

## Cynaguan May Coronet Feast, CE 2015

In 1825, the lawyer, writer, and gourmet Jean Brilliat-Savarin wrote “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” In doing so, he inadvertently started culinary archeology, which is a very useful tool for those of us in the SCA who wish to understand a bit more about our medieval forebears. The study of meals can lead to understanding their material culture, some of their thought processes and philosophy, and even give insights as to their economic approaches, all the while providing an interesting sensory experience of medieval life...one that we can all explore, because we all eat.

Recreating the actual food of the time is can actually be one of the simpler aspects of this study. Tonight’s meal, based as it is on the recipes of the 1465 manuscript by Martino of Como, is extremely readable. Later period recipes are generally less jumbled than their earlier counterparts, and read much more like recipes of today, though still not in the more-or-less standard format in use now (ingredients, followed by time-based instructions). Measurements still need to be inferred, but Martino frequently gives us instruction to “make it to your master’s taste”, implying a degree of flexibility in proportions. Martino also makes it clear that he considers those reading this manuscript to already be familiar with kitchen practices, electing not to give us recipes for simple salads or simply prepared side dishes which are mentioned in feast menus of the time.

At this time period in Italy, Humoral Theory was still in use, and had become somewhat elaborate, allowing the chef, in his role as dietician and arbiter of his master’s/client’s health, to justify nearly any combination of ingredient, seasonings, and preparation methods. This is in contrast to earlier manuscripts that explicitly and more rigidly define how food is to be prepared to make it “Safe”. In general, each dish was brought into humoral balance (ideally, all foods should be slightly warm (referring to a humoral quality, not temperature) and moist, which aligned with what was thought to be the usual state of the human body), rather than balancing dish against dish. Cheese and sweets were provided at the end of a meal in order to allow the stomach to close and the process of digestion to begin.

It should be noted, in closing, that a feast in SCA terms was not truly a feast by the standards of the wealthy and powerful people we in the SCA are trying to portray. A true feast, in that time period, could be expected to last for hours, or occasionally days, and was meant to celebrate a major religious or sometimes secular event. Attendance at these feasts was a matter of socio-economic status, and was generally a perquisite of one’s place in the given household or Court. Of course, in period, the more highly ranked one was, the better one’s selection of dishes, and the more food was prepared for you (something the SCA avoids with our egalitarian upbringing). Also, these more highly ranked people also had to support more dependants, and this food made it possible (as an example, a Duke living in a Royal Court might be allotted 2 gallons of small beer a day—much of that obviously was given to his retinue). In addition, these excesses from the feast were frequently distributed to the less fortunate, supporting the lower classes, and providing them a quality food source they would not otherwise have had access to. Failing that, leftovers became the bases for future days’ meals. The SCA does none of this, with the result that a feast on our terms may only have ten or fifteen dishes in tasting samples, and the elaborate affairs of the true feast cannot be simulated without making the feast part of a lifestyle.

## REFERENCES

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## **Recipes and Redactions:**

### The First Course:

Bread has been a staple of man's diet for more than six thousand years. Further, it is as much eating implement as foodstuff. Martino's contemporary, Scappi lists it in his feast menus, but gives little detail. Also, at this time, I am not a competent baker and would have no reliable means of baking fresh bread on site. Accordingly, I am purchasing bread locally, with as close a match to the grains and textures of high-status breads as possible.

Despite the custom we currently have of serving butter with bread, I have as yet found no evidence that butter was served in this fashion in period. As stated previously, bread was often used as a utensil, serving in place of the modern fork or to mop up more liquid items. That said, other dips and relishes for bread certainly existed, and I have chosen to make a lightly smoked ricotta salata cheese on site with a period style cheese-mold and added cream due to the high class of my patrons to serve as an accompaniment. Ricotta is documented to prior to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Ricotta salata is only slightly later, is Italian, and is simply the creation of ricotta, preserved past its early days with salt and a slight smoking as the cheese would be allowed to drain near the hearth (illustrations in Scappi's Opera show cheeses in just such a location.

Making the ricotta salata is quite simple as ricotta is merely a batch of whey from earlier cheesemaking, brought to just below boiling (185F is the accepted temperature) and treated with an acid such as vinegar to precipitate out most of the remaining proteins as cheese. These curds are then salted and allowed to drain in a colander-like cheese mold (I have a ceramic mold made to match extant examples from period). To treat as a spread, one would simply allow it to drain longer, adding more salt to taste (and preserve the cheese, and allow it to dry a bit longer near a fire, which will impart a pleasant, smoked flavor. To finish the process of making it into a spread, break up the cheese and add a small amount of cream or butterfat until the desired consistency is reached.

### The Second Course:

A Dish of Herbs: Green salads appear in many period references, though as one might expect, the actual varieties of greens used depended greatly on location and season. Under humoral theory, various greens were generally considered to be somewhat cool and dry, which made them a potential health hazard unless treated properly—this is why many greens were cooked, often in spiced almond milk. In deference to modern palates, I have elected to make them safe instead by the addition of oil and vinegar (both of which have a warm and moist aspect), and added pepper, pomegranate arils and toasted pine nuts to further enhance these aspects.

Cervellate sausage:

Martino provides this as a guide:

*To make nice cervellate out of pork or young veal. Take lean meat from the leg, without sinews, and good pork or veal fat and cut it with a knife as small as you possibly can. Then take some good hard cheese and some good soft cheese, some mild spices, and salt as well, according to the quantity, and mix everything carefully together, coloring it all yellow with a little saffron. Take large pork intestines and clean them very well so that they are thin and have no fat left in them. Fill with this mixture, tying them up very well, as short or as long as you please. They should be simmered and will not last in good condition for more than two days. All the same, though, they can be kept for two to three weeks, depending on the time of year and necessity, if well handled.*

Some experimentation is necessary, of course. For instance, the words used for "good pork fat" are also used for cured pork fat, which was often used as an ingredient. Use of that (in the form of minced bacon) instead of the more usual pork back fat adds an excellent flavor. Likewise, I find that adding a soft, more mild cheese makes almost no difference in the final flavor profile, especially in comparison to a harder cheese, such as Parmesan (which was also used in Italy at the time of this manuscript). Mild spices were frequently considered to be pepper, nutmeg, mace, cinnamon, ginger and cloves. The yellowing with saffron adds no particular flavor in such small amounts, but does leave the casing a somewhat golden appearance.

My final interpretation is this:

1 lb.pork, ground

1/2 lb bacon, ground

4 oz grated cheese (Parmesan)

1 1/2 tsp. pepper

1 1/2 tsp. cinnamon

1 1/2 tsp. ginger

1 tsp. salt

1/2 tsp. ground clove

1/2 tsp ground nutmeg

Grind all ingredients together, mixing by hand in a large bowl. Some water may be added if it does not come together in a homogenous mass. Stuff into cleaned pork casings. Simmer five to ten minutes and optionally grill after to improve appearance. Serve hot.

Zanzarelli (rice soup):

Martino includes several zanzarelli style soups in his manuscript. They all follow the pattern of a well flavored meat or chicken broth, sometimes colored with saffron or soured with lemon juice, thickened with cooking breadcrumbs, emmer wheat, or rice. Lastly one stirs in beaten egg and grated cheese. Overall, they are very like the modern Greek avogolemono.

Key in this soup is a strongly flavored broth. Usually, one would use a long-simmered both, full of bones, meat or chicken scraps, and aromatic vegetables, all strained out before continuing. In this instance with constraints posed by an honored guest at this dinner, I am substituting asafetida (which was well known to medieval Italians as they exported it to Eastern counties where it is still popular today) for the onions and garlic.

Examples of Martino's version include:

*To make ten servings, take eight eggs, half a pound of grated cheese, and a grated bread roll and mix everything together. Then take a pot of meat broth, yellow with saffron and lemon, and when it starts to boil, add the mixture and give it a stir with a spoon. When you think it is done, take it off the fire and dish up, sprinkled with spices.*

And:

*Do as for emmer wheat, but as so many people dislike eggs with rice, it is well to consult the taste of your lord and master.*

My version combines these:

1.5 gallons chicken broth, made with chicken scraps, carrots, rosemary, parsley stems, chicken feet, etc, strained.

2 tsp powdered asafetida resin, sautéed in 2 tbsp olive oil

8 whole eggs

2 cups grated Parmesan cheese

1 cup lemon juice

1 large pinch saffron

2 cups brown rice

Simmer broth, saffron, and rice for at least 1 hour (preferably more), add asafetida, and simmer at least another 30 minutes, stirring frequently. Meanwhile beat together eggs, grated cheese, and lemon juice. Slowly stir in ladles of hot broth to the egg mixture, stirring constantly. When volume of egg mixture has doubled, pour back into simmering broth slowly, again stirring constantly. Do not allow to boil. Serve hot.

### Third Course:

Martino's directions for roasting a chicken is both simple, and delicious.

*To roast a chicken. Roast it and, when done, take bitter orange juice or some good verjuice, rose water, sugar, and cinnamon; put the bird on a dish, toss the mixture over it, and send it to the table.*

Cooking on site, without a large, well trained medieval staff has necessitated the use of a few adaptations. I will be par-cooking the chicken in advance for safety, searing it off at the last minute from a vacuum-sealed state. I have also found that combining equal parts of verjus and bitter orange juice results in a more balanced flavor. Also, to aid in service, the chicken will be already pieced out. In period, the servers would have carved the meat from the birds at table, which can be quite time-consuming without trained servers for every few guests.

My adaptation:

1 chicken, cut into pieces, covered and roasted at 375F until juices run clear (about 45 minutes)

1/2 cup each verjus and bitter orange juice

1 tsp raw sugar

1 tsp rosewater

1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

Salt to taste

Finish roasted chicken in hot skillet to brown chicken, removing skins after. Mix remaining ingredients and drizzle over chicken, serving immediately after. If desired, servers can remove meat from bones and serve it in bite-sized pieces.

## Fresh Peas

*Fresh peas with salt meat. Take fresh peas, just as they are in their pods, and give them a boil. Then take salt meat, marbled with fat, cut it into thin strips half a fin-ger's length, and fry them a little. Add the peas and continue cooking with a little verjuice, a little sweet grape must or sugar, and cinnamon. Green beans can be cooked in the same way.*

Another simple and tasty dish. My redaction is as follows:

1.5 pounds sugar snap peas, stems removed from the pods

1/4 pound salt pork, sliced thinly into pieces 1/8" thick, and 1/4"X1 inch.

1/2 cup verjus

1/4 cup sapa (reduced grape syrup)

1/2 tsp cinnamon

Blanch pea pods approximately 2 minutes in boiling water. Sauté salt pork in skillet, rendering the fat. Remove the cooked pork, and sauté the pea pods in the pork fat. Toss with verjus, cinnamon, and sapa. Just prior to service, top with salt meat and serve.

## Gingered Carrots

This recipe has no counterpart in the Martino corpus, or even in that of Scappi. However, carrots were used as a purée, with ginger and other spices, as a filling in tourtes and pies. As the purely orange carrot is a relatively recent "invention", they were used as colorants also.

Sometimes, however, when there is a hole in existing recipes, we must infer them. We have evidence that carrots were frequently paired with carrots in period recipes. We know they were eaten. And from a humoral standpoint, which leads us to an understanding of their culinary philosophy, we know that carrots, grown in the ground, were considered both cold and dry. Boiling carrots would mitigate both of these characteristics, as would some form of fats (considered moistening), and the addition of ginger (a warm, even hot, ingredient). Sugar or honey was considered the ideal food as precisely matching healthy human humors. Adding

either could only improve a dish in the mind of a medieval chef. Overall, this creates a dish that would be considered warm and moist, or a safe match for a healthy person. It might not be advised for someone with an imbalance that lead to their being extra hot and moist (perhaps a disease whose symptoms were a fever and sweating), but under medieval beliefs, this would be quite acceptable.

My recipe:

1 pound carrots, scrubbed or peeled if large, greens removed, sliced

1 cup water

2 tbsp powdered ginger

4 tbsp butter

4 tbsp honey

Place the carrots in a large skillet or saucepan. Add water and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally until the water is evaporated and the carrots are crisp-tender. Add butter, ginger, and honey, stirring to coat. Serve.

#### The Fourth Course:

I was extremely fortunate to be able to procure 3 small elk roasts at nearly the same time I reviewed the Martino recipes looking for something exotic.

*To make a civet of game. To make a civet of game, first cook the meat in water mixed with the same amount of vinegar. When done, take it out and let it dry. When dry, fry the meat in good lard. For two serving dishes of this civet, take a pound of raisins and half a pound of unskinned almonds and pound them well together. Then take a pound of bread, cut in slices, toasted dry at the fire but not too dark, and put it in to soak in a little red wine. Pound this up with the other things and dilute with some of the meat broth and force through a sieve into a pot. Simmer gently for half an hour over the coals, but away from the flame, then put in plenty of cinnamon and ginger, mild or strong according to the common taste or that of your lord and master. Next take an onion and cook it, whole, in a pot with good bacon chopped small; when cooked, pound and crush it fine and put it back in the pot with the bacon. Then add this to the pot with the aforementioned things and let it cook for a little longer. Now dish up your prepared meat with the civet over it and send to the table.*

This recipe requires more interpretation than others. Game is defined in other recipes in the same section as red deer (Which is the American elk), roebuck, or venison of any sort. Scappi notes that



venison was nearly any wild animal—which could include such exotics as bear, boar, or anything fresh-caught. Aside from that, the recipe is in two parts, the preparation of the meat itself, and that of a sauce for it. To prepare the meat, we're advised to simmer it in water and vinegar, which would help relieve any gamy flavors, and then to fry it. The word used for "good lard" in the manuscript (bono lardo) is also used for preserved pork fat in the form of bacon, guanciale, or the cured fat known today simply as lardo. Given that the recipe calls for bacon for the sauce itself, that becomes a logical choice.

The civet sauce is remarkably well defined, and also created a problem. The geasa of one of the guests at this dinner prevented him from partaking in onions, which formed a bold part of it. However, in referring to the Martino recipes, we find one for a "cameline relish". Cameline sauces are common to a great many medieval times and cultures, and were a sauce commonly served over meats, especially strongly flavored game meats. And Martino's version of cameline sauce, in this case a thickened version identified as a relish, is nearly identical to the sauce used as a civet here, with the exceptions that it is not strained so finely, and has no onion or bacon. I therefore felt confident in my substitution of cameline relish as the sauce in the civet, with the bacon used as the source of fat to fry in, and adding at the end, which has the added advantage of adding a crisp element for textural contrast to the dish.

My recipe is then as follows:

Approximately 3 pounds elk loin, cut into one pound pieces

Water and wine vinegar to cover

1 pound each toasted bread, crust removed, and golden raisins (cameline indicates a tawny color)

½ pound blanched almonds

Red wine sufficient to soak bread

½ pound bacon, cubed

Powdered cinnamon and ginger to taste

Soak bread in red wine, set aside. Meanwhile, place elk loin in heavy pot, cover with water and vinegar, and simmer 30 minutes. Skim any scum that forms in the broth from the pot. As this cooks, grind together in a large mortar (or food processor) the almonds and raisins, adding in the soggy bread after.

Remove elk from cooking liquid and allow to dry, reserving liquid. Render fat from bacon, setting cooked bacon aside. Sear cooled elk briefly in bacon fat, browning roasts. Add skimmed broth as necessary to thin out cameline sauce to desired consistency. Top thin sliced elk loin pieces with sauce and bacon, and send to the table.

Mushrooms Another Way

*Another way of preparing mushrooms is first of all to clean them very well, then cook on a grate over the coals, dressed with pepper and lard and garlic pounded together. Or you can dress them with oil.*

So, in reviewing the properties of mushrooms, they were considered slightly dry on their own, but very cold, and were often considered humorally to be quite dangerous for people to eat. A natural enough conceit, of course, given the number of poisonous species which abounded—often toxic mushrooms result in poisoning with cold, clammy skin a frequent symptom. As we will refrain from use of any poisonous mushrooms, we can hope to avoid these issues while conforming to the directions given.

1 pound field, white, or cremini mushrooms, sliced (porcini would be an excellent choice for flavor, but extremely hard to obtain fresh)

Olive oil

2 tsp sautéed, minced garlic (due to aforementioned issues, we will be using ½ tsp sautéed asafetida resin)

Black pepper and salt

Trim and wipe clean mushrooms, halving or quartering larger ones. Sprinkle with salt. Grill well until browned on all sides. Place in bowl and toss with pepper, olive oil, and asafetida. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Asparagus in the Roman fashion

To the medieval mind, asparagus was very much like carrots, above. They were served as part of a puree, and humorally, they were almost identical to the carrots we cooked earlier in this meal. However, Martino's contemporary Scappi advises us:

*Asparagus in Rome have their season beginning in April. Roast over a fire or boil them, and dress them with oil and pepper and serve them thus.*

This hardly requires a recipe interpretation. For this meal, I have simply trimmed the tough ends from the asparagus, grilled them over the fire, and drizzled with olive oil and pepper. Some salt to taste may be added.

Fifth Course:

Within period, feasts did not include what we would recognize as a dessert course, though the modern haute cuisine fashion of finishing with a cheese course does have its roots in medieval beliefs that sweets and cheeses both allowed the stomach to seal itself so that the process of digestion could begin. And mundanely, modern diners often feel that a recognizable dessert is needful to complete an elaborate meal, even if it is often slighted by the diner's inability to eat more.

Both dishes rely on wafers, a thin sweet or savory waffle-like flatbread cooked on hot irons over the fire. While a professional, such as Martino, would undoubtedly know how to make them, they were

invariably prepared by a waferer, someone who made his living selling large numbers of these little treats to wealthy households, or even as street food (there is a woodcut from period showing a waferer hawking his wares, carrying 20 or more wafers on a long, straight stick. And since these were generally prepared and made by workers in a far less exalted position than Martino and Scappi, no known period recipe exists for the wafer batter. Terrance Scully (see references) however has experimentally concocted a plausible batter of 4 eggs, a cup of flour, a pinch of salt, a tablespoon of sugar, a tablespoon of oil and a tablespoon of wine or verjus. The batter is spread on a hot iron, preferably with designs on both sides (like a pizzelle iron), and cooked until golden brown. Repeat until the batter is all used.

*Marzipan Torte. Get almonds, soak them a night, skin them so they are quite white, grind them thoroughly and add to them the same amount of sugar; to make this Torte better, use a pound of the one - that is, of almonds - and a pound of fine sugar, either more or less depending on the amount you want to make, and add to them an ounce of rosewater; mix it all together; get good wafers, made with sugar and rosewater, first soaked in rosewater, lay them on the bottom of a baking dish and put the mixture over them, spreading it carefully with a spoon, and make it low, adding sugar and rosewater on top; then cook it slowly. That is what a Marzipan Torte is like.*

It is recommended for modern tastes to limit the use of rosewater as most are unused to the strong floral flavor.

Secondly, for something less sweet than marzipan, Professor Ken Albala suggests the use of wafers rolled around a sweetened new soft cheese (such as the modern cream cheese blended with sugar). Alternately wafers and be stacked with cheese spread between each, and served as a cake.

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In conclusion, it is to be hoped that you will enjoy the dinner this evening. Perhaps the food will allow you an insight into the medieval people that are at the heart of the SCA. For your added enjoyment, I am including a page from an Italian late medieval guide to proper table manners. Remember, this guide no more says what sensible people did then than does the modern DMV manual say how sensible people drive today.

Buon Appetito!