

A CONJECTURAL VIKING FEAST

GUENIÈVRE DE MONMARCHÉ

SERVED AT THE TOURNEY OF YMIR, 2008

INTRODUCTION

For the Tourney of Ymir, I was asked to do a “Viking Themed” feast. While I was enthused about the feast itself, I knew this would be a challenge as there are no existant cookbooks from the area and time in question, so the recipes would have to be conjectural reconstructions based on available foods and recipes from other times and areas.

I chose to focus on the Danelaw in approximately 1,000 AD, though my sources varied widely from this focus due to the unavailability of cooking sources from this time and place. I first looked at literature and archaeological finds from the time, and then conjectured as to how these foods might have been cooked, based on the kitchen facilities and cooking techniques available. One thing to note is that apparently chickens were not commonly kept, thus the noted absence of poultry in the menu. I did use eggs, as sea fowl eggs were collected, though more were used in this feast than probably featured in the Norse diet.

I did make a variety of compromises from historical correctness in order to create a feast that would please a variety of guests; Ymir is the Barony’s biggest event and the challenges of creating a feast for 240 people with varied palates (from “carnivores” to vegetarians, with many picky eaters) sometimes required making choices that were not strictly accurate, as did the limitations of kitchen, budget and the “sideboard” format of the feast. These are detailed with each recipe.

the menu¹:

MATBRÖD:

Freshly baked wheat bread.

KNÄCKEBRÖD:

Rye Crispbread

NY SMÖR:

Homemade Butter

SKYR MED VITLÖK:

Fresh cheese with garlic

BROTCHAN FOLCHER:

Leek soup with oatmeal

KLÄTTRA OCH MUSSLA SMÅKOKA:

Scallop, mussel and clam stew with fennel

STEKA NÖTKÖTT:

Roast beef

ÄLGSTEK FFLÄTA MED RÖD VIN OCH SVAMPEN:

Venison braised with red wine and mushrooms

GRISKÖTT KORV INNE OM TITULERA OM LUCAN:

Pork sausage in the style of the Lucanians

SYLT FISK MED RÖDLÖKEN:

Pickled fish with onions

BÖNAN MED ÖL:

Beans cooked with beer and spices

MOROTEN UGNEN MED INGEFÄRA:

Carrots cooked with ginger

STEKET KÅLEN:

Sautéed cabbage

SÖT HAVREKAKA:

Sweet oatcakes

BAKAT ÄPPLESÅS:

Baked applesauce

¹ All translations are from www.tranexp.com and are meant only to give the meal character, not as references to any period source.

THE RECIPES: BREADS

MATBRÖD: FRESHLY BAKED WHEAT BREAD.

Barley, rye, oats and wheat were all found at Birka, Jorvik, Oseburg and Dublin². Based on finds at Birka, it appears that most breads were flat and unleavened, cooked on griddles over the fire. However, I wanted to bake at least one leavened bread, as many people feel that they haven't had a meal unless they've had bread (a very medieval attitude, really). So I chose to bake one plain wheat bread, and one rye flatbread – while barley breads were more common, I was using barley in other dishes in the feast and wanted to vary the grains a little.

There are very few existent bread recipes from pre-1600. Among those are the bread recipe in Platina, the recipe for “Rastons” in one of the Harleian manuscripts, and the recipes for “Fine Manchet” and “Restons” in *The Good Huswife's Handmaide for the Kitchen*. Looking at the recipe from Platina³, who wrote in Italy in the late 15th century, he says:

“Therefore I recommend to anyone who is a baker that he use flour from wheat meal, well ground and then passed through a fine seive to sift it; then put it in a bread pan with warm water, to which has been added salt, after the manner of the people of Ferrari in Italy. After adding the right amount of leaven, keep it in a damp place if you can and let it rise.... The bread should be well baked in an oven, and not on the same day; bread from fresh flour is most nourishing of all, and should be baked slowly”

The recipe used at the feast was:

- 6 cups wheat flour
- 2 ½ tsp yeast (a substitute for sourdough leaven)
- 1 tsp salt
- Enough water to make a loose dough

All ingredients were mixed and kneaded. The dough was allowed to rise overnight, kneaded and formed into loaves then baked in a 350° oven until done.

KNÄCKEBRÖD: RYE CRISPBREAD

For the “crispbread”, I wanted a savory cracker-like bread to complement the cheese I was making. Breads like these are still eaten in Scandinavia today, and are prepared similar to

² <http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/food.shtml>

³ Platina, De Honesta Voluptate (reprinted at www.davidffriedman.com)

modern pie dough. I started with a modern recipe⁴ and chose to omit the sugar called for, as sugar would not have been available and I felt it unlikely that any other sweetener would have been used in a simple dish like this. I also chose to use water instead of milk, as milk was commonly made into butter for longer storage – I added additional butter to compensate.

The final recipe used was:

1 1/3 cups rye flour

1/2 teaspoon salt, plus additional for sprinkling tops.

5 tablespoons butter

1/3 cup water, +/-

Mix salt and flour, cut in butter, add water. Roll out thinly on a floured surface, prick generously with a fork, and sprinkle with salt (pat salt into place if necessary). Cut into serving pieces (approximately 2"x3") and bake on a cookie sheet at 300° for 20-25 minutes or until done.

⁴ <http://www.recipezaar.com/135097>

THE RECIPES: DAIRY

NY SMÖR: HOMEMADE BUTTER

Butter was an essential storage tool for keeping milk – heavily salted, it could be kept for years and in fact was used to pay taxes. The process is simple – cream is agitated until the fat clumps and sticks together, while the buttermilk drains out. The flavor can be improved by allowing the cream to sour slightly, either naturally or by culturing the cream with yogurt or sour cream to introduce desired bacteria.

SKYR MED VITLÖK: FRESH CHEESE WITH GARLIC

Skyr is a fresh cheese still eaten in Iceland today – while I have no evidence this precise recipe was used by the Vikings, dairy products including cheese were a key part of their diet. The recipe used was given to me by Idonea de la Mare.

Skyr

Yield: 8 servings (6 c)

4 qt Milk(1 gal)

1/2 pt Sour cream

1/2 Rennet tablet

The milk is brought to a boil without burning it, and then cooled to blood heat (98F). A cupful of the sour cream is whipped and mixed with some of the milk until thin and smooth: then it is poured into the milk. At the same time, one-half rennet tablet is dissolved in a little cold water (about a tablespoonful) and poured into the milk, which is stirred to mix the ingredients. The mixture is allowed to stand at room temperature for 24 hours. Then the skyr is scooped from the pot and strained gradually through a fine linen sieve (several layers of cheesecloth may be used instead). It is thus separated from the whey. The skyr which is left in the sieve should be about as thick as ice cream. Four quarts of milk should make about one and a half quarts of skyr. When serving, whip skyr well with a spoon or whipper to a smooth ice-cream-like consistency. The consistency should not be grainy or like cottage cheese.

I added parsley, sage and garlic, all flavorings available to the Norse, to further differentiate it from the butter.

THE RECIPES: SOUPS

BROTCHAN FOLCHER: OATMEAL PORRIDGE WITH LEEK

*"Ferry me over the sound; | I will feed thee therefor in the morning;
A basket I have on my back, | and food therein, none better;
At leisure I ate, | ere the house I left,
Of herrings and porridge, | so plenty I had."* – HARBARTHSLJOTH, The Poetic Edda⁵

While the precise composition of the porridge eaten by Thor in this passage isn't indicated, grain-based porridges were common for the Vikings. To make a simple dish more interesting, I added vegetables and spices.

Thinly sliced leeks were sautéed in butter, then water was added to twice the level of the leeks and the entire mixture was brought to a simmer. "Irish" oats were added in a quantity approximately equal to the leeks and cooked until done, then milk was added to make the mixture liquid again (the oats absorb water as they cook). The final soup was spiced simply with salt and pepper.

KLÄTTRA OCH MUSSLA SMÅKOKA: SCALLOP, MUSSEL AND CLAM STEW WITH FENNEL

Seafood was a huge part of the Norse diet, including shellfish. Evidence at the Norse settlement in Dublin indicates that oysters, cockles, mussels, winkles, smelt, eels, salmon, and scallops were eaten. This shellfish soup was roughly based on the following recipe from Two Fifteenth Century Cookbooks⁶:

Muscules in broth. Take Muscules, And sith (Note: seethe, boil) hem, And pike hem oute of the shell; And drawe the broth thorgh a streynour into a faire vessell, And sette hit on the fire; And then take faire brede, and stepe hit with the same broth, and draw hit thorgh a streynour, And cast in-to a potte with the sewe; and munge (Note: Douce MS. mynced; see next recipe) oynons, wyn, and poudre peper, and lete boyle; and cast there-to the Musculis and poudre ginger, and saffron, and salte; And then serue ye hit forthe.

However, I made significant changes to this recipe – overall, it was just a suggestion of technique. First of all, I didn't want two thickened soups in the same feast, so I did not thicken the soup at all. Secondly, the exotic spices – ginger and saffron – would not have

⁵ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe08.htm>

⁶ <http://www.medievalcookery.com/cgi-bin/display.pl?tfccb:363>

been available, so I used fennel and bay leaves – both commonly grown⁷ – to flavor the soup. Wine was available to the Vikings, but probably would not have been used for cooking. However, the acidity significantly improved the flavor of the soup.

First, approximately 35 lbs (shell-on) of mussels and clams were steamed with a little fennel seeds. The “meats” were chopped and the juices were saved. Next, approximately 20 bulbs of fennel were chopped finely and sautéed with an equal quantity of chopped onions in butter. 6 bottles of white wine was added, and the mixture was simmered for several hours, and then 20 lbs of bay scallops (shelled) were added, and simmered until tender. Finally, about 30 minutes before serving, the reserved mussels and clams (only about 3 lbs at this point, with several cups of concentrated broth) were added to heat through, and pepper and fennel seed were added to finish the spicing.

⁷ Medieval Gardens; John Harvey (1981) pp. 30-32, 163-179. Charlemagne dictated in 800 that all monasteries should grow a particular variety of plants, which rapidly spread through Europe – Bay and Fennel are both on this list.

THE RECIPES: MEATS

STEKA NÖTKÖTT: ROAST BEEF

This dish was added to satisfy the large number of people, especially fighters, who wanted a “plain” meat dish at the feast. The sagas make reference to oxen being eaten, though they were boiled:

*Then of the steers | did they bring in three;
Their flesh to boil | did the giant bid.⁸*

I chose to roast the beef instead due to the site’s kitchen having more oven availability than stove space, and because cold roast beef is more appetizing than cold boiled beef on a sideboard. The beef was roasted with salt, mustard, rosemary, and garlic rubbed on the outside, all spices available to the Norse, and sliced.

ÄLGSTEK FFLÄTA MED RÖD VIN OCH SVAMPEN: VENISON BRAISED WITH RED WINE AND MUSHROOMS

Venison was part of the Norse diet, though how important a part varied based on what part of Scandinavia is discussed – the farther north, the more game was eaten, and deer was the most commonly hunted animal.⁹

An important part of keeping the feast under budget (at \$6 per person) was the donation of approximately 40 lbs of assorted venison – shoulders, hams and even a tenderloin. Given the assortment of parts, and the limited quantity of meat (only 2 oz per person, once boned) the most efficient way to cook and serve the game was to cut it into 1” chunks and cook slowly, with a lot of moisture. Another recipe from Two Fifteenth Century Cookbooks states: *Venyson in broth. Take rybbes of venyson, and wassh hem faire in Water, And streyn the Water thorgh a Streynour into a faire potte, and cast the Venyson thereto, parcely, Sauge, powder of peper, cloue3, Maces, Vinegre, salt, And late hem boile til thei be ynow, and serue it forth.*¹⁰ So moist cooking of venison (as opposed to roasting) was not a modern idea.

The chopped venison was placed on a bed of sliced mushrooms, the 40 lbs were divided amongst 6 pans, with approximately 2x the volume of mushrooms to venison. A 750ml bottle of red wine and approximately 1/3 cup of red wine vinegar were added to each, along with pepper, coriander and juniper berries (more spices that would have been available to

⁸ HYMISKVITHA, The Lay of Hymir, The Poetic Edda. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe09.htm>

⁹ <http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/food.shtml>

¹⁰ <http://www.medievalcooking.com/cgi-bin/display.pl?tfccb:264>

the Norse in place of the exotic mace and cloves – coriander was found in graves at Jorvik¹¹). The pans were covered tightly and baked at 300° - the braising could have occurred on the stove instead, but again, the kitchen had limitations. This was also served with barley frumenty, as was common in many medieval menus and recipes.

GRISKÖTT KORV INNE OM TITULERA OM LUCAN: PORK SAUSAGE IN THE STYLE OF THE LUCANIANS

Instead of moving forward in time for this recipe, I chose to look backwards to Rome for these sausages. I have redacted these two ways, one as a milder “feast” version, the other with unusual ingredients (pine nuts and “fish sauce”). The feast sausages were smoked, these are not because while my Barony owns a smoker, I do not.

The source for these is Apicius¹², with a recipe for “Lucanian sausage”: *Lucanian sausage or meat pudding is made similar to the above. Crush pepper, cumin, savory, rue, parsley, condiment, laurel berries and broth; mix with finely chopped pork and pound well with broth. To this mixture, being rich, add whole pepper and nuts. When filling casings carefully push the meat through. Hang sausage up to smoke.*

I could not source laurel berries, and I chose not to use rue because it is an abortifacient and poisonous in some quantities. I assumed that “condiment” meant garum, which is a fermented fish sauce – I used Thai fish sauce as the closest substitute I could find, it adds a salty, savory flavor to the sausage. The nuts used are pine nuts, and since I was not smoking and drying the sausage, I did not add whole peppercorns – while an occasional whole pepper is pleasant in a dried sausage like a salami, it is not in a fresh sausage.

There are two batches of this sausage, the ingredients for the first (the “feast” version) are as follows:

- 3 lbs pork shoulder, ground
- 2/3 cup chicken broth
- 1 oz salt
- 2 tsp dried savory
- 2 tsp dried parsley
- 4 tsp ground pepper
- 4 tsp ground cumin

In the second batch, I added 2 oz of coarsely chopped pine nuts, reduced the salt to .8 oz, increased the cumin to 5 tsp, and added 1 tbs of Thai fish sauce. I feel that these changes produced a much more savory sausage, but I did not want to use fish sauce in a pork dish

¹¹ <http://www.vikinganswerlady.com/food.shtml>

¹² Cookery and Dining in Imperial Rome, Apicius translated by Vehling.

nor pine nuts in a sausage for allergy reasons at a feast, and I tend to prefer spicier food than most people so I kept the smaller amount of spice at the advice of my testers.

The sausages were made by grinding using an electric grinder, then stuffing into rinsed hog casings – mincing with a knife would have been more appropriate, but time limitations prevented that. For the feast, the sausages were smoked over cherry wood for 2 hours before baking to ensure internal temperature reached 165, the displayed sausages were not smoked.

SYLT FISK MED RÖDLÖKEN: PICKLED FISH WITH ONIONS

Preserved fish were important to the Norse, and I really wanted to make them a part of this feast. The most common form of preservation was salting and drying, however, I had no hope of convincing the average feast-goer to eat salted cod. I thought of a recipe from the Harpestraang manuscript for The Lord's Salt which preserves meat in vinegar and spices¹³, and found other recipes for fish with salt and vinegar, including one from Forme of Cury that I believe was meant more as a marinade than a preservative, and one from Martino that is preservative: *"To prepare carpione of trout as you would cook a carpione, clean the trout well and gut them, then pierce them in many places all over with the point of a knife. Then make a brine with equal parts of water and vinegar, adding plenty of salt which you must dissolve thoroughly; and put the trout in for half a day or more. And when this is done, transfer them to a table, putting them under a weight for three or four hours, and fry them well in plenty of good oil, so that they are nicely cooked but not burnt. You can keep these trout for a month, refrying them if you like, and preparing them again as you would a carpione."*¹⁴

These recipes are very complicated, however, and I wanted a simple dish that would highlight the preserved fish. What I settled on was as follows:

Take tilapia fillets (the fish I could find on my budget) and cut into serving-size pieces. Place in bowl with 1 cup salt per 5 lbs fish, add vinegar to cover and stir carefully to dissolve the salt somewhat without breaking up the fish. Allow to marinate for several days – the fish will “cook” in the vinegar. Drain vinegar and rinse fish, and add chopped onions in equal quantity to the fish, as well as a large quantity of dill – about ½ oz, dried, for 5 lbs of fish. Add water and allow to marinate overnight – the water draws some of the excess salt and vinegar out of the preserved fish and allows the flavors to mingle.

Note: For the feast I used cider vinegar, for the display I used red wine vinegar. Overall I prefer the cider vinegar – an aleger would probably be the most appropriate choice.

¹³ <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cariadoc/miscellaneous.html#8>

¹⁴ The Medieval Kitchen Recipes from France and Italy, Redon, Sabban, and Serventi, p. 122

THE RECIPES: VEGETABLES

Vegetables are amongst the hardest things to find recipes for – as Taillevent said, “*Other Lesser Pottages, such as stewed chard, cabbage, turnip greens, leeks, veal in Yellow Sauce, and plain shallot pottage, peas, frenched beans, mashed beans, sieved beans or beans in their shell, pork offal, brewet of pork tripe -- women are experts with these and anyone knows how to do them.*”¹⁵

However, that being said, I still needed to provide some vegetarian options for the diners at this feast. The bean dish was chosen specifically to provide a vegetarian protein option, especially as the feast was served during Lent and the Baron was keeping the fast.

BÖNAN MED ÖL: BEANS COOKED WITH BEER AND SPICES

The flavors of this dish are inspired by a recipe from Ein Buch von guter spise¹⁶: *Boil green beans until they become soft. So take then fine bread and a little pepper. (Take) three times as much caraway with vinegar and with beer. Grind that together and add saffron thereto. And strain the broth and pour the color thereon and salt it to mass and let it boil in the condiment and give out.*

Red chickpeas (which were apparently preferred over the more common yellow chickpeas) were soaked overnight, then boiled in beer until tender, and drained. They were dressed with vinegar, pepper and caraway.

MOROTEN UGNET MED INGEFÄRA: CARROTS COOKED WITH GINGER

STEKET KÅLEN: SAUTÉED CABBAGE

These two recipes are fairly modern, especially the cabbage. Cabbage was eaten by the Vikings, but would probably have been boiled rather than sautéed, and would have been cooked more thoroughly, as would the carrots (which wouldn’t have been orange, nor would they have had ginger). However, very few modern diners prefer their vegetables cooked until “mushy”, and as it was many of the vegetables returned to the kitchen uneaten.

Both recipes are simple:

The carrots were boiled until tender, and then tossed with honey and ginger. The cabbage was lightly stir-fried with butter and caraway seeds/

¹⁵ <http://www.godecookery.com/how2cook/howto01.htm>

¹⁶ <http://www.medievalcookery.com/cgi-bin/display.pl?vgs:33>

THE RECIPES: DESSERT

SÖT HAVREKAKA: SWEET OATCAKES

As mentioned previously, flat breads have been found in grave finds. I chose to make a sweet version for a “dessert” of sorts, using honey (which could be found in wild hives) as the sweetener. The redaction was based on one by Mistress Hauviette d’Anjou¹⁷, with the addition of a significant quantity of honey to the batter and drizzled over the cakes.

Hauviette’s Adapted Recipe for Oatcakes: makes 16 oatcakes

- 1 cup of oat flour (2 cups ground rolled oats)
- 1 cup of course ground steel cut oats
- 1cup butter milk or soured milk
- 3 eggs
- pinch of salt

Mix ingredients. Let sit for 1 hour. Cook as a pancake, on a hot griddle, not turning, but placing into a 350 degree oven to dry the tops.

They were actually fried on both sides, and were made using the buttermilk leftover from making the fresh butter for the feast.

BAKAT ÄPPLESÅS: BAKED APPLE SAUCE

Pureed apple recipes, often with almond milk, are fairly common – this one from A Noble Boke of Cookery¹⁸ is not unusual: *To mak an appillnose, tak apples and sethe them and lett them kelle ,then fret them throughe an heryn syff on fisse dais take almonde mylk and oile olyf ther to. and on flesshe days tak freche brothe and whit grece and sugur and put them in a pot and boile it and colour it with saffron and cast on pouders and serue it.* I do not think this recipe was entirely meant to be sweet, though it would depend on the apples – I took tart apples and added honey, butter and cinnamon and baked them (again, due to a limited quantity of stove space). Cinnamon would not have been available to the Norse, but it’s a familiar taste combination that was enjoyed by the feast goers.

¹⁷ <http://home.comcast.net/~iasmin/mkcc/MKCCfiles/AFeastAtCarrickFergus.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.medievalcookery.com/cgi-bin/display.pl?nob:248>