

Evolution of Cookery

by

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Cookery is the most ancient and the most important of the arts. That one must eat to live is beyond question. As it is through food and drink that man derives the strength for his highest mental activities and physical well-being, the selection and preparation of food should receive the greatest consideration.

The first mention of food in the Bible is in the first chapter of Genesis. "And God said, Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." The first mention of eating is in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve ate the first apple, and this was a wild fruit, which required no cooking. The first direct mention of bread-stuffs is where Abraham tenders the angel a morsel of bread, and bid Sarah make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. The first dish of which any record exists is the red pottage of lentils for which Esau sold his birthright. This is a form of food still common in Germany and France.

As soon as fire was discovered it was used in preparing food, first by roasting on hot embers. This was found to bring out a flavor. Afterwards skewers were used to hold the meat above the embers which suggested the idea of boiling.

An early method of baking was to dig a trench, put the material to be baked over the fire then cover with earth and allow to remain until done. From this naturally evolved to baking in ovens. Baking in old Egypt being frequently represented in paintings. Each household possessed a portable oven, consisting of a stone or metal jar about 3 feet high, which was heated inwardly with wood or dried grass and flower-stalks. The baking was

done upon heated stones, or thrown into the heated embers of the fire.

Boiling was another primitive mode of cooking, and the method even yet practiced by barbarians is to utilize the hide of the slaughtered animal for a bag, placing the meat in this receptacle with water, and dropping in stones heated to a white heat leaving them until the flesh is cooked. Utensils of pottery and metal were unknown to the early nations.

Among the primitive tribes and nations vegetable food was more common than animal, the latter being served principally in the case of entertainments and special occasions of hospitality. Potatoes were cooked and dressed with butter. Parsnips and carrots were boiled and then buttered. Radishes were eaten as a sauce with meat. They were also eaten raw with bread. Roots, berries, and fruits were largely used.

In cooking meats the ancients cooked the animal whole. Moses specifies four insects of the locust family. Some of the Locusta are yet esteemed a delicacy in the East, these being cooked with oil, roasted upon wooden spits, baked in ovens or broiled. Instead of lard and butter, olive oil was used, and is still almost entirely used by the Orientals.

With many savage races, bread-fruit, nuts, the plantain, the cocoa-palm, known as the "tree of life", with numerous other food, served as a principal means of subsistence.

The first fruit tree cultivated by man is mentioned by all the most ancient writers to be the fig, the vine next in order. The almond and pomegranate were cultivated at an early date in Canaan, and the fig, grape, pomegranate, and melon were known to Egypt from time immemorial. In Solon's laws, the olive, the fig, and the vine are enumerated.

The food of the Hebrews was principally vegetable. The Orientals have been at all times sparing in the use of animal food, not only

does excessive heat render it unwholesome to eat much but it is expensive from the necessity of immediately consuming a whole animal on account of the extreme heat. The vegetarian diet of mankind seems to have resulted from a religious or philosophical theory of a primitive state. The ritual regulations of Mosaic law in ancient times tended to this result.

The Hebrews ate unleavened bread which is unfermented bread. Manna was also eaten. It is a sort of resin collected from various shrubs. In some places, manna is found on the leaves of various plants, and is shaken from them before sunrise into clothes. It is also found upon sand and stones, and is then whiter and purer than the tree-manna, but its appearance depends upon the dew or rain. The Bible says, "Behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground."

And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat."

Sometimes the fresh green ears were eaten in a natural state, the husks being rubbed off by the hand; more frequently, however, the grains after being carefully picked, were roasted and eaten as parched corn. The grain used in making bread was of various sorts; the best was made of wheat. Barley was used only by the very poor. When the time for preparation was short unleavened cakes hastily baked were eaten, as is still the prevalent custom among the Hebrews. There occur allusions to some finer sorts of pastry; wafers with honey. The sons of the prophets gathered all sorts of vegetables in the field but kings had gardens of herbs. The spices or condiments known to the Hebrews were numerous.

Boiling was the more usual method of cooking. Vegetables were

usually boiled and served as pottage. Corn was ground by the use of stones, the lower one being fixed and the upper one rubbed on the lower.

Fruit was an important article of food. Grapes were eaten fresh or dried in the sun as raisins. Figs, nuts and almonds were used.

The process of making bread was as follows- the flour was mixed with water or milk, it was then kneaded with the hands until it became a dough. When the kneading was completed leaven was added unless the time for preparation was short then it was omitted. The leavened mass was allowed to stand for some time. The dough was then divided into round cakes and taken to the oven.

The Egyptians used beef and goose as the principal constituent of the animal food. Large quantities of meat were served at repasts which was a custom. The meat used was killed for the occasion. Pork was not and the use of mutton is never indicated. Flesh of cow was not eaten eaten for it was held sacred. The Egyptians often lived on roots and herbs either raw, toasted or boiled.

The right of exportation belonged to the government as is shown by the sale of corn to the Israelites. The frugal mode of living enabled the peasants to dispose of nearly all their wheat and barley. The quality and proportion of their food and beverage were prescribed to the kings. The cucumber was known to Moses and the Israelites, the patriarch referred to fish and cucumbers, melons and leeks as among the delicacies that were freely eaten in Egypt.

The Persians were first to set an example of luxurious cookery. The favorable climate and fertility of their products had a tendency for luxurious cookery. The oldest books refer to their pomp in banqueting. The feasts of Nebuchadnezzar and those of Belshazzar are notorious in history. The last of the Assyrian kings offered a recompense of a thousand

pieces of gold to the one who would produce a new dish. The book of Esther records the magnificent royal feast given by the Persian king; a carnival which lasted one hundred eighty days. The people drank an abundance of wine out of vessels of gold.

The Greeks were simple in their habits and this simplicity extended to their cookery. Spartan black broth, composed of pork, broth, vinegar, and salt became a national dish. But this epoch was of short duration.

The early Greeks had four meals daily, -the breakfast; the dinner; the relish; and the supper. As luxury increased, cookery advanced, luncheon took the place of the midday dinner, the latter among the wealthier classes, gradually being postponed to a later hour. At all great feasts and dinners of ceremony, which were held in the evening, the bill of fare was presented to the guests.

The Iliad of Homer tells how Achilles entertained three chiefs of the Greeks, one of whom was a king. Their dinner was broiled flesh with bread and wine. During this time music was rendered while the dinner was partaken of. Homer never made mention of boiled meat.

Two especially prized dishes were those termed myma and mallya- the former composed of all kinds of finely minced viands and fowls, seasoned with vinegar, cheese, onions, honey, raisins and various spices; the latter dish a fowl boiled with a great variety of herbs.

The Greeks were especially fond of the peacock. Suckling pig was considered a delicacy. The sea yielded the oyster and the earth its varied fruits. Strong and sweet wine was a common beverage.

After fish and game, pork was the most esteemed food of ancient Greek. At large entertainments it was customary to serve pigs roasted whole.

Cabbage and asparagus were known to the Greeks from the earliest ages, and by them the chestnut was largely utilized for food. Differing from the Egyptians the Greeks and Romans excluded women from their feasts.

The Romans were apt scholars and soon outrivalled the Greeks in luxury and splendor. The tables and the dinner service were expensive. Eating and drinking were carried to excess. Horace, a poet and scholar, was aware of the intemperance and extravagance and constantly censured them through his writings.

The Romans had three meals daily - the breakfast, the luncheon, and the dinner. The dinner was served in the morning, but with the progress of luxury it was deferred to late afternoon or evening.

The breakfast consisted of bread, dipped in wine or flavored with salt, grapes, olives, cheese, milk and eggs. Luncheon consisted of more solid dishes, both hot and cold and was taken about the middle of the day. The chief meal or dinner was taken between noon and sunset.

The poorer classes at all periods chiefly fed on porridge which served them as bread. After the Roman conquests in Greece and Asia the diet of the richer classes became altered - more elaborate. Various kinds of meats and fish, salads and rare fruit were used and more cooks were required to prepare the meal.

The Romans used vegetables of which prepared grain and pot-herbs seasoned with wine and sauces was a favorite dish. The carrot was stewed, boiled with a little oil, and eaten as a salad with salt, oil and vinegar. Turnips were boiled and seasoned with rue, pounded in a mortar, adding honey, vinegar, gravy, boiled grapes and oil. Brocoli was boiled with the additions of pepper, chopped onions, and a little oil. Asparagus was cultivated. The finest heads were dried, and when wanted were placed in hot water

and boiled. Millet was served by the Romans with a seasoning of pepper, rue, onions, dates and mustard, to which was added the flesh of the sea-hedgehog reduced to a pulp and oil. Barley, wheat, rice, peas, beans, and gourds were used in the making of soups. Beets, mallows, artichokes, and cucumber were greatly relished. The plants and herbs used as flavorings were the hyssop, thyme, rue, poppy-seed, onions, garlic and leeks- savory taking the place of parsley.

Many kinds of fish appeared upon the Roman tables in some form. Potted meat and minces come to us through the mediaeval kitchens of Rome. They combined meats which should have been kept separate. Instead of developing flavor they smothered it. They could relish what was filthy, but they revolted against what was tough.

They had many condiments of which garum was the seasoning most used. This condiment was obtained from the intestines, gills, and blood of fishes, stirred together with salt and exposed to the sun until the compound was putrid, then wine and spice-herbs were added. The liquor of this compound was strained and sent to the market. They were ignorant of the principles which should control the manufacture of condiments. Not all their sauces were objectionable, some would be acceptable at the present time.

The Germans are not surpassed in baking including all forms of breadstuffs and pastry. Germany is the home of the sausages and they were combined with beer. Of game, the hare and partridge have always been held in great esteem. Since the latter half of the sixteenth century Germany produced many manuals on cookery but they did not receive a reputation outside of their own country.

The early cooks of France were Italians. France made progress in the art of dining and continued to improve during the reigns of Francis

II, Charles IX, and Henry III. The first French treatise on cookery, originally written in 1375, appeared in the latter part of the fifteenth century. During the reign of Louis XV there appeared numerous cook-books. A work of four volumes entitled "Suppers of the Court", was pronounced the best of its kind. During the reign of Louis XVI new discoveries were made and the relation of cookery to man's physical nature became more apparent.

During the Revolution, when private establishments were no longer maintained, cookery languished until the French restaurant was established. Many master-cooks who were thrown out of employment started restaurants and became wealthy. With the restaurants dining and good living advanced. The first one is said to have been established in Paris about 1765. Early in the nineteenth century cookery was fully able to take care of itself, irrespective of royalty.

The cookery of the Anglo-Saxon was of greatest simplicity. An ancient writer says that they lived chiefly on dried corn, which they brayed in mortars, and worked into a heavy paste. The poorer people made a bread partly or altogether of acorns. Superstition forbade them to eat the goose, the hare, and the chicken. But they were eaters of meat. They devoured large portions of badly broiled flesh. Of all meats pork was the most acceptable. They were consumers of pork-pudding and various kinds of pork sausage.

The English had four meals daily - breakfast at seven, dinner at ten, supper at four, and livery at eight. In Cromwell's time, one o'clock had come to be the fashionable hour and in Addison's day two o'clock, which gradually became four. Four and five continued to be the popular dining hour among the better classes until the second decade of the century when dinner was postponed until evening.

Whale, porpoise, and seal were common dishes. Besides such seasonings as ginger, cinnamon, cloves, garlic, and vinegar, ale was employed. Almond-milk and marrow were used much. The fifteenth century had an abundant variety of bread-stuffs. The poor often used a mixture of rye, lentils, and oatmeal.

Under the rule of Elizabeth, fish formed an important article of diet. The punch-bowl was in use in England in olden days - punch however being a drink of Indian origin. The division line between the rich and the poor, was far more marked than at present. Cookery has developed more slowly in England than in France.

Earliest of the English works on cookery is a "Treatise on Utensils" written at the close of the twelfth century. Of other old works is the "The Forme of Cury", containing one hundred and ninety six recipes, compiled by the chief cooks of Richard II. Many others were written some of which existed only in manuscript. The seventeenth century produced many cook-books most of which republished ancient recipes of puddings, pies and tarts.

The olden monks and friars preserved ancient recipes. Previous to the Renaissance the higher cultivation of cookery was confined to the monasteries. The introduction of soup, which is mentioned in history at the beginning of the fifteenth century, is closely connected with the clergy. Plum-pudding and mince pie are mentioned in an English bill of fare as early as 1424. Plum-pudding similar to its present form does not appear in books earlier than 1675. Previous to this, plum-porridge was prepared by boiling beef or mutton with broth thickened by brown-bread. When half cooked raisins, currants, prunes, cloves, nutmeg, mace, ginger, and other condiments were added, and after the mixture was thoroughly boiled it was served with meats. The plum-pudding has rarely been used in France.

With the Gothic invasion went the degeneration of the art of cookery. Many of the cooks were massacred and others who offered their services were refused. But the management of the table gradually improved especially under Charlemagne. Women began to take part in the preparation of food which heretofore had been done by men.

The reign of Louis XV marks the observance of order, neatness, and elegance as essentials in a meal.

During the reign of Louis XVI there was an increase in the occupation of cooks, pastry-cooks, and confectioners. The art of preserving food became a profession. Gardening made progress, different kinds of vegetables were gotten by culture.

The culture of the world began with the Renaissance in the fifteenth century. The Italians extended it to the table.

In the eighteenth century the French took the lead in cookery.