

**Buñuelos en forma de pez**

A Fish Shaped Fritter from Martino da Como's

Libro de Arte Culinaria

Naples ca. 1450 - 1460

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## *The Recipe with My Translation*

175<sup>1</sup>. Buñuelos en forma de pez

Pela las almendras y hazlas blancas, y coge la pulpa de cualquier buen pescado, y májala muy bien junto con las almendras, añadiéndole al majarlo uva pasa con un poco de azúcar; también un poco de perejil y de mejorana cortada menuda con buenas especias y un poco de azafrán; y tendrás preparada una pasta fina al modo de la que se hacen las lasañas, cerrando y ligando en estas pasta trozos mayores o menores como te guste de esa composición. Después coge piezas de madera vaciadas en modo y forma de peces de diversa calidad y manera como te gusten, y con éstas darás forma a la dicha pasta con su relleno. Y estos buñuelos se deben freír con buen aceite, y todavía se pueden cocer secos en la sartén al modo de una torta; y cocidos parecerán peces.

### **My Rough Translation**

Peel the almonds and make them white, and take the pulp of whatever good fish, and mash it very well close with the almonds, adding to it the raisins to mash with a little sugar; also a little of parsley and of marjoram cut small with good spices and a little saffron; and having prepared a fine dough in the manner of which they make lasagnes, closing and binding in this dough pieces larger or smaller as the composition pleases you. Then take pieces of wood hollowed out in the manner and form of fish of diverse quality and style as pleases you, and with these give form to the said dough with its filling. And these fritters should be fried with good oil, and still they can be cooked dry in the frying pan in the style of a torte; and cooked they appear as fish.

### **My More Refined Translation**

My more refined translation would sound almost verbatim like the translation that I checked against so I am not included here. I used the recipe in Appendix A to work from.

### **My Redaction**

To make a “Fine dough”:

2 cups Unbleached flour

2 cups Whole wheat flour

1 tsp salt

Enough water to form an elastic dough (with the humidity in my house that was 1 ½ cups)

1. Combine all dry ingredients in a large glass mixing bowl. Make a well.
2. Pour about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of your water into the well and begin to slowly pull down flour from the sides of the well. Continue adding flour from the sides slowly.
3. Add more water as needed until a tender, but not sticky dough forms.
4. Turn the dough out onto a clean, floured workspace and knead until an elastic, shiny dough is achieved.
5. Allow the dough to rest for at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour.
6. Divide the dough into 2 balls of equal size.
7. Roll out each to a thin sheet measuring about 12 X 18 inches.
8. Allow dough to rest again before stuffing and cutting.

For the Filling:

16 oz. Flounder fillets

½ cup almonds

½ cup raisins

1 tsp. sugar

2/3 cup chopped fresh parsley

1/3 cup chopped fresh marjoram

1 tsp. fresh ginger root pieces cut small and thin

15 black peppercorns

A pinch of saffron threads in 2 tsp. water

(My saffron threads were very broken up. I would guess that there were about 10 in the pinch that I used, but I can't be sure.)

1. Mash the fish fillets well in a large mortar and pestle.
2. Blanch the almonds and run through a food processor until finely chopped.
3. Mash the almonds and sugar together in the mortar and pestle.
4. Combine all three in a larger mixing bowl.
5. In the mortar, mash all the herbs and spices along with the saffron liquid.
6. Combine with the fish.
7. Drop by teaspoons full onto a sheet of fresh pasta.
8. Cover with a second sheet of pasta and cut into rectangles.
9. Press into the fish mold. (See Appendix D)
10. Drop into boiling water and cook until they float or bake at 350 F for 15-20 minutes.

## The Redaction Process

Following Cindy Renfrow's instructions<sup>1</sup>, *Step 1* is to write out exactly what information is given in the original recipe.

| <u>Ingredient</u>    | <u>Amount</u> | <u>Instructions</u>  |
|----------------------|---------------|--|
| Almonds              |               | Peel/Blanch  |
| Flesh of "Good Fish" |               | Mash with the almonds  |
| Raisins              |               | Mash with almonds/fish   |
| Sugar                | a little      | Mash with previous   |
| Parsley              | a little      |  |
| Marjoram             | a little      | well chopped   |
| "Good Spices"        |               |  |
| Saffron              | a little      | Mash all spices/herbs with previous  |
| Fine dough           |               | In the manner of lasagne; use to encase the fish mixture & shape in a mold like fish; Fry in good oil or heat in a skillet like torte. |

*Step 2.* Examine the Ingredient List

### "Good Fish"

Since the Iberian Peninsula is bounded on three sides by water and has numerous rivers, the term "good fish" is open to the interpretation of the cook. Robin Carroll-Mann (Mistress Brigid ni

Chiarain) has translated the “Arte Cisoría”, a carving manual from 1423 Spain, which lists the following fishes as good for eating:

*Of the fish: whales, red-mullet, solrayo [type of ray], needlefish, pollack, conger-eel, moray eel, hake, turbot, percebe [mollusk common on coast of Galicia], mosello, sole, flounder, salmons, pike, gilt-head, eels, gudgeons, ralla [ray?], cuttlefish, octopus, tunny, dolphins, shad, sea-bream, red sea-bream, barbels, trout, ox-eye cackerels, sardines, lamprey, minnows, torquellas, lobsters, prawns, crawfish, sabogas [species of shad], yellow mackerel, loaches, flying fish, mullet, gatos [?] and those which closely resemble them; likewise the shellfish; such as oysters, mussels, tellinas [a kind of mussel], shrimp and the like.<sup>2</sup>*

Being rather land-locked and cash-poor, only a few of these options were open to me. I can easily obtain flounder and trout from my local commissary. I could also obtain salmon, lobster, prawn, oysters, mussels, and shrimp; however, the price for too much experimentation with these would rapidly become prohibitive. Fortunately for me (and perhaps unfortunately for the judges), I have cheap tastes. Having grown up eating flounder, I considered it a “good fish” for working with in this dish.

Another reason to go with flounder is that it has white flesh. Because the recipe calls for a little saffron, I believed that a white fleshed fish would have been used so as to appear yellow when colored and flavored with saffron.

### “Good Spices”

Determining exactly what “good spices” a medieval Spaniard (or rather in this case Aragonese or Catalan) would have used is a little more difficult for me as I have very modern tastes. I consider good spices to be things like salt and pepper. However, I've taken my cues from Ruperto de Nola<sup>3</sup> whose cookbook was probably available to Maestro Martino.

De Nola starts his meat day recipe section with a discussion of spices<sup>4</sup>. In his introduction to that section he states: “...there are in the world these three are the flower and the most princely: Sauce for Peacock, Mirrauste, and Blancmange,<sup>5</sup> ...” However, his first listing is for Common Spices. This is a mixture of cinnamon, clove, ginger, pepper, dried cilantro, and a little saffron (if you wish). He follows with several more recipes for spice mixtures, giving in each the spice and the proportions to be followed when uses the mixture for a particular dish.

For the dishes that he lists as the most princely, these are the spices called for in the recipes:

*Sauce for Peacock:* Cinnamon four ounces, cloves, one ounce, ginger one ounce, enough saffron to tint the sauce well; ... some add grains of paradise.<sup>6</sup>

*Mirrauste:* an ounce of cinnamon<sup>7</sup>

*Blancmange:* no spices listed<sup>8</sup>

As I continued looking through the recipes, the spices most commonly called for were cinnamon, cloves, and ginger. He also began to simply refer to “fine spices” as Martino does assuming the cook would know what these were. Therefore, I flipped over to de Nola's Lenten recipes to see what spices he called for in his fish dishes. I wanted to see if they were any different than the spices in his sauce recipes. I did find them different enough to comment upon. To me, it seemed that each type

of fish had a specific set of spices used in cooking. Although I did not find any specific flounder dishes, I've included a sampling of de Nola's other fish recipes below:

*On Lamprey in a Pie:* "...and then take its spices which are long pepper, and galingale and nutmeg, and all this should be well ground and mixed with the blood, and then baste the lamprey again with it; and put a nutmeg in the lamprey's mouth and in each little hole that it has place a clove: ..." <sup>9</sup>

*Salmon in a Crust:* "...and take its spices which are long pepper, galingale and ginger; and all this should be well ground with salt, in such a way that there is not too much spicing, but just enough; ..." <sup>10</sup>

*Sea Bream in a Crust:* "...and take its spices: pepper and salt and ginger; and a pair of whole cinnamon sticks..." <sup>11</sup>

*Sea Bream in Casserole:* "...and then add its spices, which are saffron and pepper and nutmeg, and a little salt all well ground; ... and some of all the herbs and a little bitter orange juice and if you wish to add raisins and almonds later, you can do so; ..." <sup>12</sup>

*Bonito in Casserole:* "...and then take the spices: as you should know, pepper and ginger and galingale and saffron and salt. And all this should be well ground and scatter it over the pieces of bonito; and then add some herbs which are: marjoram and parsley and mint, ..." <sup>13</sup>

*Sollo:* "...and it is eaten marinated with watered white vinegar and salt and oregano and a small clove of garlic which is crushed by the one who eats it, and you can also add some crushed cloves; and crushed ginger:" <sup>14</sup>

While I did not find a recipe for flounder in the translation of de Nola that I was working from, Dr. Ken Albala, does list a flounder recipe from that same work. The recipe that Cuenca calls "Plaice and Sole or Flatfish" <sup>15</sup> is what Albala calls "Cold Flounder" <sup>16</sup>. Although they disagree on the name of the fish, the recipe is essentially the same and calls for quickly frying the fish in oil and then covering with lemon and pepper. Dr. Albala's commentary states that "The palaya in the original recipe in Catalan is the Atlantic spotted flounder (*Citharus linguatula*) that is also common in the western Mediterranean. Any small flat fish, including sole, will work well." <sup>17</sup>

The temptation to use oregano and garlic, as in the Sollo recipe, was very strong. I adore that combination and use it in many of my modern dishes. However, I feared that I would flavor the fish as I always do and miss out on a more medieval combination of spices without ever experiencing the combinations listed in the other fish recipes. Therefore, I decided to go with the the most common spice from my examples: pepper. It is also what is used in the Flounder recipe that Albala cites. I further decided to add a little fresh ginger root since that also came up frequently among de Nola's recipes.

### **"Fine Dough"**

I had a difficult time locating a true pasta recipe from the time period and location of Martino and de Nola. That is not to say that they do not exist. I just did not locate one that said "and this is how to make pasta". Extrapolating from comments by Barbara Santich, author of The Original Mediterranean Cuisine, this may be because there was a specific pasta makers guild in Italy <sup>18</sup>. I did, however, look at the book *Pleyn Delit* by Constance B. Hieatt, et al. (Please see Appendix A for a copy of the specific recipe.)

Based on the recipe from Pleyn Delit as well as the many modern recipes I looked at, pasta can be made from only two ingredients: flour and water. Modern pastas add egg and oil to condition the dough and make it softer. I did not. For one thing, Constance Heatt states that “if you make them [noodles] yourself, they will be more authentic if you omit eggs”<sup>19</sup> which seems to be a consensus of several modern cooks whose recipes I looked at. However, in that same recipe, she later says to make fresh pasta with eggs, flour, sugar, and ginger.<sup>20</sup>

I did decide to use a blend of unbleached flour and whole wheat flour. I am trying to eat a little more healthfully as a modern principle for one thing, but on the other hand, in that time period of Spain I believe that freshly ground flour would have been made strictly from wheat and although it could be and was sifted to create a fine white flour, it would not be as refined as our all-purpose flour. I used unbleached flour also to give the pasta a little less texture and be slightly softer.

### Step 3: Experimentation

The most important thing that I found in playing with recipes for this was that fresh herbs aren't as flavorful as dried ones. I had to keep adding more to strike a balance. On the other hand, saffron is quite powerful and a little goes a long way.

## *Appendix A: Other Recipes Consulted*

To double check my translation of the recipe:

### Fish-Shaped Fritters<sup>1</sup>

Peel and blanch some almonds, and take the flesh of some good fish and crush it well together with the almonds, adding some raisins as well to be crushed with a little sugar; likewise, a bit of parsley and marjoram finely chopped with some good spices and a little saffron; prepare beforehand a thin dough in the same manner that lasagne are made, encasing and binding this mixture in the dough, in bigger or smaller pieces, as you wish. Then take some wooden molds that have been carved in the shape of fish in different qualities and in different manners, as you like, and use them to shape the dough with its filling. These fritters should be fried in good oil and they can also be cooked dry in a pan the same way as a torte; and once cooked, they will resemble fish.

To learn about fresh pasta:

### Ravioli for Non-Lenten Times<sup>2</sup>

For the pasta:

2 ¼ cups flour, plus extra for dusting

3 eggs

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

Pinch of salt

### Losyns<sup>3</sup>

Take good broth and do in an erthen pot. Take flour of pandemayne and make [th]eref past with water, and make [th]eref thynne foyles as paper with a roller; drye it harde and see[th] it in broth. Take chese ruayn grated and lay it in disshes with powdour douce, and lay [th]eron loseyns isode as hoole as [th]ou myzt, and above powdour and chese; and so twyce or thryse, & serve it forth.

## *Appendix B: Cook's Notes*

In the future, when funds permit, I would be incredibly tempted to try this with a fresh slab of salmon. First, because I would be interested to see the effect of saffron on salmon, and, second, because even if I like a cheap flounder fillet, I still like a really good salmon steak!! I would also like to try the oregano spice combination from the Sollo recipe.

I have been in several competitions now and even though I always explain in my documentation that it is not easy for me to use a mortar and pestle, I always get told that I should. At the Colorado Renaissance Festival this summer, I found a vendor selling cast iron mortars and pestles. After some discussion with him, I decided to buy one because the heft of the pestle was such that it did not place as much strain on my wrists. However, I was still unable to mash almonds in the thing without pain. Since I am a wimp, at the first tinge, I quit. I'll take the mark down for using modern equipment. One option in the future would be to find a kitchen slave to do almonds for me.

A period cook would have just purchased a food mold. I opted to try to make one. I found that I lacked the patience to do such a project. The tail came out so that it gave the desired shape. Everything else lacked definition when I used my mold. I ended up using a knife to define the shape of the fish in the fresh pasta. This could also be because I overstuffed my pasta pieces. I was going for large pieces as would be served somewhere like Olive Garden, which serves rather large mushroom ravioli's.

I think this recipe would benefit from a sauce of some sort if using the boiled raviolis.

Having tried the baked and the boiled version, I much prefer the baked. The fish set up much better.

## *Appendix C: What I Learned*

First and foremost, I learned that making fresh pasta is not a scary thing. It is really as easy a process as baking bread. I also learned as a side bar to this that one does not need a pasta maker. Using my own two hands to knead it and a heavy wooden rolling pin, I was able to make passable pasta sheets.

Many of the recipes that I looked at specified kneading the dough on a smooth wooden or marble cutting board. I do not own either so I had to look around for a suitable substitute. The best thing I could find in my kitchen was my well used rectangular baking stone. Not only was it a very smooth surface to knead on, but it was also the perfect size & shape for approximating how big to roll out the dough. I also found that after a good scrubbing, my (cooled) ceramic cook top made a great kneading surface. It was just the right height to aid my aching back.

I learned I still would not want the job of almond peeler in anybody's kitchen. I've been told repeatedly how easy it is to blanch almonds. It does not work for me. I do something wrong every time and spend forever trying to use my fingernails to get the skin to start peeling

## *Appendix D: Carving a Fish Mold*

As part of my cooking entry for the Championship competition, I needed to obtain a fish mold that was small enough to press a ravioli into the shape of a fish. The recipe from Maestro Martino da Como even goes so far as to specify that it be “wooden molds that have been carved in the shape of fish in different qualities and in different manners, as you like”. As I could not find any of those, I decided to try my luck carving my own. While I learned that wood carving isn't going to be a specialty of mine because I just don't have the patience, I wouldn't be adverse to trying again at a less stressful time to improve the shaping of the mold.

### Tools used:

Cheap set of wood carving tools from Harbor Freight  
A regular hammer  
Sandpaper of questionable size  
A block of scrap maple from Colorado Woodworkers

### Process:

1. Drew a simple fish shape on the wood.
2. Hollowed out the body with a curved chisel.
3. Used a straight and a slanted chisel to hollow out the tail and fins.
4. Used a V-shaped gouge to put in the “striping” of the fish's tail.
5. Used the curved, straight, and slanted chisels to mark and hollow out the fins.
6. Smoothed the whole inside with sandpaper to get rid of the little bits of wood left from lifting out the pieces with the chisel. (I know sandpaper isn't period. See reference #2)
7. Scrubbed the whole thing at the sink to get rid of the sandpaper and steel wool that I had originally tried to use.
8. Allowed to dry and rubbed with olive oil. (See reference #2)

### What I learned:

1. I don't have the patience for this type of detail work.
2. I obtained a smoother line by working from each outer edge toward the middle.
3. It's much easier to work with the grain/growth rings of the wood.
4. Maple is called a “hardwood” because it is HARD.  
(OK. Not that isn't really the reason, but it works for me.)

### References:

Halstead, Gary R. “European Woodworking Tools: 600-1600 C.E.” *Compleat Anachronist* #121

Medieval Woodworking F.A.Q.: <http://tech.cls.utk.edu/wood/faq/index.htm>

## *End Notes*

### The Recipe with My Translation

1. Recipe #175 as numbered in La cocina mediterránea en el inicio del Renacimiento by Juan Cruz Cruz.
- 2.
3. I am working from Vincent F. Cuenca's translation. His translation is available from Poison Pen Press. However, Robin Carroll-Mann has a free version available on Stefan's Florilegium.
4. Cuenca p. 16
5. Cuenca p. 16
6. Cuenca p. 16
7. Cuenca p. 17
8. Cuenca pp. 17-18
9. Cuenca pp. 65-66
10. Cuenca p. 66
11. Cuenca pp. 68-69
12. Cuenca p. 69
13. Cuenca p. 69
14. Cuenca p. 76
15. Cuenca p. 77
16. Albala p. 31
17. Albala p. 31
18. Santich p. 28 “In medieval Florence, pasta-makers (lasagnai) had their own guild; their product came in sheets 3-4 cm (about 1 ½ in) wide, with one edge crinkled. ... The term lasagne was applied principally to fresh pasta.”
19. Hieatt, pages are unnumbered, but it is in the redaction for recipe 11 “Makerouns”
20. Hieatt, again pages are unnumbered, but it is the special note for recipe 11

### Appendix A: Other Recipes Consulted

1. Ballerini p.94
2. Ballerini p.153 I reproduced only the portion concerned with the recipe for the pasta.
3. Hieatt et al, recipe 12 “Losyns”

## ***Bibliography***

Albala, Ken. Cooking in Europe 1250-1650. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006. ISBN: 0-313-33096-4.

Cruz, Juan Cruz. La cocina mediterránea en el inicio del Renacimiento. Huesca, Spain: La Val de Onsera, 1997. ISBN: 84-88518-39-0.

Cuenca, Vincent F. Translator. The “Libro de Cozina” of Master Ruperto de Nola, 1529 Logroño. 2001 Self-Published

Hiatt, Constance B., Brenda Hosington, and Sharon Butler. Pleyn Delit: Medieval Cookery for Modern Cooks. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. ISBN: 0-8020-7632-7.

## Recipe Trials & Errors:

Making Fresh Pasta 17 September 2008:

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup Unbleached Flour + extra for kneading

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup Stone Ground Wheat Flour

Pinch sea salt (probably  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. in my palm)

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup of cool water + 2 tbsp

Combine dry ingredients.

Work in water, pulling flour from the sides of the well.

Knead the dough ball for 12 minutes until shiny and well-combined.

Let dough rest for 30 minutes.

Roll out into a very thin sheet. Cut into desired shapes.

Let cut pasta rest for 30 minutes.

Boil for 3 minutes.

YUMMY!!!

Exploring the flavor profile 24 September 2008:

12 oz. Flounder Filets

$\frac{1}{4}$  c. Raisins

$\frac{1}{4}$  c. Almonds

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. Sugar

2 stems of Marjoram

2 stems of Parsley

$\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. fresh ground pepper

$\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. Sea Salt

$\frac{1}{8}$  tsp. Ground Ginger

3 threads Saffron in 1 tsp. warm water

--Put everything but the fish through the food processor

--Marjoram and Parsley are quite pungent

--The whole goop was very sticky

--Placed on top of fish and baked at 400 F for 20 minutes