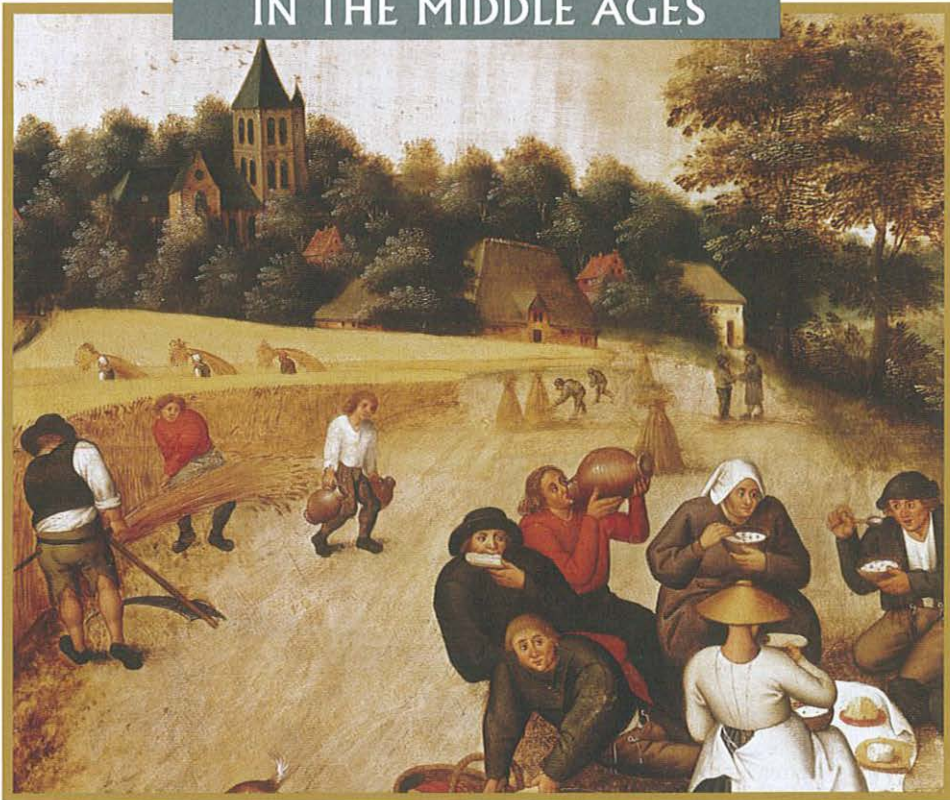




WORLD ALMANAC® LIBRARY OF THE MIDDLE AGES

feudalism and village life

IN THE MIDDLE AGES



MERCEDES PADRINO

SALINA FREE LIBRARY
100 BELMONT STREET
MATTYDALE, NY 13211

2006



Gareth Stevens
Publishing

food and drink

For people at all levels of society, bread was the basis of every meal. It was even the plate! Instead of dishes, diners ate off thick slices of old bread, called trenchers. The trenchers softened as they absorbed the juices and sauces from the food.

Dinner with a Knight

The lord's household ate large quantities of bread at every meal. The bread served to nobles, however, was much finer than the bread given to servants. Meat was the second most important part of meals. The knightly class ate beef and mutton often and pork, veal, and poultry less frequently. Game, such as venison and partridge, was a special treat rather than a staple. Often the meat was salted. Joints of meat or birds were roasted whole on a spit or were cut up and cooked with liquid in a pot. They were also baked in pies.

People ate fish as well. Inland people ate freshwater fish from ponds or streams, but they

also ate ocean fish that had been salted, smoked, or dried. People who lived near the coast had a far greater variety of fresh fish and shellfish. Other important sources of protein were cheese and eggs.

Vegetables and fruits were not always plentiful. Garden greens and most fruit had to be eaten in season, so choices were limited in winter. Roots—like turnips, carrots, and onions—

▼ Visits from high nobles were occasions for feasting. Here, King John I of Portugal entertains the Duke of Lancaster. The rectangle on the table in front of each diner is his trencher. The round buns—made from lighter flour—were the bread they actually ate.



PRESERVING with Salt

After a large animal was slaughtered, the meat was treated with salt to keep it from spoiling. In one process, the salt was pounded very fine by hand. Then the meat was coated with it and left to rest in a tub of salt. A second way of preserving meat was to place it in a strong brine—a mixture of salt and water. No matter which method was used, the meat had to be soaked and rinsed well to get the excess salt off before cooking.

stayed fresh in the cold. Peas and beans could be dried and later cooked into thick soups with bacon, vegetables, and spices.

People everywhere drank alcoholic beverages. In wine-producing areas, the entire household drank wine. In areas that did not produce wine, knights and ladies drank imported wine, and the domestic staff drank ale or beer. Nobles drank ale as a thirst quencher any time of day. Milk was reserved for children and cooking. Some people drank cider or mead, an alcoholic drink made from honey.

A MEDIEVAL KNIGHT'S DINNER

*"Then attendants set a table upon trestles broad,
And lustrous white linen they laid thereupon,
A saltcellar of silver, spoons of the same.
He washed himself well and went to his place,
Men set his fare before him in fashion most fit.
There were soups of all sorts, seasoned with skill,
Double-sized servings, and sundry fish,
Some baked, some breaded, some broiled on
the coals,
Some simmered, some in stews, steaming
with spice,
And with sauces to sup that suited his taste."*

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,
fourteenth century¹³

Medieval people liked spicy food. They grew sage, borage, mustard, and many other herbs in their gardens. Wealthy people purchased a tremendous variety of spices from Asia, including pepper, cinnamon, and cumin, and other spices with exotic names, such as zedoary (a bitter plant) and grains of paradise (a peppery seed). Herbs and spices were used in combination. People also flavored wine and other drinks with them and used them to make medicines. Cooks used honey and sugar in both main dishes and desserts.

Asian spices were luxury items and very costly. Some foods grown in Europe became luxuries when shipped to other areas. For example, almonds, rice, and figs, which grew in Spain and Italy, were very expensive in northern Europe. Due to their value, these items were locked away. Every day, the cook had to ask for the luxury items needed for that day's meals and account for their use to the household steward every night. Serving luxury items emphasized the lord's status and wealth.