

Medieval Food

Agriculture

More intense agriculture



Shift from animal products (meat and dairy)
to various grains and vegetables

Cereals were the staple



Barley, oat and rye for poor



Wheat for the governing classes

Bread

Finely milled flour was expensive, while the bread of commoners was typically brown and coarse



Consumption around 1 to 1.5 kilograms (2.2 to 3.3 lb) of bread per person per day.

Among the first town guilds to be organized were the bakers', and laws and regulations were passed to keep bread prices stable.

Nobility had their own baking staff, but there were public bakeries, normally owned by the local land lord, where the poorer people brought their bread to be baked communally, and later where they could buy ready-baked bread.

Bread and Food Regulations

Food regulations and the Assize of Bread and Ale. 51 [Hen. III](#), occurring about 1266–1267

regulated the price, weight and quality of the bread and beer manufactured

laid out harsh punishments for brewers and bakers who were caught cheating.



The disreputable cook from
[Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales](#).

141 THE BLACK HORSE

begyn at the quarter of white/ and so to the nexte column to
the out both sides of the leafe/as the hole openeth.

			
A halfe penny white lofe.	A halfe penny white lofe.	A penny white lofe.	A halfe penny household lofe.
xiij. pounde. xvi. li. xiiij. s. xli. li. viij. s. xvi. li. xii. s. s. weyng. c. xlv. weyng. c. lvi. eng. iiii. s. lxxx weyng. li. c. ounce di. and. xlvij. ounce. a. and. xvi. ounce. xxi. ounce di. a ii. d. trope.	xiij. pounde. xvi. li. xiiij. s. xli. li. viij. s. xvi. li. xii. s. s. weyng. c. xlv. weyng. c. lvi. eng. iiii. s. lxxx weyng. li. c. ounce di. and. xlvij. ounce. a. and. xvi. ounce. xxi. ounce di. a ii. d. trope.	xiij. pounde. xvi. li. xiiij. s. xli. li. viij. s. xvi. li. xii. s. s. weyng. c. xlv. weyng. c. lvi. eng. iiii. s. lxxx weyng. li. c. ounce di. and. xlvij. ounce. a. and. xvi. ounce. xxi. ounce di. a ii. d. trope.	xiij. pounde. xvi. li. xiiij. s. xli. li. viij. s. xvi. li. xii. s. s. weyng. c. xlv. weyng. c. lvi. eng. iiii. s. lxxx weyng. li. c. ounce di. and. xlvij. ounce. a. and. xvi. ounce. xxi. ounce di. a ii. d. trope.



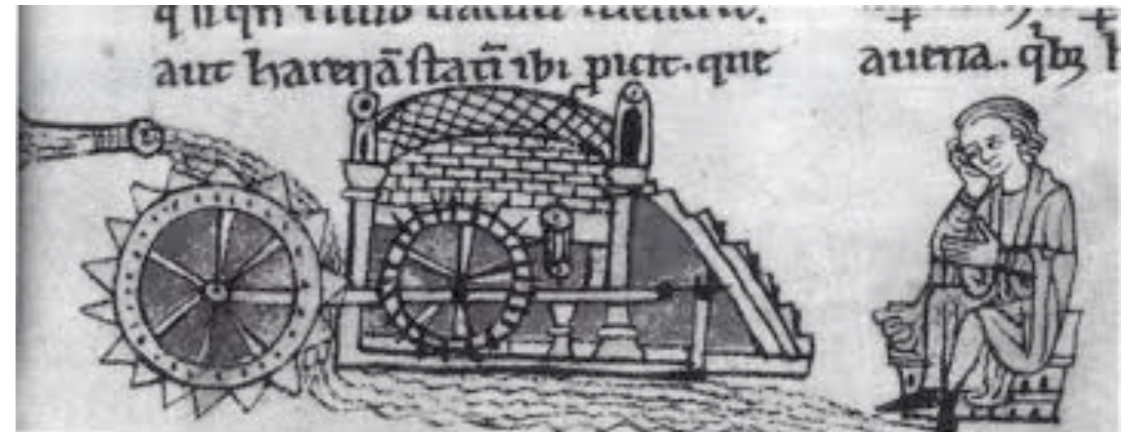
Worshipful Company of Bakers

Bakers' Guild had the very onerous
responsibility of enforcing the 'Bread
Assize' within a radius of 2 miles
from the City of London

Food (Bread) Machines

For people in late medieval Europe, the mill, whether wind or water, was the best-known example of a machine that converted inanimate power to work.

England had about ten thousand mills in 1300 and that they ground 80 percent of the grain was milled in them



“*Four banal*” (“common oven”) was a feudal institution in medieval [France](#)

Personal ovens were generally outlawed and commoners were thus compelled to use the seigniorial oven to bake their bread.



Sugar

The spread of cultivation and manufacture of cane sugar to the medieval Islamic world together with some upscaling of production methods.



Crusaders brought sugar home with them to Europe after their campaigns in the Holy Land, where they encountered caravans carrying "sweet salt"

Early in the 12th century, Venice acquired some villages near [Tyre](#) and set up estates to produce sugar for export to Europe,

From its first appearance in Europe, was viewed as much as a drug as a sweetener;
original of candy as medicine



Spices

Over 288 spices in Medieval Europe



Most common were ginger, cinnamon, pepper, nutmeg, and saffron

Common myth about medieval food is that the heavy use of spices was a technique for disguising the taste of rotten meat

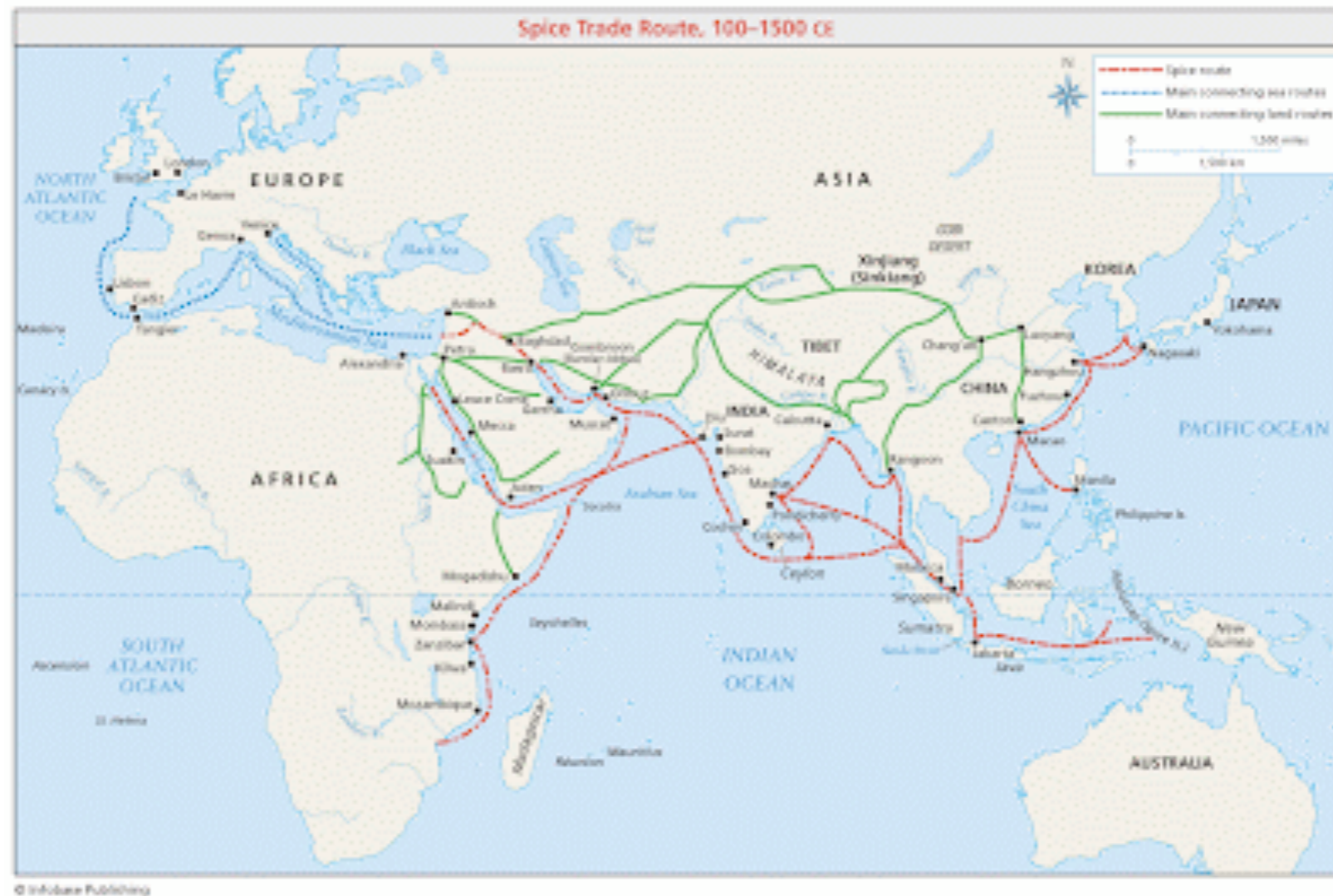
Common [seasonings](#) in the highly-spiced sweet-sour repertory typical of upper-class medieval food included [verjuice](#), [wine](#) and [vinegar](#), together with sugar and spices.

Common [herbs](#) such as [sage](#), [mustard](#), and [parsley](#) were grown and used in cooking all over Europe, as were [caraway](#), [mint](#), [dill](#) and [fennel](#).

Spices

Spices were, instead, as sign of luxury and affluence.

Connection to trading routes



Around 1,000 [tons](#) of pepper and 1,000 tons of the other common spices were imported into Western Europe each year during the late Middle Ages.

Value of these goods was the equivalent of a yearly supply of grain for 1.5 million people.

Sauces

"Note that to every sauce and condiment salt is added, and crumb of bread to thicken it." -

Sauces	Colour	Serve With	Comments
Cameline	White	Lamb Veal Pork Rabbit Beef	
Cinnamon-Orange	Orange	Chicken	
Cumin	Beige	Chicken	
Green Sauce	Green	Fish Goose Frogs legs	
Murrey Sauce	Purple/Blue	Poultry Excellent with turkey	
Pink Garlic Sauce	Pink	Roast meats Chicken Vegetables	
Sharp Pepper Sauce	Beige	Roast beef Venison	
Sweet and Sour	Red	Ham	



The vast majority of medieval sauces are made with an acid e.g. vinegar, verjuice, or wine, as the base and bread crumbs as the thickener.

Almonds were very popular as a thickener in soups, stews, and sauces, particularly as almond milk.

Byrdys

A wide range of birds were eaten, including swans, peafowl, quail, partridge, storks, cranes, larks, linnets and other songbirds



Medieval pies (sometimes called "bake metis" in medieval days) were often topped with either a pastry shell (often called a "coffin") or "byrdys."

Swans and storks apparently only eaten by the social elite, and more for their appearances than for their meat.

Food preservation

1. drying,
2. salting
3. smoking
4. pickling
5. sweet Preserves
6. fermentation
7. Confits



fruit, and fish

Connection of food preservation to trade,
especially in fish and fruit (and spice)

Caloric Structure of Daily Life

Diets were very high-carbohydrate, with most of the budget spent on, and the majority of calories provided by, cereals and alcohol

Meat contributed a negligible portion of calories to a typical harvest worker's diet; however, its share increased after the Black Death and, by the 15th century, it provided about 20% of the total

Even among the nobility of medieval England, grain provided 65-70% of calories in the early 14th century

Adult peasant male ate 2,900 calories (12,000 kJ) per day, and an adult female needed 2,150 calories (9,000 kJ). Intakes of aristocrats may have reached 4,000 to 5,000 calories (17,000 to 21,000 kJ) per day.

Monks consumed 6,000 calories (25,000 kJ) per day on "normal" days, and 4,500 calories (19,000 kJ) per day when fasting.

Obesity was common among upper classes.



Cookbooks

The first cookbooks began to appear towards the end of the 13th century

Le Ménagier De Paris

Forme of Cury



Le Viandier de Taillevent

Liber de Coquina



Cookbooks

Recipes were pretty sparse

i - Tartes de chare. Take Freyssche Porke, and hew it, and grynd it on a mortere; and take it vppe in-to a fayre vesselle; and take the whyte an the 3olkys of Eyroun, and strayne into a Vesselle thorw a straynoure, and tempere thin Porke ther-with; than take Pynez, Roysonys of Coraunce, and frye hem in freysshe grece, and caste ther-to pouder Pepir, and Gyngere, Canelle, Sugre, Safroun, and Salt, and caste ther-to, and do it on a cofynne, and plante thin cofynne a-boue with Pyne3, and kyt Datys, and gret Roysonys, and smal byrdys, or ellys hard 3olkys of Eyroun; and 3if thou take byrdys, frye hem on a lytel grece or thow putte hem on thin cofynne, and endore with 3olkys of Eyroun, and Safroun, and lat bake til it be y-now, and serue forth.

Smale Byrdys y-stwyde. Take smale byrdys, an pulle hem an drawe hem clene, an washe hem fayre, an schoppe of the leggys, and frye hem in a panne of freysshe grece ry3t wyl; than ley hem on a fayre lynen clothe, an lette the grece renne owt; than take oynonys, an mynce hem smale, an frye hem on fayre freysshegrece, an caste hem on an erthen potte; than take a gode porcyon of canel, an wyne, an draw thorw a straynoure, an caste in-to the potte with the oynonys; than caste the bryddys ther-to, an clowys, an **maces**, an a lytil quantyte of powder pepir ther-to, an lete hem boyle to-gederys y-now; than caste ther-to whyte sugre, an powder gyngere, salt, safron, an serue it forth.

Cookbooks

Guillaume Tirel aka "Le Taillevent"

One of the first truly "professional" master chefs.

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TOMBE de pierre au milieu de la chœur de l'église du Prieuré d'Haumont.

Taillevent helped start the modern favoring of Burgundy and strong (dry) red wine.

Cookbooks

THICK POTTAGES

9. Pork intestine.

Cook it in water, cut it into bits, and fry them in lard and pork fat. Soak ginger, long pepper, milk; and strain through cheesecloth. Thread in egg yolks and boil. Take verjuice grapes

10. Cretone of new peas.

Cook them almost to mush, drain them, and fry them in lard. Boil cow's milk for an instant in water, quarter them, fry them, and add them to the milk to boil. Withdraw it to the back

11. Cretone of new beans.

Just as for peas.

12. Chicken cumin dish.

Cook it in wine and water, quarter it, and fry it in lard. Temper your broth with a bit of wine of egg yolks, beat them well, and thread them into your pottage at the back of the fire. Make

13. Almond cumin dish.

Cook your chicken well in water, quarter it, and brown it in lard. Take almonds, crush, steep in wine, always thickens itself.

14. Cassia soup.

Cook your chicken (or whatever meat you wish) in wine or water, quarter it, and brown it in beef broth. Boil well with your meat and some verjuice. Take cloves and grains of paradise

15. Georgie soup.

Take whatever poultry meat you wish, cut it up, and fry it lightly in lard with leafy parsley. Boil everything well. Grind ginger and saffron, and steep in verjuice. Your broth should be

16. Russet soup.

Take whatever meat you wish, and fry it lightly in lard with leafy parsley and onions sliced. Add ginger, cassia, cloves, grains of paradise and cassia flowers, and steep in verjuice. It should

17. Vinegar dish.

Take pork *menue haste* [spleen and other offal] and roast it, but do not allow it to cook too much and shake the pot very often. When it is well fried, add some beef broth and wine to boil and it should thicken itself and be brownish.

18. Ragout of small birds or whatever meat you wish.

Fry very well in lard. Take grilled bread, steep in beef broth, sieve, and put with your meat. Grind ginger

19. White capon soup.

Cook them in wine and water, dismember them, and fry them in lard. Crush almonds with some capon galingale, long pepper and grains of paradise, and steep in vinegar. Boil well together, and thread in

20. Hare or rabbit bisque.

Brown them on the spit or on the grill, dismember them, and fry them in lard. Take grilled bread, beat it, and steep in verjuice. It should be dark brown and not too thick.

21. Capon houdons.

Cook them in wine and water, dismember them, and brown them in lard. Take a bit of grilled bread and steep in verjuice. It should not be too thick.

22. German meat, rabbit and chicken soup.

Take your meat, cut it up, and fry it lightly in lard with some finely chopped onion. Grind plenty of pepper of paradise, nutmeg and just a bit of saffron, and steep in verjuice. It should be rather yellow, and this

17

23. Chicken hotchpotch.

Take your chicken, dismember it, and fry it lightly in lard. Take a bit of grilled bread and some chicken of paradise, and steep in verjuice. It should be clearish black and not too [thick?].

24. Subtle English soup.

Take cooked peeled chestnuts, egg yolks cooked in wine, and a bit of pork liver. Crush everything together (to give it colour), and boil together.

25. Verjuice soup of chicken or whatever meat you wish.

Cook it in wine, water and so much verjuice that the taste of the verjuice exceeds all others. Add some egg yolks, strain everything through cheesecloth, boil, and throw onto your meat (when it is browned).

26. Bright green soup.

Cook whatever meat you wish in wine, water and beef broth, with pork fat to give it taste. Brown your bread; strain everything through cheesecloth; and steep in your broth. It needs a bit of verjuice, and

27. Grape dish.

Fry your meat lightly in lard. Take some bread, soak in beef broth, strain through cheesecloth, and then add gooseberries or some verjuice grapes.

18

28. Veal ragout.

Roast it on the spit or grill without letting it cook too much, cut it into pieces, and fry it lightly in lard and boil with your meat. Grind ginger, cassia, cloves, grains of paradise and saffron (to give it colour) and it should be thick, sour with vinegar, spicy and golden.

29. Hare ragout.

It should be black, with the bread well grilled to give it colour, and made of the same ingredients as

30. Rabbit ragout.

It should be spicy, not as black as the Hare Ragout, nor as yellow as the Veal Ragout, but between the

19

Meals

Two meals / day. No breakfast: Moralists frowned on breaking the overnight fast too early, and members of the church and cultivated gentry avoided it

For practical reasons, breakfast was still eaten by working men



Strong collectivist ethic of eating communally; many large households, courts and religious orders forbade meals outside of the great hall at set times.



The wife of the host often dined in private with her entourage or ate very little at such feasts. She could then join dinner only after the potentially messy business of eating was done.

Food was mostly served on [plates](#) or in stew pots, and diners would take their share from the dishes

Knives were used at the table, but most people were expected to bring their own ... important guests got their own knives.

Food and the church

Food practices at heart of christian tradition

“The behavior that defined a Christian was food-related behavior.”

Asceticism in medieval thinking



starving
mystic
Blessed
Lidwina

Lenten food restrictions dominated the spring for Medieval Christians

Feast days and fast days and fish days

Medieval Saints and Feast days as they would have been celebrated in the 14th Century. Dates were often given by the name of the event or feast day of a saint.

- 1 January - St Maelrhys, St Elvan & Mydwyn (2nd Century), Circumcision, The Solemnity of Mary
- 2 January - St Basil the Great of Aix, France (329-379), St Gregory of Nazianzen (329-389)
- 3 January - St Genevieve (Genovefe) of Paris (ca. 422-512)
- 4 January - St Simeon the Stylite (390-459)
- 5 January - St Julien, St Edward the Confessor, Twelfth Night, Vigil of Epiphany
- 6 January - St Peter of Canterbury (d. 607), St Hywyn (Ewwn, Owen) of Aberdaron, Gwynedd, Wales (d. 516), Epiphany
- 7 January - St Raymond of Pennafort (1175-1275), St Brannock of Braunton, England
- 8 January - St Wulsin of Westminster (d. 1002)
- 9 January - St Adrian of Canterbury (d. ca. 709), St Brihtwald (Berhtwald, Beorhtweald, Brihtwald) of Canterbury (d. 731)
- 10 January - St Paul (d. 342), Geraint of Wales (9th Century)
- 11 January - St Egwin of Worcester, St Brandan Of Ireland (5th Century)
- 12 January - St Benedict Biscop of Wearmouth (d. 690), St Distaff's Day
- 13 January - St Hilary (Hilarii) of Poitiers (d. 368), St Erbin (Ervan, Ernie, Erbyn, Hermes) of Cornwall and Devon (5th Century), St Kentigern Mungo of Scotland (d. 603), St Elian of Cornwall, England (6th Century)
- 14 January - St Felix of Nola (d. 260), St Kentigern (ca. 516-601), St Deusdedit of Canterbury (d. 664)
- 15 January - St Ita (Deirdre and Mida) (d. ca. 570), St Blaithmaic of Ireland (d. 823), St Ceowulf of Northumbria, England (d. 764)
- 16 January - St Honoratus of Aries, France (350-429), St Henry of Cocket Northumbria, England (d. 1127)
- 17 January - St Antony of Egypt (251-356), St Milburga of Wenlock (d. 715)
- 18 January - St Volusian of Tours (d. 496), St Ulfrid of England (d. 1028), St Day of Cornwall, England
- 19 January - St Canutus of Denmark (Canute IV, Knud) (d. 1086), St Wulstan (Wulfstan) of Worcester (1008-1095), St Branwallader of Jersey (6th Century)
- 20 January - St Fabian (d. 250)
- 21 January - St Agnes of Rome (d. ca. 305)
- 22 January - St Paschasius of Vienne, France (d. 312), St Brithwald of Ramsbury (d. 1045)
- 23 January - St Paul's Day, St Ormond of St Maire (6th Century)
- 24 January - St Bertrand of Saint-Quentin (7th Century), St Cadoc (Docus, Cathmael, Cadvael, Cadfael) (d. 580)
- 25 January - St Amarinus of Clermont, France (d. 676), St Dwywnwen of Brecknock, St Eochod (d. 697), St Dwywnwen of Wales
- 26 January - St Eystein (d. 1168), St Margaret (1243-1271), St Alberic (d. 1109), St Paula (d. 404), St Robert of Newmister (1100-1159), St Conan (d. 648), St Thordgith (Theoregitha) of Barking, England (d. 960)
- 27 January - St Emerius (8th Century), St Gamo of Bretigny, France (8th Century), St Gilduin of Dol (d. 1077), St Julian of Le Mans (3rd Century)
- 28 January - St Cannera of Bantry, Ireland (d. 530), St Antilnus of Brantome, France (8th Century), St Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274)
- 29 January - St Gildas the Wise (d. ca. 576), St Blath (d. 523), St. Voloc (d.724)
- 30 January - St Aidan of Connaught (Edan, Modoc, Maedoc) (d. 626), St Adamnan of Coldingham (d. 680), St Madoes
- 31 January - St Aedh (Aiden) of Ferns

Food and the church: gluttony

[Pope Gregory I](#) description of gluttony:

1. Eating before the time of meals in order to satisfy the palate.
2. Seeking delicacies and better quality of food to gratify the “vile sense of taste.”
3. Seeking to stimulate the palate with sauces and seasonings.
4. Exceeding the necessary quantity of food.



Food and the Church

Wednesdays and Fridays (Saturdays sometimes too) were fast and then later Fish days.

The approved foods for consumption included fish and all other water creatures as well as fruits, vegetables and breads.



“As fish was a relatively pliable meat, it was often sculpted to reflect things that could not be eaten, for example, salmon was sculpted into pork sculptures and white fish was stuffed into cleaned egg shells so that it appeared to be a boiled egg.”

Food and The Church

Monasteries as production centers



Food and Class

Cuisine of nobility took on foreign influence via trade.

Innovations from international trade and foreign wars from the 12th century were also taken up by upper middle class in medieval cities.

With the rise of the middle class, the nobles felt there needed to be control on the personal spending of these nouveau riche. They enacted Sumptuary Laws to regulate and reinforce social hierarchies and morals through restrictions on e.g. food.

Phillipe Le Bel in 1294 forbade every subject to have served as an ordinary meal more than one dish and one side dish, and for larger meals, more than two dishes with a potage au lard.

In England in 1363, servants of gentlemen, merchants, and artificers, should only have one meal of meat or fish in a the day and that their other food should consist of mild, butter, and cheese.