

A brief class on

# Reading Middle-English Recipes

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## I. Translation vs. Transcription vs. Facsimilie

**Translations** are the easiest to work from as they are, if not in modern English, at least close to it. However they are not without problem as sometimes the wording is vague or errors may have been introduced in the translation process.

*To Make Pyes*

*The mutton or beef must be minced finely for pies and seasoned with salt and pepper, and a little saffron to colour it. Also add a good quantity of suet or marrow, a little vinegar, prunes, large raisins and dates. Take the best of the broth, and if you would like a paste royal, take butter and egg yolks and mix this broth with some flour to make the pastry.*

*(author's translation, A Proper Newe Booke of Cokerie)*

*To make Pyes.*

*Pyes of mutton or beif must be fyne mynced and ceasoned wyth pepper and salte, and a lyttle saffron to coloure it, suet or marrow a good quantite, a lyttle vyneger, prumes, greate raysins, and dates, take the fattest of the broathe of powdred beyfe, and yf you wyll haue paest royall, take butter and yolkes of egges, and to tempre the flowre to make the paeste.*

*(my transcription from a facsimile, A Proper Newe Booke of Cokerie)*

**Transcriptions** are intended to be a faithful copy of the original manuscript, but in a more readable form. A transcription is only as good as the transcriber though, and substantial errors can be introduced by misinterpreting or completely missing diacritical marks and misreading difficult script.

*Bukkenade. Take Henn or Conyng or Veel or other Flessh and hewe hem to gobett waische it and hit well.*

*(taken from an online transcription, Forme of Cury)*

*Bukkenade. Take hennes oper connynges oper veel oper oper flessh & hewe hem to gobettes. Waische it and sepe hit well.*

*(transcription of the same recipe from Curye on English)*

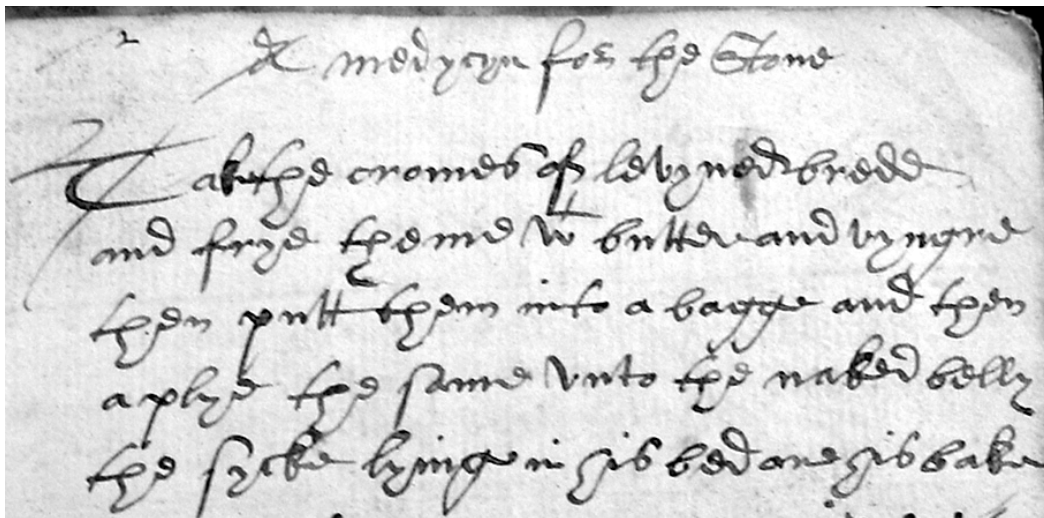
**Bukkenade 9.**

**xvii.**

**Take Henn<sup>9</sup> r<sup>9</sup> op<sup>9</sup> Conyng<sup>9</sup> : op<sup>9</sup> Veel op<sup>9</sup> op<sup>9</sup> Flessh ā  
hewe hem to gobett<sup>9</sup> waische it and hit well<sup>9</sup>. grynde**

*(facsimilie of Pegge's transcription)*

**Facsimilies** are the next best thing to seeing the original, but the script can be very hard for a novice (or even an expert) to read.



*(facsimilie of a medicinal - this recipe is titled "A Medycyn for the Stone")*

## II. Unusual Letters

There are a few letters that appear in Middle-English texts that are not used in modern English.

- þ** (thorn)      Used for a **th** sound. The lower case **þ** in handwritten documents is easily confused with the letter **y**, which is the origin of the “Ye Olde Shoppe” abomination. This would more accurately be “Þe Olde Shoppe”, and would still have been pronounced the same as it is now.
- Ð or ð** (eth)      This letter shows up in very early Middle-English and was used for the voiced **th** (e.g. the **th** in **that**). It fell out of use early on and was replaced by **þ**.
- ȝ** (yogh)      The yogh is a confused letter. It was sometimes used where we’d use a **gh** (making night turn out as **niȝt**), and at other times was used in the place of a **y** or **i** (making night turn out **nȝght**). It was also used in French words - including english words borrowed from the french - in place of the vowel sound **é**, and is sometimes transcribed as an **es**, **ez** or just **z**.

## III. Weird Marks

In some transcripts, such as Pegge’s transcription of *Forme of Cury*, the transcriber attempts to reproduce in clear form the various marks and abbreviations found in the original manuscript. Talk about cryptic. These things can be a real pain.

- ā, ū, ō**      A line over a vowel indicated a missing **m**, **n**, or **i** (nasal consonant) or a missing syllable involving **m**, **n**, or **i**. For example, suspension might have been written *suspensiō*.
- ʹ or ‘**      An apostrophe or what looks like a superscript **9** usually indicates a missing **us** at the end of a word, or a missing **e** or **er** (or **es**?) in the middle or end of a word.
- ₄**      A symbol that looks like a subscript **4** at the end of a word normally marks a missing **rum** or **run**.

**p and q** There are a number of variants of p and q. **p̃** or **p<sup>a</sup>** (**pra**), **p̄** (**pre**), **p<sup>i</sup>** (**pri**), **p** (**pro**), **p̄** (**per, par, por**), **q̃** or **q<sup>a</sup>** (**qua, quam**), **q̄** (**que**), **q<sup>o</sup>** (**quo**), **q** (**quae, qui, quod**), **q̄** (**que, quam, quid**), **q·** (**quasi**), **·q·** (**quaestio, quondam**), **q3** (**quia**), **q<sup>9</sup>** (**quibus**), **q<sup>m</sup>** (**quantum**), and many others.

#### IV. Variable Spelling

Noah Webster was born on October 16, 1758. Note how this is over 150 years after the end of the medieval period, which gave those writing Middle-English plenty of leeway in terms of spelling. There are some notable tendencies though to their orthography.

**y and i** The letters **y** and **i** were often interchanged. Common examples of this are words like **yt** (it), **yf** (if), **ys** (is), and **yn** (in) on the one hand, and **mani** (many) on the other.

**u and v** These letters were used interchangeably, resulting in words like **vp** (up) and **uerious** (various).

**w** The letter **w** was still pretty new on the scene and was often replaced by a literal double-u. Since **u** and **v** were interchangeable though, this usually became a double-v as in **nevv** (new). This can be extra confusing with words like **cuuer** (cover) where the **uu** looks like it should be a **w**, but is actually meant to be a **uv**. Occasionally a **w** is used in place of a **v**, as in **clowes** (cloves).

**th -> h** Occasionally a **th** is replaced with an **h**, as in **hem** (them).

**y-** The prefix **y-** is used to mark a verb as past tense instead of the suffix **ed**, as in the word **y-couer** (covered). Some times the hyphen is left out, and in later years both the **y-** prefix and the **ed** suffix are used, as in **y-baked** (baked).

**h** Sometimes the initial **h** of a word is dropped. Other times an **h** is added to a word that starts with a vowel. There's just no sense in it.

**j -> i** The letter **j** is relatively modern variant of the letter **i**. Words like **juice** would have been spelled **iuice**.

When in doubt, sometimes pronouncing the word out loud will help to figure out what the writer meant.

## V. Miscellaneous Words

There are numerous strange words in Middle-English, mostly due to the influence of the French and German languages. Note that there may be many spelling variations for each of the words below.

<b>alay</b> (v.)	mix with, pour on top of, set alongside of
<b>alkinet</b> (n.)	a red colorant
<b>amidon</b> (n.)	wheat starch
<b>blanc</b> (adj.)	white (from French)
<b>brawn</b> (n.)	meat, flesh
<b>bray</b> (v.)	grate
<b>brewet</b> (n.)	stew or soup
<b>canelle</b> (n.)	cinnamon ( <i>Cinnamomum cassia</i> )
<b>char</b> (n.)	meat or flesh, also the “flesh” of a fruit
<b>chargent</b> (adj.)	thick, like oatmeal
<b>civey</b> (n.)	gravy, usually with onions
<b>cubebs</b> (n.)	a spice, sometimes called tailed pepper ( <i>Piper cubeba</i> )
<b>dight</b> (v.)	the term for carving a swan, crane, heron, etc....
<b>eiren</b> (n.)	eggs
<b>endore</b> (v.)	to color gold
<b>farce</b> (v.)	stuff
<b>farsure</b> (n.)	stuffing
<b>foil</b> (n.)	leaf or sheet (from French)
<b>galingale</b> (n.)	a spice, similar to ginger ( <i>Alpinia galanga</i> )
<b>hyssop</b> (n.)	an herb, ( <i>Hyssopus officinalis</i> )
<b>kine</b> (n.)	old word for cattle
<b>larding</b> (v.)	a method for adding fat to lean meats. Small holes are poked into the meat and little slivers of fat (usually pork fat) are inserted.
<b>leche</b> (v.)	to slice, also (n.) a slice
<b>let / lait</b> (n.)	milk (from French)
<b>menge</b> (v.)	mix, related to “mingle”

**messe** (v.) serve

**mye** (v.) grate

**nym** (v.) take (from German)

**oper** (conj.) can mean both “or” and “other”, and when doubled means “or other”

**paindemain** (n.) bread (from French)

**pomme** (n.) apple (from French)

**pottage** (n.) stew or soup

**saunders** (n.) red sandalwood (*Pterocarpus santalinus*)

**seþe** (v.) boil (seethe)

**skirrit** (n.) a water parsnip (*Sium sisarum*)

**soden** (adj.) boiled (also soþen or y-sode)

**standing** (adj.) very thick, like nearly set plaster

**sumdelle** (adv.) somewhat, a small amount

**swing** (v.) whisk, whip

**temper** (v.) to mix, has connotations around the for humors or elements (tempering dry with wet, cold with hot)

**trap** (n.) a baking pan

**verjuice** (n.) the sour juice of unripe grapes or crabapples (from French *vert juice* meaning “green juice”)

**wardons** (n.) pears

**wastel** (n.) a fine, white grade of bread

## VI. Practice Texts

28 For to make capons in casselys. Nym caponys & schald hem. Nym a penne & opyn þe sckyn at þe heuyd & blowe hem tyl þe sckyn ryse from þe flesche, & do of þe skyn al hole. & seþ þe lyre of hennyn & ʒolkys of heyrn & god powder, & make a farsure, & fil ful þe skyn and perboyle yt, & do yt on a spete & rost yt and droppe yt wyþ ʒolkes of eyryn & god powder rostyng. & nym þe caponys body & larde yt, & roste it & nym almaunde mylk and amydown and mak a batur, & droppe þe body rostyng, & serue yt forþe. [*Curye on Inglisch*]

35 For to make apulmose, tak applys & seþ hem and let hem kele, & after mak hem þorwe a cloþ & do hem in a pot. & kast to þat mylk of almaundys, wyþ gode broþ of buf in flesh dayes; do bred ymyed þerto. & þe fisch dayes, do þerto oyle of olyue, & do þerto sugur & coloure it wyth safroun, & strew þeron powder & serue it forþe. [*Curye on Inglisch*]

.xxxv. Perys en Compost. – Take Wyne an Canel, & a gret dele of Whyte Sugre, an set it on þe fyre & hete it hote, but let it nowt boyle, and draw it þorwe a straynoure; þan take fayre Datys, an pyke owt þe stonys, an leche hem alle þinne, an caste þer-to; þanne take Wardonys, an pare hem and sethe hem, an leche hem alle þinne, & caste þer-to in-to þe Syryppe: þanne take a lytil Sawnderys, and caste þer-to, an sette it on þe fyre; an ʒif þow hast charde quynce, caste þer-to in þe boyling, an loke þat it stonde wyl with Sugre, an wyl lyid wyth Canel, an caste Salt þer-to, an let it boyle; an þan caste yt on a treen vessel, & lat it kele, & serue f. [*Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*]

.xlix. Bryndons. – Take Wyn, & putte in a potte, an clarifiyed hony, an Saundereys, pepir, Safroun, Clowes, Maces, & Quybibys, & mynced Datys, Pynys and Roysonys of Corauns, & a lytil Vynegre, & sethe it on þe fyre; an sethe fyges in Wyne, & grynde hem, & draw hem þorw a straynoure, & caste þer-to, an lete hem boyle alle to-gederys; þan take fayre flowre, Safroun, Sugre, & Fayre Water, ande make þer-of cakys, and let hem be þinne Inow; þan kytte hem y lyke lechyngys, an caste hem in fayre Oyle, and fry hem a lytil whyle; þanne take hem owt of þe panne, an caste in-to a vesselle with þe Syrippe, & so serue hem forth, þe bryndonys an þe Sirippe, in a dysse; & let þe Sirippe be rennyng, & not to Styf. [*Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*]

Hereberht  
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Erodes pou wykked fo / whar of `ys' þy dredinge.  
 And why art þou so sore a gast / of cristes tocominge.  
 Ne reueth hé nouth erthlich gód / þat maketh ous heuenekynges.  
 Þe kynges wenden here way and foleweden þe sterre.  
 And sothfast lyzth wyth sterre lyth souhten vrom so verre.  
 And sheuden wel þat he `ys' god / in gold / and stor / and mirre.  
 Crist ycleped heuene lomb / so com to seynt Ion.  
 And of hym þas yshafte þe sinne naddre non.  
 To halethen oure wylouth shatey / þat sinne hanet uorden.  
 A nesse mylþe he cude / wyl he þas at a feste.  
 He made vulle þyþ / þyþ wáter / þyþ annes þy þe lyste.  
 Þwe þe shatey tynde in to þyþ / wrou cristes oure heste.  
 Gele loueþ þe myd þe / þat sheshedest þe to dny.  
 Þyþ þe uader and þe holy gost / þyþ heuten endecny.  
 Hostis Herodes  
impie 7c  
 That ma  
 Uniaqua pini  
 Noui gen' poten  
 Gloua t' dnc.

Erodes þou wykked fo / whar of `ys' þy dredinge.  
 And why art þou so sore a gast / of cristes tocominge.  
 Ne reueth hé nouth erthlich gód / þat maketh ous heuenekynges.

Þe kynges wenden here way and foleweden þe sterre.  
 And sothfast lyzth wyth sterre lyth souhten vrom so verre.  
 And sheuden wel þat he `ys' god / in gold / and stor / and mirre.

William Herebert, OFM (d. ca. 1333); "Hostis Herodes impie," (Index of Middle English Verse No. 1213); from British Library MS Addit. 46919, f. 205r