

Recipes and Information

Medieval Banquet – OES #155 – October 30, 2010

(Or What Went Right & What Went Wrong!)

Most recipes from: Santich, Barbara. The Original Mediterranean Cuisine: Medieval Recipes for Today. 1995. Chicago Review Press, Inc. Chicago, IL.

First Course

Bread: I served a sourdough baguette available from Safeway. Probably, a French baguette would have been better as sourdough was considered a lower class bread. Nobles would have had the very finest, sifted white flour breads known as “manchet”. However, I prefer sourdough!

Salat (Per 8 People Served)

1 pound mixed leaf greens

3 Tbsp fresh chives, chopped

3 Tbsp fresh dill, chopped

Dressed with a 1:1 ratio of Extra Virgin Olive Oil and White Wine Vinegar (roughly ¼ cup ea.)

***Note: I did this in huge batches so the recipe was more like:

4.5 pounds lettuces, 1 box each of fresh chive & dill, and 2 cups each oil & vinegar

Honey Butter: 2 cups honey beaten into 5 pounds of margarine

***When I make this at home, I put 3 Tbsp honey into 1 stick of unsalted butter or margarine

Herbed Butter: ¾ cup dried basil beaten into 5 pounds of margarine

***When I make this at home, I put 2 Tbsp dried basil into 1 stick of unsalted butter or margarine

Second Course

This ended up being my Third Course due to problems with the ovens.

Lemon Chicken

from Barbara Santich's The Original Mediterranean Cuisine based on “Di Limonia di Polli” from the Libro della Cucina.

1 KG Chicken drumsticks or 800g of Boneless chicken Breasts

2 onions, chopped

1-2 Tbsp Oil

1 cup ground blanched almonds

2 cups chicken stock

1-1 ½ Tbsp ground ginger

Freshly ground pepper

Salt

½ tsp pure saffron, infused in ¼ cup hot stock

Juice of 1 – 1 ½ lemons

That's the "official" recipe. In order to be able to serve 40+ people on a budget, I used:

3 large flats of Chicken thighs from Sam's Club (68 pieces total)
64 oz. of prepared, organic almond milk
2 cups lemon juice
4 cups chopped onion

Baked chicken thighs in a single layer. I did this by putting them in a 450 F oven for 30 minutes which was then turned down to 325 F and cooked for another 2 hours, or so I thought. Just before service, I discovered the ovens had gone out and had to serve the third course first! I'm not sure how long they actually cooked, but the ovens were relit and cranked back to 400 F. I made sure they had reached the safe internal temperature. The skin turned out to be really crispy and some were a little overcooked. Lesson: Don't trust the ovens if they aren't your own!

As the chicken was baking, I cooked the onions in a large pot, covered by about 2" of almond milk. I've found that it is so much cheaper to buy almond milk than make your own as called for in most medieval cooking. However, be aware that prepared almond milk doesn't have all the thickening properties of the homemade stuff & be sure to buy the **unsweetened** kind! Once the onions were cooked to be soft and sweet and **not more** than 15 minutes before serving, I added the lemon juice to them. I let it continue to simmer. The lemon flavor should be distinct, but not overpowering. I added salt and pepper to my taste. Due to cost, I did omit the ginger and saffron. At home, I definitely add those in, because I like the bright yellow color from the saffron and the extra flavor of the ginger.

The chicken thighs were arranged on the serving platters and several ladles of the onion mixture were poured over them.

Beans in the Mediterranean Style also from Santich based on "Fava Menata" from the Libro de Arte Coquinaria.

Small Recipe:

Soak dried broad beans in cold water for 24 hours and remove the skins. Set them to cook in fresh water for 45 – 60 minutes or until tender. If desired, add thyme, marjoram, and parsley to the pot. Remove herbs & puree the beans. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Meanwhile, fry 2 onions, finely chopped, in 2 Tbsp of olive oil until soft, then add 2 tsp finely chopped sage leaves and a small apple.

Ladle the broad beans into bowls, add a drizzle of olive oil and top with the onion and apples.

The "giant" recipe

8 - 16 oz. bags of dried Great Northern Beans
3 – 32 oz. boxes Vegetable Broth
2 cups chopped onions

I soaked the beans overnight per the instructions. There were no skins to remove because I chose not to use fava beans both for cost and health reasons. (Some people of Mediterranean descent

have an inherited allergy to fava beans. Although my guests were probably not in the high risk category, I didn't want to chance an unwelcome surprise for anyone! Besides, I make this frequently at home with Great Northern Beans and my kids will eat it. Why mess with a good thing?)

I set the beans to cook in a large pot with the veggie broth and enough extra water to cover them by at least 3 inches. Lesson: Stir them frequently to avoid the burnt on mess in the bottom of the pan! However, that burnt part, while not served, was probably what gave the beans their "smoky" flavor that people remarked on.

Because there were so many beans to cook, I put them to cook 4 hours before service. They ended up nearly disintegrating so I didn't need to puree them. I also completely forgot about cooking my onions or even dicing the apples that I had purchased. I topped each bowl of beans with 2 – 3 Tbsp of fresh, chopped onions just before serving.

Marinated Asparagus:

I served a prepared marinated asparagus that is available at certain times of the year from Sam's Club. It has a nice, spicy, vinegary bite to it. It was also far more cost effective to pay \$4.72 a jar than to buy fresh asparagus at \$4 a pound, trim, cook, and pickle it several weeks in advance.

Third Course

Actually served Second because it was ready when I needed to be serving!

Roasted Pork with Violet Garlic Sauce

Since I didn't have a spit and spit-boy and I didn't want to worry the fire department, my pork wasn't roasted over an open fire. Instead, I put 2 large pork loins in a roaster oven set at 325 F and let them go for 3 hours.

Violet Garlic Sauce also from Santich based on "Agliata Bianca"

2 Baguette-size rounds of white bread, 1 cm thick, crusts removed

2 – 3 cloves garlic, peeled

4 Tbsp stock, or water with a pinch of salt

2 Tbsp ground blanched almonds

Soak bread in stock or salted water then, using either a mortar and pestle or a food processor, combine all ingredients into a thick, smooth sauce. If a less pungent sauce is desired, roast the whole garlic cloves until soft (in the roasting pan with the meat perhaps, for 20-30 minutes).

As Santich notes, most of the medieval texts have a recipe for garlic sauce. There are also mentions of how to color it: nasturtium leaves, black grapes, and cherry juice.

Amounts used to for 40+ people:

½ sourdough baguette

¾ box of peeled garlic cloves (from Sam's Club)

2 cups beef stock

3 cups ground almonds
36 oz. Black Cherry juice

This turned out to be way too much!

I baked the garlic cloves at 350 F for 45 minutes to soften and sweeten.

Everything went through the food processor, but I left it rather rustic instead of making it absolutely smooth. Next time I make a smaller amount and much smoother!

Cabbage with Fennel and Apple from Santich based on “Cauli Verdi” from the Libro della Cucina.

Santich’s translation of the original recipe: Take the tips of cabbage, and boil them; then remove them, and fry in oil with sliced onion, and the white part of fennel, and sliced apple; and add a little stock: and then serve it in bowls, and sprinkle with spices. And you can also cook it with salted pork fat, with cheese and with poached eggs, and add spices; and offer it to your Lord.

What I did:

3 large Napa Cabbage (about 7 pounds!)
4 large onions sliced
6 large fennel bulbs sliced
5 pounds Gala apples diced small
4 cups 100% apple juice

Parboil the cabbage and drain well.

In a large roaster oven, cook the thinly sliced onion, fennel, and diced apples, in enough olive oil to coat the bottom of the roaster at 275 F until softened.

Add the cabbage and apple juice. Cook at 300 F for 2 hours.

I choose to use apple juice instead of stock in order to enhance the sweetness of this recipe. I found that the cabbage picked up the apple flavor nicely. When making smaller batches, I preferred not to cook it quite so long in order to keep the crunch of the apples and fennel.

Mushrooms

There are any number of recipes for mushrooms dating from early times. I choose to use Apicius, a Roman, as my starting point. There wasn’t one particular “recipe” that I used.

2 institutional sized cans of sliced mushrooms
2 bottles of cheap chardonnay wine
¼ cup black pepper

Heat all ingredients over a low fire until thoroughly warmed. Quick, easy, tasty.

Banqueting Course (Dessert)

Candied Walnuts – Purchased prepared at Sam’s Club.

Many nuts and spices were coated with sugar syrup in layers to create confit. It’s a pretty long process so I went the shortcut route.

Torta Blanca (Cheesecake)

I gave the recipe from Santich to several ladies from the chapter to prepare. Some made their own pie crusts while other used prepared crusts. When I make this at home, I use a crust from the store. Despite Grandmother's best efforts, I can't make a pie crust to save my soul!!

Recipe from Santich:

Shortcrust pastry made with 1 cup flour, 60 g butter, 1 egg yolk, and a little cold water

500 g Ricotta

2 large eggs

1 Tbsp melted butter

1 Tbsp soft white bread crumbs

3 Tbsp sugar

1 ½ tsp ginger

½ tsp cinnamon

2 Tbsp currants

Prepare the pastry in the usual way, and set aside to rest.

In a food processor blend cheese, eggs, butter, breadcrumbs, sugar and spices until smooth. (You could also add the egg white left over from the pastry.) Fold in currants.

Preheat oven to 180 C (350 F). Roll out pastry to fit a shallow 20-22 cm tart tin, spoon in filling and smooth surface with the back of a spoon. Bake in preheated oven for about 40 minutes, or until the top is firm and showing signs of browning. Cool before serving.

I assume the ladies used the recipe exactly as presented except for using a regular pie crust in a 9" deep dish pie pan instead of the shortcrust pastry in a tart tin. However, when I do this at home, I use 2 tsp cinnamon because I like that flavor. I will also add ½ tsp of nutmeg sometimes. I usually skip the currants!

Drinks:

Lemon Water – Water with Real Lemon to taste or about ¼ lemon juice to 2 quarts water

Sekanjabin

4 cups sugar

2 ½ cups water

1 cup white wine vinegar

1 box of spearmint

Dissolve the sugar in the water and bring to a boil. Add the vinegar and mint. Simmer until reduced by 1/3. Syrup will keep without refrigeration. Dilute to taste in ice cold water, roughly ½ cup to 2 quarts water. Modern Middle Eastern restaurants may serve with grated cucumber as garnish.

Note: I used to hate this stuff. In Germany, I found that varying the type of vinegar and the ratio of water to vinegar can make it highly palatable. However, in Germany, I also had access to Champagne vinegar at very affordable prices which had the lightest taste of any vinegar I had ever tried! It was the best for this recipe that I have found.

Rose Water Syrup

4 cups sugar

2 ½ cups water

1 cup white wine vinegar

1 cup rose water

5 drops red food coloring

Dissolve the sugar in the water and bring to a boil. Add the vinegar and rose water. Simmer until reduced by 1/3. Allow to cool and add the food coloring. Syrup will keep without refrigeration. Dilute to taste in ice cold water, roughly ½ cup to 2 quarts water.

Note: I forgot to serve this.

Info placed in the programs that were handed out to guests:

The Medieval Feast, in a noble household, was a long affair with a very specific order. The table was set with bread and the salt cellars before guests set down to a meal. Tablecloths and napkins were also present. It was customary in the Mediterranean region to give each diner a bowl or dish. (In northern Europe, bread trenchers were common and could be given to the poor after the meal was finished.) Wine was a staple of the meal and could be served watered. Drink syrups could also be served either hot or cold to flavor water. Knives and spoons would be present, but forks were not commonly present before the 15th century.

To the medieval person dishes must be served in order to balance the four humors of the body. The meal would begin with a series of small dishes. Boiled meats would come next followed by small roasts and then larger roasts. A series of sweet dishes signaled the end of the meal. In the Mediterranean, sweetness could be provided by cane sugar because the cane grew well in Spain's climate. In other areas of Europe, sugar was costly and, rather than be used in cooking, was sprinkled on the foods before serving. In those areas, honey was the sweetener of choice.

Because diners often shared dishes, there were set rules of etiquette and food presentation. Many of the Spanish and Italian cookery books included sections on the proper carving and service of the meat. Such carving was done at the table and larger households might even have a dedicated office of "carver".

When sharing a dish, etiquette demanded that each person take the portions closest, but no more than a fair portion. Salt was to be taken on the tip of a clean knife from the salt cellar and the knife placed on the edge of the plate, not the table! When drinking from a shared cup, each should drink from his or her own side and wipe the cup after each sip. When reaching to take a portion of food or to dip a piece of bread or meat, be sure that your sleeve does not fall into the plate.