

A FABULOUS FEAST

Medieval Luncheon



THE MEDIEVAL TABLE

Upon the table a white cloth, covered with an overcloth called a "sanap" was background for few table ornaments and less cutlery. A SALT, an open embellished container, stood before the seat of the most honored -- thus others sat "below the salt". Goblets or tankards made of glass or metal, or crystal stemware were used; MAZERS were bowls, sometimes footed, used as drinking vessels. Silver or gold spoons and a few sharp knives completed the table settings. Individual plates at place settings were rarely used. Foods were conveyed from kitchen to table on serving platters called chargers; the guests selected what they wanted and it was placed before them upon large slices of bread called TRENCHERS which served as edible platters, kept for the morrow as a nutritious sop in wine or milk; or as food for the dogs; or as culinary alms for the poor at the gate.

FINGER EATING

Elaborate rituals were observed for finger-eating. Spoons were used for soups and puddings; knives, some with serrated tips, lifted meats from platters and sometimes to the mouth. But all else was picked, balanced, and conveyed by those most portable, manipulable, graceful terminals of the hands. Certain fingers were extended while eating specific foods to allow grease-free fingers available for the next dish, as well as for dipping fingers into condiments and spices. (Some among us still maintain an atavistic extension of a pinky-finger at a tea-cup.) This primacy of finger implements explains in part the prevalence of easily handled foods at feasts: the meat- and fish- and fruit-filled pastries, breads and individual pies. However, since much food was served in piquant sauces, gravies, stuffings and creams, punctilious dexterity (such as Chaucer's Prioress's) was necessary grace. Guests usually carried their own knives, encased with other necessaries such as a pair of scissors, in a Chatelaine. Forks, though known in European kitchens and used on Byzantine tables as early as the 12th century, nevertheless were not fashionable in England until the late Renaissance. English visitors to Italy reported the peculiar, finicky table habits of the fork-wielding Italian nobility and avoided such superfluous encumbrance. However, fingers were washed between courses and at meal's end.

THE PANTER & THE PANTRY

The PANTER, guardian of the lord's bread (from the French word for bread, "pain",) uses a ceremoniously rolled "Portpayne", a special cloth for carrying bread. He uses three knives at his own bread board; a "chaffer" for large loaves, a "paper", and a "trencher knife" for smoothing the edges of the specially sliced bread that served as platters. Trenchers in England generally consisted of 4 small bread squares, sides abutted, forming a large square upon which foods were placed; a fifth square covered the central seams of the joining four. Sometimes, however, the trenchers were single rectangles or circles. The Panter's fourth knife, the "mensalknife", cut the choice "upper crust" from rolls and breads for presentation to the master and special guests. From this bread custom comes our modern appellation for the mighty. Bread baked the day of service was for the lord alone; from the pantry other guests received the day-old bread; the household, three-days' bread, and for their trenchers, bread four-days old. The Panter also controlled the salt; he was required to carry his ivory salt planer -- 2 inches by 3 inches in diameter.

WHAT IS AN HERB?

"What is an herb?" the 8th century Alcuin inquired of Charlemagne. "The friend of physicians and the praise of cooks," the Empweor replied. The medicinal and culinary values of herbs were highly regarded in the Middle Ages. "There is no Herbs nor weeds but God hath gyven vertue theb to helpe man", states the 16th century Doctor of Physick Andrew Boorde.....In the Middle Ages no distinction was made among herbs, flowers, and vegetables; all were considered parts of growing plants. Among the seventy "herbys" mentioned in the treatise "Mayster Ion Gardener" of the 15th century are rue, sage, clary, thyme mints, savory spinach, lettuce wormwood, leek, radish and rose. Another treatise of the period gives a list of salad herbs: violets, parsley, redmints watercress, purslane, rosebuds, daisies, dandelions, and chickweed. Flowers were used not only in salads, but as the primary flavoring agent in many rich desserts.Pepper was one of the most highly prized spices during the period. The guild of Pepperers, organized in the 11th century, was early in the 14th century given charge of the "peso grosso", the heavy beam used to weigh spices by the pound. Guild members came to be called "grossarii", the probable ancestor of our "grocer".

USE OF HERBS AND SPICES

To modern eye and taste, medieval spicery is probably the most startling aspect of the cookery. How piquant might stewed and stuffed capon taste whose recipe begins: "take parcelly, sauge, isoppe, rosemary, and thyme", adds saffron, "good herbs", and "a pottel (2quarts) of wine, raisins, sugar and ginger. Gardens of fragrant leaves, foils, seeds, berries and bars were used in medieval sookers, not only in sauces and stuffings but in pies, breads, fruit tarts and in wine. In the profusion of types and also in the combinations of fragrance and tastes, medieval spicery seems wildly aromatic. Expensive, imported spices from the East were listed in recipes alongside those from the kitchen garden. Furthermore spices were strewn on, between and around foods prepared with yet other condiments and herbs. Spices were superb insignia of conspicuous wealth--and ostentatious waste. Given the difficulties of transport, the very presence of imported exotica in a household demonstrated its owner's access to a copious treasury. While remarkable varieties of imported as well as domestic spices and herbs were sold in London's markets by the Spicers and Pepperers and Gardners, some condiments were more expensive than others, and yet others were available only to the highest mobility. A particular odor or taste in food thus affirmed the political statement: Power bought this. Not only allied to wealth, herbs and spices were utilized because of ideals of health. Some foods' effects upon the physiology had to be tempered. Particular spices were thought to aid digestion, counteract heartburn or compensate for overeating. All foods were understood to possess a quality of hot, cold, moist, or dry thus it was necessary to balance the "moist" quality of a food with a "dry" herb, or a "hot" spice with a "cold herb. Certain spices and foods were

mixed together to complement one another as well as to enhance taste. Since all of the castle's social activity took place in the great hall, tables made of long wooden planks balanced on trestles were set up especially for meal time and dismantled immediately thereafter. The king had a special chair with back, arms, and cushions, while the guests sat on "Banquettes", the small backless benches which have given their name to the feast itself.

Guests of honor were seated on raised platforms that ran the width of the room; subordinate tables paralleled the side walls to accommodate less distinguished trenchermen. Decorative tapestries were hung on all the walls to keep chilly drafts to a minimum, the most majestic providing a backdrop for the high table.

Each table was covered with a cloth and had napkins. At each setting, the ushers place a trencher and a spoon. The pinky finger was reserved for taking spices: etiquette requires that these "spice fingers" be held in a raised position while eating to keep them free of grease.

The feast lasts as long as the daylight, with entertainment between courses, be it minstrels or sculptured food, or illusion.

YPOCRAS--HIPPOCRAS

A translated synopsis from John Russell's
Boke of Nurture:

"Have three pewter basins for the liquid and three straining bags, one for each, hanging inside of them from a perch. Pare ginger or beat it into a powder and be sure to use the columbine variety. Your cinnamon sticks should be thin, brittle, and fair in color. Use grains of paradise, sugar, red wine, long pepper and turnsole for coloring. Put each spice into a separate bladder and hang these bags from the perch so that they don't touch each other. Place two or three gallons of wine into each of the basins. Allow the wine to absorb the flavors from the spice pouches. Then strain the liquid through the long cloth bag called a Hippocrate's sleeve. Taste it. If there is too much ginger add cinnamon and vice versa. After you have made hippocras, you can use the dregs in the kitchen."

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Lorna F. Sass

YPOORAS
A spiced Red Wine

½ t. ginger powder (or 5 slivers of fresh
ginger)
4 cinnamon sticks, broken in thirds
4 grains of cardamon, coarsely ground
½ cup sugar
1/8 scant teaspoon pepper (optional)
1 quart good red dry wine
4 blue heliotrope blossoms ("turnsole") for
coloring

Garnish: 1 unblemished lemon, cut in small
slivers

1. Place spices in a large enameled pot.
Pour in red wine.
2. Bring the wine and spices to a boil and
simmer, tightly covered, for 7 minutes.
3. Add heliotrope blossoms and slowly sim-
mer another 3 minutes.
4. Remove all whole spices and flowers.
5. Serve warm in individual chalices, gob-
lets, or mazers (small glass bowls will
do); garnish each portion with a sliver
of fresh lemon.

BRIE TART

8" uncooked pie pastry
½ lb. young Brie cheese
½ cup heavy cream
3 eggs, lightly beaten
1/8 - 1/4 t. powdered ginger
1/8 t. saffron
½ t. brown sugar
salt

1. Bake pie pastry at 425 degrees for 10 minutes. Let cool.
2. Remove rind from Brie. Optional: cut rind into pieces about an inch square and sprinkle evenly on pie crust. This will give the tart a stronger cheese flavor.
3. Combine Brie with remaining ingredients in a blender or with an egg beater. Add salt to taste: the amount will depend on the age of the brie and whether or not you use the rind. mixture should be smooth.
4. Pour liquid into pastry shell.
5. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 40 minutes or until set and brown on top.

Serves 10 - 12

JUSSELLE DATE

- 1 lb. dates, pits carefully removed
- 1 cup crumbs of gritty brown bread or date-nut bread
- 2 T. dried, sweet basil, crushed
- ½ t. salt
- 3 hard-boiled eggs
- ½ lb. cream cheese or ricotta
- ½ cup beef bouillon

1. Cut dates along one long axis to achieve a "canoe" shape suitable for filling. Place on damp towel to avoid sticky nuisance. Cover with another damp towel.
2. Add basil and salt to crumbs.
3. Mash eggs well.
4. Cream the softened cheese with broth in a large mixing bowl.
5. Add eggs and spiced crumbs to cheese and stir well. Mixture should have "pasty" consistency. If too stiff, soften with a small amount of milk.
6. Place mixture in a pastry tube with serrated nozzle and pipe into each date.

DILLED VEAL BALLS

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. chopped veal
- ½ lb. dried figs, stems removed, minced fine
- ½ t. cinnamon
- 2 T dried dill weed
- ¼ t. nutmeg
- ½ t. salt
- ½ cup toasted dark-wheat bread crumbs
- 3 eggs
- ¼ cup oil for sautéing
- Garnish: ½ cup raspberry preserves

Method:

1. In large mixing bowl, evenly mix veal with figs.
2. Combine cinnamon, dill, salt, and nutmeg with crumbs.
3. Stir in spiced crumbs to veal and figs.
4. Beat the eggs, reserving about 1 Table-spoonful.
5. Add eggs to meat mixture, molding it by hand or spoon until it holds its shape.
6. with egg-wet fingers, form small meat-balls 1½ inch in diameter and sauté in hot oil about 10 minutes, or until crisp on the outside. Drain and serve, with a dollop of raspberry preserves on each meatball.

CAUDELE ALMAUNDE

A nut dish served as a vegetable

Apparently served as today we would eat "stuffing" accompanying a roast capon or turkey, almond caudele was neither soup nor sauce, but a "side dish" for sliced meat or hard cheese.

Ingredients:

2 cups coarse-ground almonds

2 cups ale

1 cup water

$\frac{1}{4}$ t. saffron

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup brown sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ t. salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup toasted bread crumbs

1 cup currants

Garnish: 1 T. fresh basil or dill, snipped
finely

1. Bring to boil, then slowly simmer the almonds, ale, and water in a soup pot for 30 minutes.
2. Add saffron, sugar, salt, bread crumbs, and currants. Continue simmering for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Serve hot, garnished with basil or dill.

SALLAT
A Medieval Salad

Ingredients:

Turnips, quartered
Parsnips, sliced
Beets, quartered
St. John's bread (carob)
Almonds
Filberts
Cabbage, shredded
Large prunes
Figs
Dates
Golden raisins
Dried apple rounds
Dried honeyed pineapple, cut in small wedges
Lumbard or sharp mustard
Brown sugar

Method:

1. In lightly salted water boil the turnips and parsnips for 5 to 7 minutes so that they retain their firmness but lose their hardness. Similarly boil the beets, separately.
2. Arrange artistically all elements of the "sallat" so that repetitive patterns of color and shape please. Oftentimes an armorial or coat of arms was formed from such edible "quarterings". The long pods of the St. John's bread are particularly useful uncut as well as broken.
3. The salad elements should be dipped in Lumbard mustard and brown sugar, each of which ought to appear in a separate spice bowl.

Serves 6 - 8 large portions or 10 - 12 small portions.

LUCE WAFERS
A delicate fish cake

Fish stomachs generally grace the garbage cans of fish markets, not their display cases. However, with such fish maws, as with other "giblets" modern cooks tend to waste, medieval cooks created delicacies.

1 cup of luce, salmon or flounder "stomachs"
(or fresh fish filets, cut small; about ½
pound)

1 cup or more of beef broth

½ cup grated cheddar cheese

½ cup all-purpose flour

½ t. brown sugar

¼ t. salt

½ t. powdered ginger

3 egg whites

3 egg yolks

1 whole egg

1 t. milk

2 T. each, oil and butter combined for frying

1. In large heavy frying pan gently poach fish in enough beef broth to cover, until just done, about 7 minutes.
2. Drain fish or fish stomachs, discarding broth. Gently flake with a fork or cut into small slivers, being careful to eliminate all bones.
3. Combine grated cheese, flour, sugar, salt and ginger.
4. Combine fish with dry mixture.
5. Beat egg whites until light and frothy.
6. Carefully fold into fish-and-cheese mixture.
7. Slowly heat oil and butter in heavy skillet.
8. Beat the yolks, whole egg, and milk.
9. Wetting hands in egg, form thin fish wafers or patties. Immediately sauté in skillet, turning once, until golden.
10. Drain (on paper towel) and serve warm. Garnish wafers with chopped fresh parsley.

LEEKES with walnuts

Leeks were cultivated copiously in medieval Europe as a vegetable both nourishing and stimulating to the "desires of Venus". The aphrodisiac qualities were thought dependent upon the leeks' beneficent effect upon the production of sperm.

Ingredients:

10 to 12 fresh leeks
1½ cups beef broth
½ cup white wine
¼ teaspoon salt
1 T. sugar
1 cup coarsely ground walnuts
1 t. vinegar
½ cup walnuts, cut in quarters

1. Wash, trim, and coarsely chop the leeks.
2. Simmer slowly in broth and wine for 12 minutes, in a covered pot.
3. Add salt, sugar, ground nuts, and vinegar. Simmer another 7 minutes, uncovered.
4. Spoon leeks into individual serving bowls. Garnish each portion with quartered nuts. Serve warm.

LEMONWHYT
Lemon Rice with Almonds

1 large unblemished lemon
1 cup raw rice
2 cups water
½ t. salt
½ t. cinnamon
1 T. butter
2/3 cup coarsely ground almonds
2/3 cup currants
1 cup dry white wine

Garnish: 12 teaspoons honey

1. Finely grate the skin from the lemon. Then cut the lemon, thoroughly squeezing its juice and removing most of the pulp. Reserve the skin, juice and soft pulp, discarding the membranes and pits.
2. In a large enameled pot bring to a brisk boil the water, rice, salt, cinnamon, butter, and lemon, reducing heat to simmer until most fluid is absorbed (about 10 minutes). Stir once or twice while simmering, otherwise keep pot tightly covered. Remove covered pot from heat.
3. Slowly simmer the almonds and currants in white wine for 7 minutes.
4. Fluff rice gently with a fork. Add the wine almonds to the lemon rice.
5. Garnish with 1 teaspoon honey for each portion.

1 cup fresh peas can be added after step 4. Slowly simmer for 5 - 7 minutes. If the rice begins to stick to the bottom of the pot, add small amounts of boiling water.

Serves 12

BLANKMANGERE.

Chicken with Cumin and Cream

- 20 small individual pastry shells
- 4 chicken breasts, skinned and boned
- 4 T. butter for sautéing
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup ale
- ½ t. salt
- 1 cup slivered almonds
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 t. cumin seeds
- 1 t. rosemary, finely ground

1. Make pastry-tart shells at 425 degrees so that they are crisp for serving.
2. In heavy skillet, sauté chicken in butter until white on all sides.
3. Cut chicken into small cubes.
4. Add broth and simmer with chicken on low flame for 20 minutes or until tender.
5. Drain broth. Sprinkle salt on chicken. Reset oven to 400 degrees.
6. Heat ale; pour hot ale over chicken. Let steep 20 minutes; drain off ale.
7. Roast almonds for 5 minutes at 400 degrees on well-greased cookie sheet.
8. Add cream, almonds, rosemary and cumin to chicken. Stir thoroughly.
9. Gently heat, but do not boil, for 7 minutes.
10. Spoon into crisp, warm tart shells. Or reheat for 5 minutes in warm oven before serving.

SAMBOCADE
Elderflower Cheesecake

The name sambocade is derived from the Latin word for Elderflowers: sambucus. The flowers add a pleasing aroma and taste, both of which are difficult to describe. Use a butter-based pie crust and serve this sweet cheesecake warm for optimum flavor and texture.

9 inch uncooked pie pastry
3 T. dried Elderflowers
4 T. heavy cream
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 lb. farmers cheese
1/2 lb. ricotta cheese
2 t. dry bread crumbs
6 egg whites, beaten until stiff, but not dry

1. Bake pie pastry at 425 degrees for 10 minutes. Let cool.
2. Soak elderflowers in heavy cream for about 10 minutes.
3. Add sugar and stir until dissolved.
4. Push cheese through a strainer with the back of a tablespoon.
5. Combine cheese with elderflower-cream mixture. Add bread crumbs. Blend thoroughly.
6. Fold in stiff egg whites.
7. Pour mixture into pastry crust.
8. Bake at 375 degrees for about 50 minutes or until firm but not dry. Turn off heat and allow to cool in oven with door open about 15 minutes.

Serves 8

CIRCLETES
Almond-cardamon cakes

Ingredients:

1 cup butter
2/3 cup brown sugar
1 beaten egg
2½ cups flower
½ t. grated lemon peel
¾ t. crushed cardamon
½ cup ground almonds
1 cup currants
Butter for greasing cookie sheets

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Cream butter. Blend in sugar, beating with a spoon until frothy.
3. Whip in the beaten egg.
4. Stir peel, cardamon, sugar, almonds, and currants into the flour.
5. Beat the dry mixture into the sweetened butter.
6. Chill dough for at least 1 hour.
7. Using well-floured fingers, shape dough into small balls (1 inch in diameter) placing them 1 inch apart on greased cookie sheets.
8. Bake 7 - 10 minutes until light golden. Cool on racks.