

Discussion: Cookbooks and Where to Start

By THL Johnnae llyn Lewis, CE

*In late March 2016, the local Cynnabar Baronial **Book Club** section focused “on period cooking.” The instructions read: “Please bring a short list of your favorite food related books. Discussion is Round Robin format.” This is the guide which local member and librarian Johnnae prepared for the session. She has updated for readers here.*

In the spirit of Ranganathan’s laws of librarianship and the ideal of “Every reader his [or her] book,” my question as to which cookery books and works on food history might be appropriate for a reader would be: what do you the Reader want to accomplish? By this I mean what do you want to achieve in cookery or play with in terms of food and cookery? Are you looking for some, perhaps just a few easy standby recipes for suitably historical dishes? Perhaps you need suitable recipes for potlucks, luncheons, or contributed tables of dessert items. Are you interested more in the history and foodways of a certain period or place? Are you interested in the role food played in the culture of the medieval period or in the lives of famous Renaissance or Elizabethan personages? Do you want to know what dishes or foods your persona might have eaten back when? Or are you interested in cookery of a specific type? Are you interested in baking bread, cakes, spit cooking or roasting over an open fire, creating your own cheeses, or even creating sugar subtleties and confections? Do you want to throw caution to the wind and become a feast cook responsible for feeding 100 plus diners?

Despite this being a short article on books, I am going to start by advocating heresy and suggest that all a beginner or even a moderately established cook needs when starting out is to use the very marvelous website **medievalcookery.com**. The Midrealm's Master Edouard Halidai (Daniel Myers) created the site. It offers over 100 carefully tested redacted recipes, a bibliography, and a database of recipes with an ingredient keyword index. Plus it provides a gateway to all the online cookery texts of period or appropriate interest which are already housed on the web. As a secondary source, take a look at Stefan's Florilegium <http://www.florilegium.org//>. [Librarian's Note: When using the Florilegium, please be aware that the editor, THL Stefan, does not edit or remove faulty information or references. Be sure to read all the sections through from the start to the end, as later posts may correct misinformation cited earlier.]

My one invaluable tip: When embarking in cookery, make it a practice to keep files and notebooks. If you want to engage in redacting recipes, note your attempts. It takes practice before a reader can easily redact, render, or work out his/her own versions of an actual historic recipe. Keeping track will give you the all-important record of attempts and successes, trials and errors. If you are saving your work on a computer, be sure it is backed up on the cloud. Far too often, recipes and sources have been irretrievably lost due to computer crashes or software malfunctions.

Also be sure and note sources carefully if you copy or Xerox a section of recipes. There's nothing worse than an original or redacted recipe with no source

attached. Likewise, if you copy something off the Internet, get the source (www.address) copied. (It's not a bad idea to do a page grab.) Please be aware online quality varies even in terms of Society websites and recipes. Some are great; some are awful; some are just plainly inauthentic or worse! Verify, research, verify. Do not think for a minute that all you need to do is just get on Yahoo and type in medieval and that your hits will be authentic enough for any sort of A&S contest. Facebook groups these days may provide hints or links but it's not for serious research. The hive mind may be convenient to poll off one's phone, but it's a matter of authority. The person who replies to a Facebook question may mean well, but their information may be just a folktale or false. Did they actually look it up? Do they have any real experience? Do they research and have a collection in the topic? Again-- Verify, research, verify! Lastly, be honest. If a recipe came from a modern website or off the Food Network, say so. Lastly, never claim another's recipe or handout as your own. Chances are, you will get caught!

As to books, suggested Works in English to buy or use. Both of these are widely available and can be downloaded into your Kindle e-readers. As with all suggested volumes, if funds are short, please consider buying used copies or look at the volumes mentioned here at your local library or request through interlibrary loan.

Brears, Peter. **All the King's Cooks. The Tudor Kitchens of King Henry VIII at Hampton Court Palace.** London: Souvenir Press, 1999. Paperback ed. 2011. Excellent text with 82 recipes from 16th century England. Highly recommended. Excellent photos and drawings. Great Tudor source. KINDLE version available.

Hieatt, Constance and Sharon Butler. **Pleyn Delit. Medieval Cookery for Modern Cooks.** 1976. 1979. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. The second edition is credited to Hieatt, Brenda Hosington, and Butler. Good basic text with 142 documented recipes of English & French origin. KINDLE version available.

For French and Italian recipes, then I recommend starting with:

Redon, Odile, Françoise Sabban, and Silvano Serventi. **The Medieval Kitchen. Recipes from France and Italy.** Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998. The American edition is translated by Edward Schneider. Available in paperback. A favorite of many Society cooks with 150 14th and 15th century French and Italian recipes.

If you want to spend some money or are looking for a suitable gift, then consider:

Brears, Peter. **Cooking and Dining In Medieval England.** Totnes, Devon, UK: Prospect Books, 2008. 557 pp., 75 B/W line drawings. [Notes: 485-503. Notes on Illustrations: 504- 511. List of Illustrations: 512-514. Bibliography: 515- 528. Indexes: 529-557.] [Paperback ed. 2012. ISBN: 978-1-903018-55-2] This is Peter Brears' award winning volume on English medieval cookery. 200 plus recipes. **Tournaments Illuminated** published my review. I highly recommend the book.

Brears, Peter. **Cooking and Dining In Tudor and Early Stuart England.** London: Prospect Books, 2015. 670 pp., 141 B/W line drawings/figures. [Notes: 613-632. Bibliography: 633-641. Indexes [both general and recipes]: 642-670.] Marvelous new companion volume to his earlier volume. 370 plus recipes and variations. Includes menus, calendar customs, banquets, banqueting fare, etc. Essential and highly recommended volume. **Tournaments Illuminated** again published my review. I again highly recommend the book.

Culinary Readers interested in a more serious way may find my bibliographies of interest. **The Citadel** recently carried a few of my special bibliographies as part of the "Starting Points" series. These include bibliographies for England, Spain/Italy, Scandinavia, and Poland. These original bibliographic guides list original printed works, manuscripts, historical and reference works as well as bibliographies and online sources and projects.