

Transcript

What was the Vinalia?

Dr Joanna Paul:

This was dedicated to wine, a regular fixture in wine growing regions around the world today. And the Romans too had a slot in their festival calendar dedicated to the fruit of divine. This was called the Vinalia.

In fact, the Vinalia took place on two days each year. The first of these on 23rd April was a spring wine festival in which the first sample of the previous year's vintage now ready to be drunk was poured as a libation or an offering to the god Jupiter.

This day was also shared with the goddess Venus. And girls might visit one of her temples taking bunches of roses, myrtle or mint as an offering to the goddess.

The second Vinalia was on 19th August. With the great harvest approaching the purpose of this festival day was to make offerings to Jupiter to ask that no bad weather would come along to damage the harvest. Lambs were sacrificed and the chief priest of Jupiter would break off the first bunch of grapes from the vine, symbolically beginning of that year's harvest.

Like many of the other festivals that we've been discussing in this series our evidence for what actually happened at the Vinalia is quite fragmentary. Some Roman authors such as Pliny, Varro and Ovid do tell us a bit about what went on, but we don't have much in the way of archaeological or visual evidence.

But as is often the way with ancient events and customs modern artists and writers use their imagination to fill in the gaps and present us with their own version of what might have happened at these ancient festivals.

In this painting from 1870 called *The Vintage Festival*, Lawrence Alma-Tadema gives us his version of a Vinalia procession. This time taking place in the context of a very grand, wealthy Roman house. In fact though, his version of the procession owes quite a bit more to another Roman festival, the notorious Bacchanalia which were held in honour of the god of wine himself, Bacchus.

If you look closely at this image and particularly through to the background, you'll see a crowd of revellers dancing and drinking and having a good time who wouldn't look out of place at a festival today.