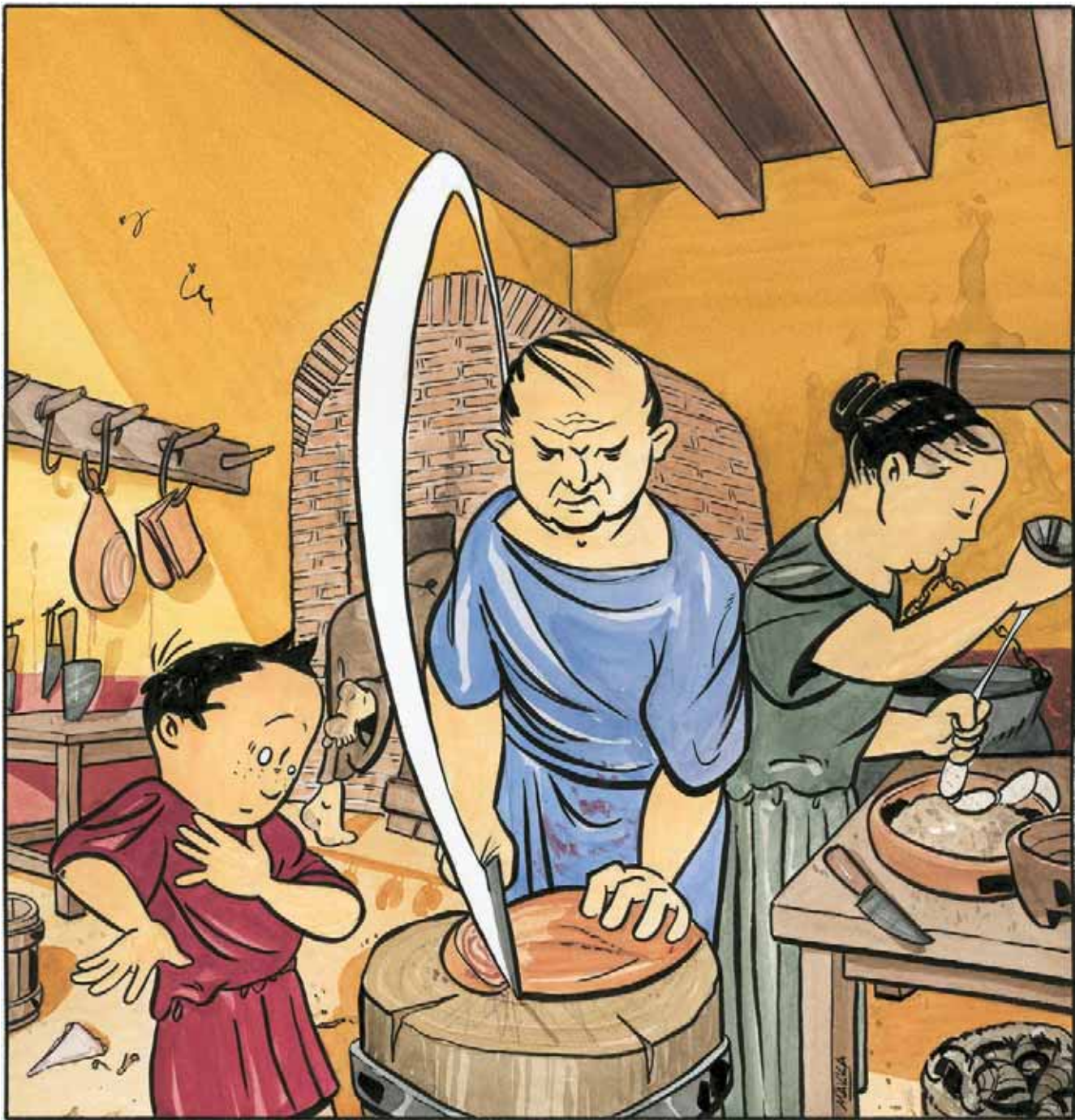


FABRICA – workshop (butcher's)

I'm often sent to the butcher to buy expensive pork or lamb if there are guests coming for dinner. I don't like going when they're slaughtering animals. It stinks of blood and there are flies everywhere. At the moment, though, the butcher's wife is busy making sausages and it smells a bit spicy. She's just stuffing clean intestines with sausage-meat. Then she will simmer them in the big cauldron. Her daughter is busy hanging up already-cooked sausages in the smoke-house. Luckily she's slim, so she can easily get through the doorway! Smoked meat and sausages are a well-known local speciality and are even sent as far away as Rome.

Do you see the basket with the bones on the floor there? They are sold on to various tradesmen. The bone carver makes spoons, combs and lots of other things from the larger bones. The glue maker takes the bones that can't be used for anything else. He smashes them and boils them to get the glue out. What a stink that makes!





Scales



Smokehouse



Meat cleaver

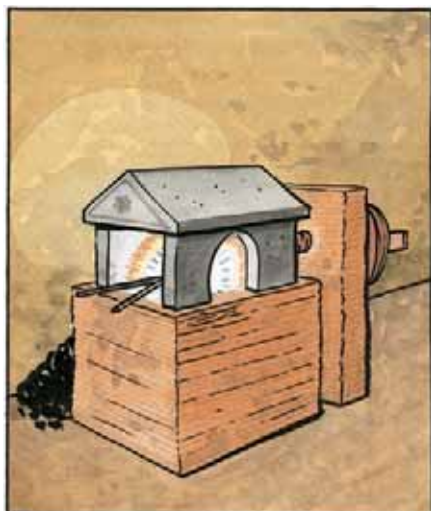
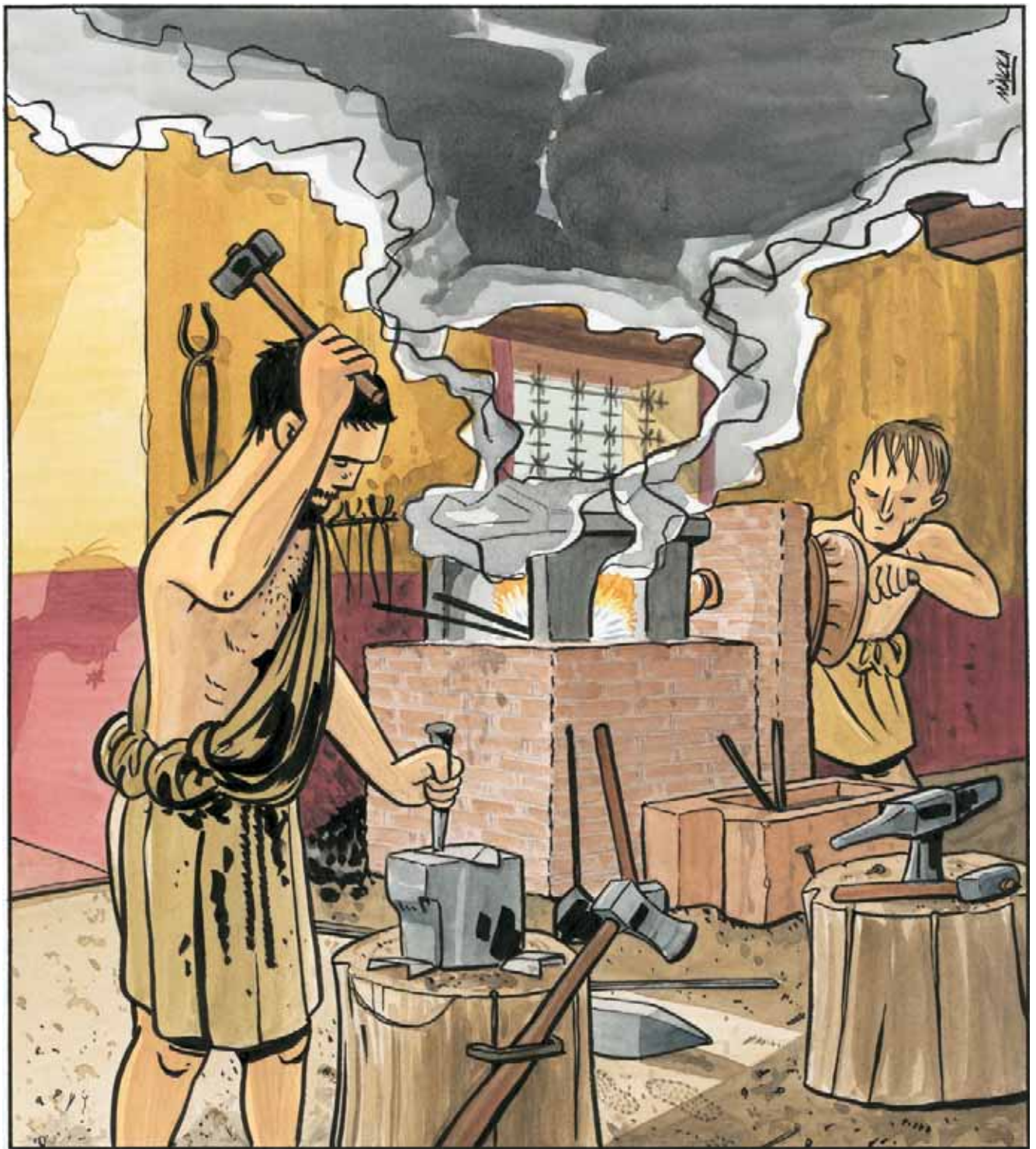
FABRICA – workshop (blacksmith's)



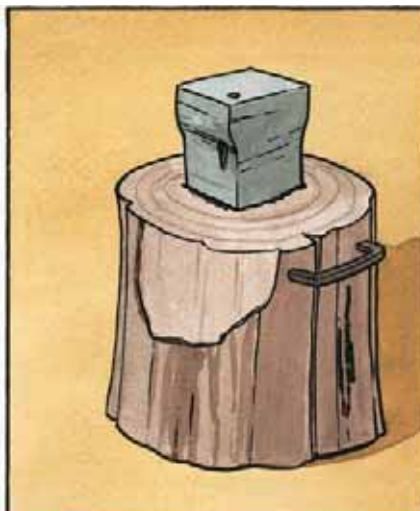
Ah – the smith is by himself just now. His slave must have gone to fetch a load of charcoal or iron bars for working. The smith's busy splitting a piece of metal with a hammer and chisel. He's making bells – almost all the pieces are already lying waiting to be put together.

Usually they are both here working away. Then the mysterious darkness of the workshop is almost uncanny ... – I really believe I can sense Vulcan, the god of fire, right here. The slave works the bellows at the forge, while his master checks on the iron he is heating. In the darkness he can easily observe the colour of the glowing metal, in order to gauge its temperature. Out of the fire, the iron cools quickly, so every second is precious. Once he has taken the metal from the fire with his tongs, he has only to turn round and he's at the anvil, ready to set to with his hammer. Bang, bang, bang he hammers at the iron, so long as the metal is still workable. Then he puts it back in the fire. Once he has finished forging a tool, he hardens it by plunging it in the water trough – *hiss!*

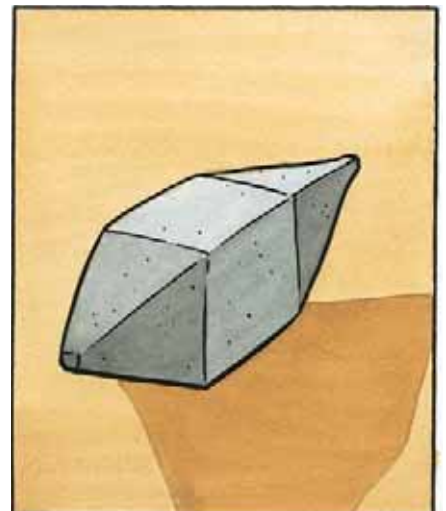




Forge



Anvil



Iron bar

FABRICA – workshop (bronze foundry)

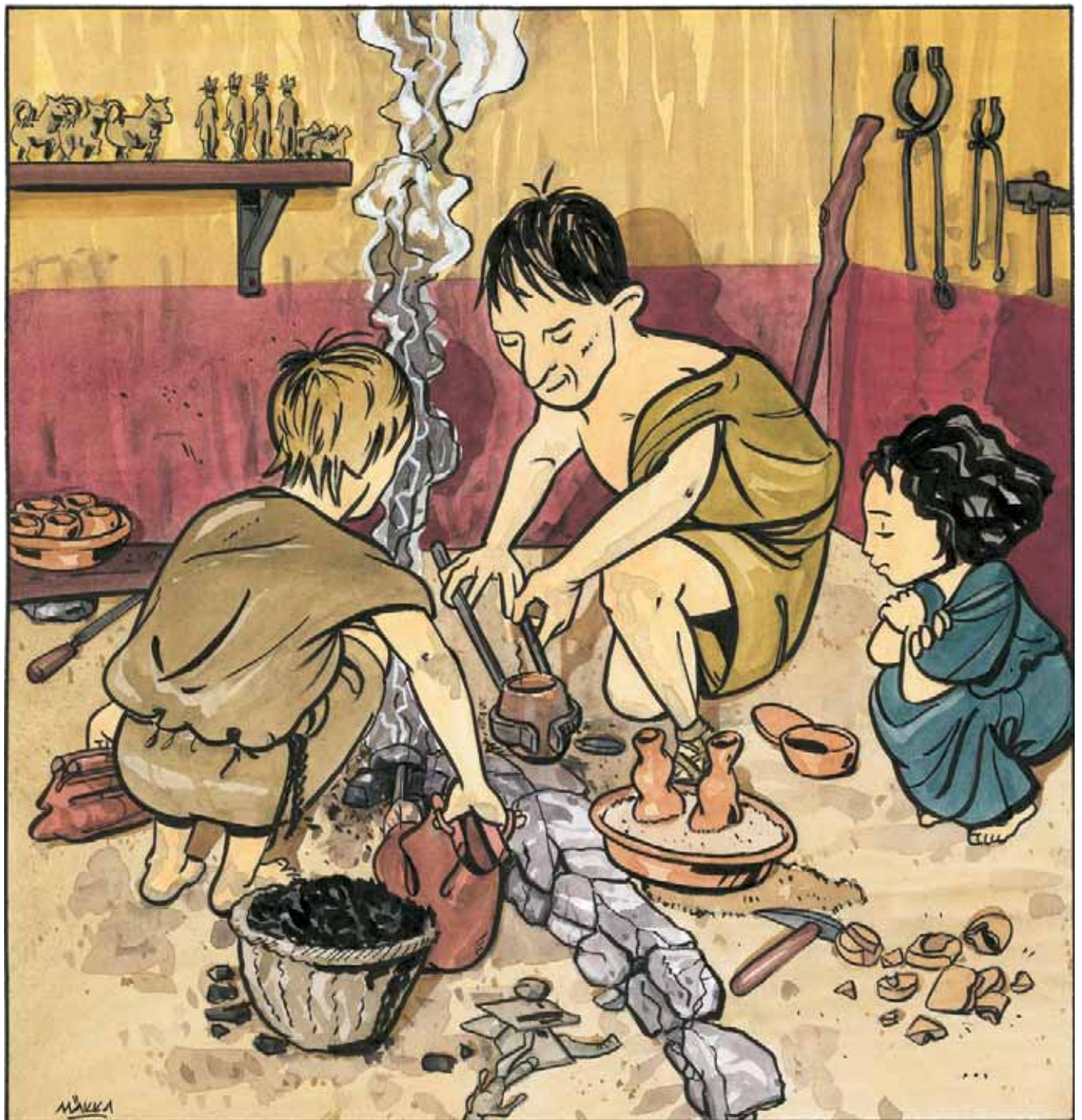


Isn't it amazing that the most beautiful statues of gods and pieces of jewellery come from this dirty little pit?

Look! The bronze caster is just taking the crucible full of bronze out of the smelting pit. He has put the little bowl deep down amongst the glowing charcoals, so that the bronze melts. The slave fans the coals with the bellows, so that they burn hotter and hotter. He has to keep at it without stopping for a moment. Only when the bronze is glowing brightly is it really liquid and ready to be poured into a mould. The moment of pouring is always spectacular. Do you see there? That's a clay mould standing ready in the sand. To make moulds like this, the bronze caster uses wax models, like the ones on the table.

After pouring, the piece must cool down for about an hour. Then there's a tense moment when the bronze caster knocks it from the mould – has the casting been successful? If not, all the work has been in vain. But at least the bronze can be recycled. If the piece is successful, the caster first files away the excess metal. Then he gives it its final finish by brushing and polishing until it shines like gold.

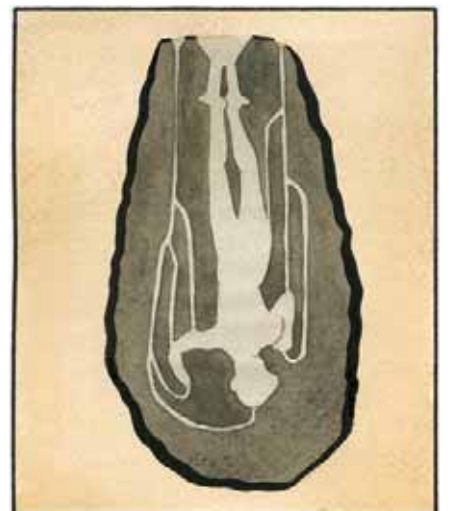




Crucible



Bellows



A clay mould, cut open to show the inside



CAVPONA – pub

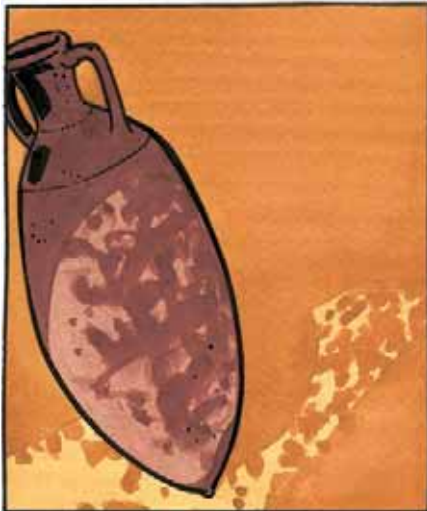
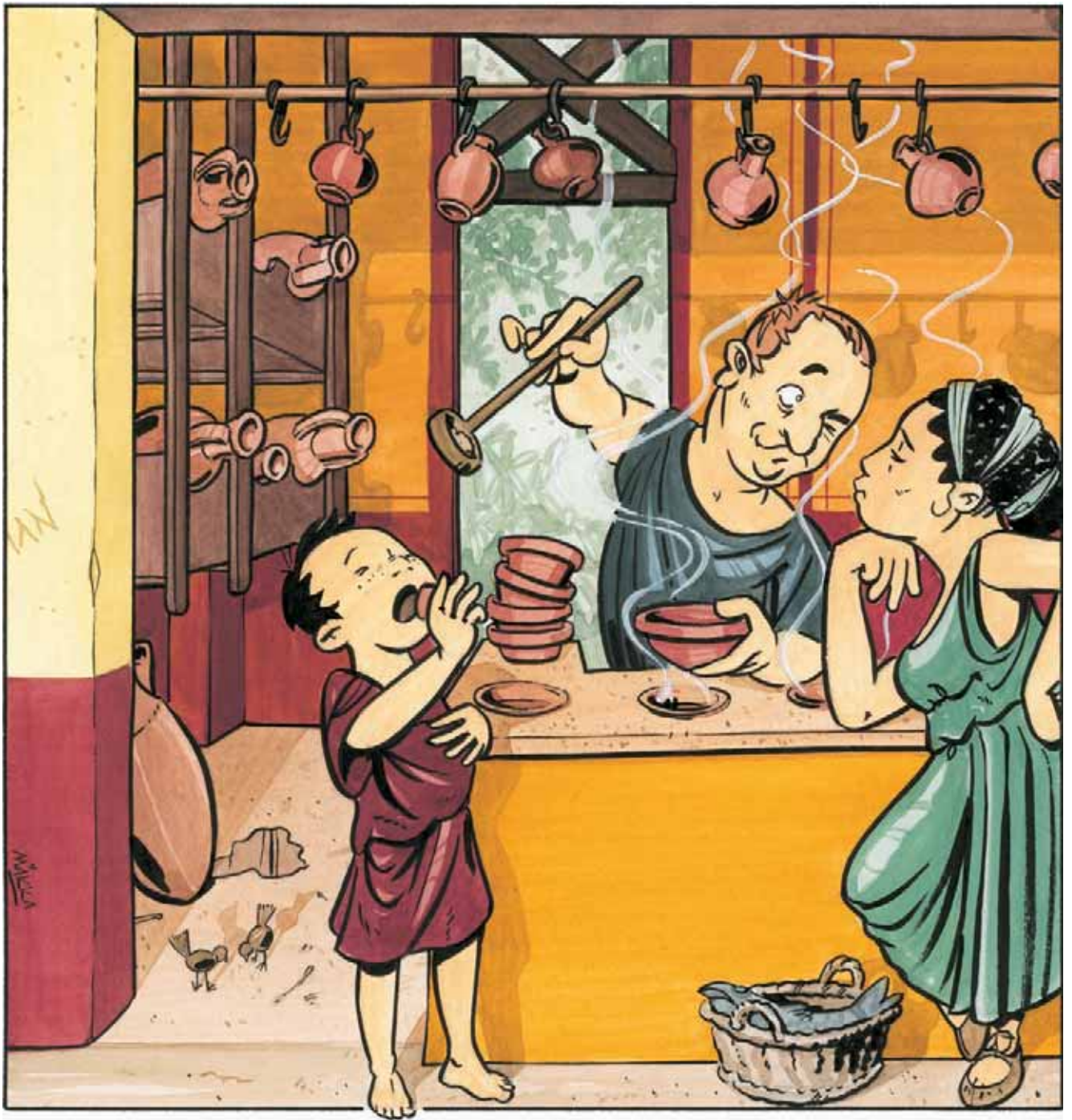
On the way home from the butcher I often have a quick glass of *posca* here. That's a mixture of vinegar and water which tastes really great.

What with theatre-goers and passers-by like me, the bartender does a roaring trade. As well as cheap wine from the region, he also has wines from Italy, France and Spain on offer. The wine amphorae are delivered regularly by the wine merchant in his ox cart. While he's at it he helps to lift the heavy containers into the wall rack. For serving, the wine is poured into jugs like those hanging over the counter. The bartender mixes the wines in the Roman fashion with water and spices, but lots of people also like to drink it undiluted – and soon get drunk! Our master is always complaining about the fellows who go staggering along the street, making a racket.

The barman also sells simple food over the counter – mostly porridge or vegetable stew. The food is kept warm in pots which are sunk into the counter. As well as passers-by, a lot of housewives and children come here to fetch supper for the family. You see, many people don't have their own cooking hearths in their rented apartments.

Try locking the door. A model on the wall shows how the wooden lock and key work.





Wine amphora

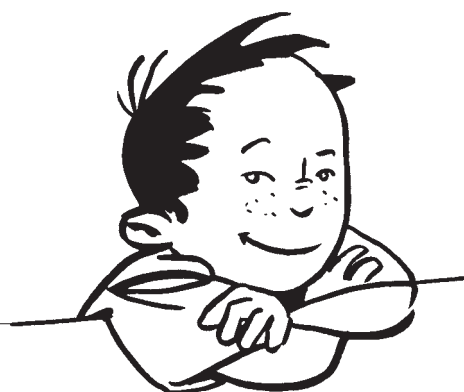


Wine sieve



Beaker

FAVCES et PERISTYLIVM – entrance hall and inner courtyard



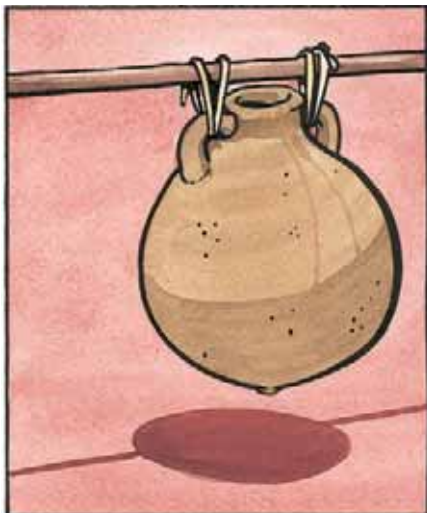
Our master is a merchant – like his father and grandfather before him. He does a specially good trade in fish sauce and olive oil from Spain. His father had the wall painting done in the entrance hall. The two men in the picture have slung the ampora of oil on a pole, so that they can manage to carry it. Empty, a container like that weighs as much as an 8 year old child, and full it weighs three times as much.

Whenever I go in or out of the house, I always greet the gods in the household shrine next to the kitchen. Every day the master offers them a portion from the meal, which he burns in the fire of the hearth. Do you recognise the figures? This one is Mercury, the god of trade and profit, with his winged hat. The master has a special relationship with him. The figure with the horn of plenty and the sacrificial bowl is the household god, Lar. And there's the goddess of love, Venus. Araurica always offers incense to her when she has romantic troubles.

The inner courtyard is the green oasis of the house. In the herb garden are plants which Septima uses for cooking or for medicines. There always seems to be someone walking around the colonnade, on their way to one or other of the rooms. Errand boys and business colleagues are constantly coming into the house to see the master, as well as people with requests to make. As a town counsellor, you see, he's much in demand.

But now we must get back to work. We hope you enjoy the rest of your visit to Augusta Raurica. Bye!





Oil amphora



Incense burner



Mercury

About life and games

The people in this book and the Roman House itself did not exist in Roman times. Thanks to the work of archaeologists and historians, though, we know quite a lot about life in those times. However, some things we will never know about the people of Augusta Raurica. For example, were servants like Tetto and Prittusa usually slaves? And what language did they speak?

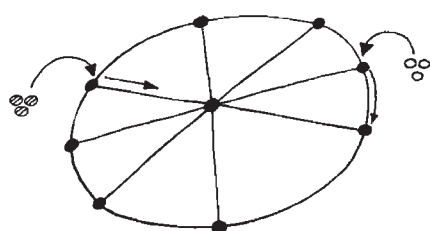
We know that the Romans enjoyed playing board games, but the rules are sometimes a mystery. From Roman texts we know roughly how “Millwheel” was played. The board for playing “Romulus and Remus” was found during excavations, but in this case we have had to make up the rules.

Millwheel

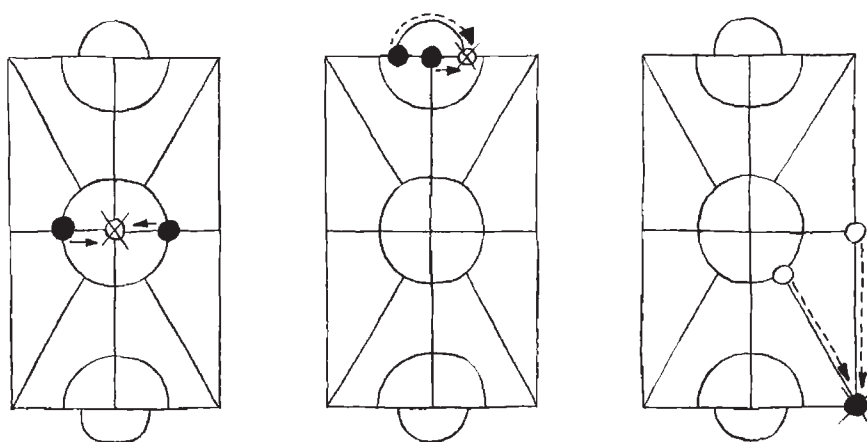
This game is for two players, each with 3 counters. Take turns to place your counters on the board and then to move them. The aim is to position your own counters in a row – but you must also occupy the centre of the board!

Romulus and Remus

This game is for two players, each with 6 counters. Take turns to place your counters on the board and then to move them. Place your counters on the points where two lines intersect. Move them from one intersection point to the next. Only one counter can occupy any one intersection point. A counter is knocked out when the two adjacent intersection points are occupied by opponent pieces, so that it cannot move. The winner is the player who knocks out all his opponent's pieces.



Millwheel



Romulus and Remus



Further reading

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J. McIntosh, Eyewitness: Archeology

(DK Publishing 2000) ISBN 0789458640

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(DK Publishing 1998) ISBN 0789434199

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