

Studies in Medieval Foods

Scholars tend to slide into the field of medieval European food from two classical disciplines, that is, from two separate directions: literature and history (including sociology and anthropology). Because no distinct discipline of "historic food" has yet been fully recognized as legitimate among the panoply of authentic scholarly specializations, academics who have – for some idiosyncratic reason – come to fix their attention upon questions having to do with the alimentation, recipes, cookery and gastronomy of times past bring with them methods and interests that, generally speaking, have been formed by either literary or historic disciplines. This lack of legitimacy for the whole new field of study in historic food, together with the consequent suspicion with which work in this field is viewed by those colleagues occupying the traditional fields, and the absence so far of any universal agreement among the new specialists about the methods to be used, or even their aims, have limited progress in the area to relatively minor and for the most part independent achievements by perhaps three score of scholars throughout the world. Their numbers are probably equally divided between historians and literators.

On the one hand, the problem of legitimacy has been attacked head-on by the insistence that modern science can properly apply its objective methods to any data concerning historic food. Primarily these methods involve quantification. Statistical studies have yielded, or they have at least organized and clarified, much information about food habits in the past; and the systematic analysis of old charters and records has led to a variety of useful conclusions in the same area. On the other hand, literary researches have gone some way to establishing the legitimacy of investigating what people ate, particularly by establishing sound texts of manuscript materials. The primary sources – recipe collections, early treatises about food, cookery, the properties of foodstuffs – are gradually being made available for scholarly study. Increasingly, researchers are in a position to examine the nature of early eating customs, and to show both the immediate causes and the latent consequences of those habits.

For several years now the annual Congress on Medieval Studies, organized by the Center for Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, has sponsored a session on "Foods in the European Middle Ages", a session which I have been very honoured to organize. The Congress attracts a large number of medievalists who find there a good representation of the variety of research currently pursued by the world's scholars. Participants who have attended

the session on "Foods" in the past have heard presentations on seasoning from a researcher from India, on the *genre* of the dietetic letter from a Canadian, and on food in hunting treatises from an American. In May of this year the three speakers (John D. Fudge, Edinburgh University: "Supply and Distribution of Foodstuffs in Northern Europe"; Mary Frances Zambreno, University of Chicago: "The Moral Ambiguity of the Medieval Feast"; and Liliane Plouvier, University of Brussels: "La confiserie européenne au Moyen Age") continued to illustrate the basic dichotomy between the approaches to the subject of medieval food. However, the speakers demonstrated as well, in the discussions that followed their papers, just how fruitful, how mutually illuminating, the combination of these two approaches, historical and literary, can be. Those interested in the field of historic food can take heart that, with the continued contribution of such researchers, full academic recognition of their interests must soon come.

Terence Scully

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Editor's Preface

The present volume of *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*-Newsletter is an indirect result of the editor's participation at the 23rd International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo this May. Among the numerous other papers delivered there, which have been relevant for historians of material culture and daily life of the Middle Ages, my attention was particularly drawn to a session on medieval food organized by Terence Scully from the Department of French Language and Literature of Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. Terence Scully is one of the few specialists on medieval food and cooking in North America and well known for his editions of French cookery books and recipe collections (cf., e. g., "Du fait de cuisine par Maistre Chiquart 1420", *Vallesia* 40, 1985, 130-231; *Chiquart's On Cookery. A Fifteenth-Century Savoyard Culinary Treatise*. New York, Berne, Frankfurt/M., 1986; *The Viandier of Taillevent*, to be published this October by the University of Ottawa Press). For several years now, he has been organizing sessions on "Foods in the European Middle Ages" at Kalamazoo.

When I offered Terence Scully and the speakers of his session - John D. Fudge, Mary Frances Zambreno and Liliane Plouvier - to publish the papers in *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*-Newsletter, they all immediately accepted. By that, we get the opportunity to be quickly informed about some important new research. I would like to thank the authors, particularly for their readiness to send their manuscripts in such a short time after the conference, in spite of their many other obligations.

This Newsletter 13 will soon be followed by Newsletter 14, which is dedicated to the conference "Mensch und Objekt im Mittelalter. Leben - Alltag - Kultur", organized by *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* and the *Institut für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs*, taking place in Krems from September 27 to 30, 1988. As in the years 1984 and 1986, we would like to present summaries of the papers delivered at the conference to inform our members about the main topics and aspects to be discussed.

Two guest editors will be responsible for Newsletter 15. Grethe Jacobsen and Jens Christian Johansen, both from Copenhagen, have agreed to edit the volume, which will be dealing with the research on daily life and material culture of the Middle Ages in Denmark. It will be the first of the already announced volumes concerning research in particular countries. We hope that this newsletter will be published at the end of 1988.

For 1989, we already have started the preparations for two volumes continuing our select bibliographies. One volume will be devoted to medieval dress, the other to medieval ships. We also plan an updated version of the general select bibliography, which was published as *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*-Newsletter 7/8 in 1986. Numerous new books and articles have come out since then; a second edition seems to be necessary.

At last, I would like to thank those members of our society who have been – some of them continuously – contributing to *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*-Newsletter. All others, I again would like to invite to send us articles, reviews, notes or announcements.

Gerhard Jaritz, editor