A Gode Grocery List

What food was prepared in an English Medieval kitchen, and how did it get there?

By The Honorable Lady Katja Davidova Orlova Khazarina

The Luttrell Psalter was created in the mid 14th Century to provide its owner, Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, with all the necessary psalms, canticles, and dates of the saint's days & church festivals of his worship. This status symbol and family heirloom was also elaborately illuminated ... but *not* with angels or other religious images. Instead, the Psalter depicts daily agrarian life on Luttrell's Lincolnshire manor.¹

The leaves of this manuscript depict that time period's most common methods of food preparation: roasting meats on spits, boiling others in large cauldrons, and grinding foodstuffs in a mortar with a pestle.

Unlike the works of Scappi, Burgkmair, and Rumpolt², or the many Books of Hours that depict harvesting, cooking, and dining during the Renaissance in Italy, Germany, or France, the Luttrell Psalter provides culinary historians with one of the few pictorial sources of <u>pre-15th Century</u> food in Britain.

Thus, an analysis of the images in the Lutrell Psalter and comparison with a cookery book created at roughly the same time (and in the same country) should give a fairly accurate view of how food was prepared in a 14th Century English kitchen. For this comparison, I chose *Forme of Cury*³, which is generally dated to 1390.

Further, we can surmise – given the conceit of a head cook writing a "grocery list" before preparing his master's meal – which ingredients were raised or grew on the Lincolnshire manor, and which ones had to be purchased elsewhere.

Images from the Luttrell Psalter

The cooking sequence of the Psalter begins with the depiction of one scullion turning a spit on which a small pig and two fowl are roasting; another scullion tends the fire with a long, forked implement. (The fire is not contained within a hearth or fireplace as is seen in Scappi's illustrations of elaborate Italian kitchens two centuries later, but rather is a simple, open firepit.)

The fowl look longer-limbed than chickens, but not as large or long-limbed as egrets, herons, peacocks, or other common large birds eaten in period. Therefore, I think that the birds depicted are either capons (castrated young roosters), ducks, geese, or pheasants. (On the other hand, some culinary historians hypothesize that all three animals on the spit are suckling pigs).



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¹ Backhouse, Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter, p. 8-9.

² Æthelmearc Cooks Guild - cooking artwork page: http://www.geocities.com/aecooks/CGArtwork.html.

³ Hieatt and Butler, Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (including the Forme of Cury).

⁴ Backhouse, Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter, p. 13.

The next image shows a cook tending three large cauldrons over another fire, scooping up simmering meat with a pierced ladle and a flesh hook. Behind him, a scullion uses two knives to chop up food. (Perhaps herbs or cooked meat?)⁵

Near the upper margin of the manuscript, a third man pounds food (almonds, spices?) in a large mortar with what appears to be a six-foot-long pestle. (Alternatively, the third man could be churning milk into butter?)





The third image has a cook carving up the roasted animals into portions so that an assistant can "plate" them, while a server fills cups from small earthenware jugs and two others walk off the edge of the image with the carved meat portions.



Other images in the Psalter show the progression of raising grain through the seasons (peasants ploughing, weeding, and harvesting, stacking sheaves of wheat, and finally bringing the grain to the windmill to be ground into flour); a gooseherd protecting a flock of geese and a woman feeding a hen and chicks; a pen of sheep with a man milking the ewes; a swineherd climbing an oak to gather acorns while his pigs consume the fallen nuts; wild rabbits playing around a warren; a man snaring small birds with a net; a beehive; a boy stealing cherries from a tree, and a man falconing.⁶

Recipes in The Forme of Cury

Based on these images, we will look for dishes containing pork and capon or goose, which are specifically seen in these images, plus sheep and rabbit, since they are seen in the other images and are very common in the recipes in the *Forme of Cury*. (Remember, we don't know exactly what is being simmered or ground in these images.)

Further, we specifically will look at roasted or boiled meats, and dishes in which items are pounded or ground in a mortar. Plus, we will take into consideration Lincolnshire's location: a rural village roughly 200 miles northeast of London in the East Midlands (see map, next page) famous for its flocks of sheep (and the forests of Nottingham).

⁶ Backhouse, Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter, pgs. 15-30.

⁵ Backhouse, Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter, p. 12.

⁷ Internet Britain Express http://www.britainexpress.com/Where to go in Britain/tour/em.htm.



Thus, we can make an educated guess as to what was being prepared in these three scenes and choose the following recipes:

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Recipes	Ingredients
Cormarye. Take colyaundre, caraway smale grounden, powdour of peper and garlec ygrounde, in rede wyne; medle alle pise togyder and salt it. Take loynes of pork rawe and fle of the skyn, and pryk it wel with a knyf, and lay it in the sawse. Roost it whan p ou wilt, & kepe pat fallith perfor in the rostyng and seep it in a possynet with faire broth, and serue it forth wip pe roost anoon. Gees in hoggepot. Take Gees and smyte hem on pecys. Cast hem in a Pot; do perto half wine and half water: and do pereto a gode quantitie of Oynons and erbest. Set it ouer the fyre and couer it fast. Make a layor of brede and blode and ley it perewith. Do pereto powder	(Roasted pork) Coriander, caraway, pepper, garlic, red wine, salt, pork, meat broth (Goose stew) Goose, wine, onions, herbs, bread, blood, strong powder
fort and serue it forth.	outong powder
Capons in councy. Take capouns and rost hem right hoot; bat bey be not half ynouh3, and hewe hem to gobettes, and cast hem in a pot; do bero clene broth. Seeb hem bat bey be tendre. Take brede and be self broth and drawe it vp yfere; take strong powdour and safroun and salt and cast berto. Take aryen and seeb hem harde; take out the 30lkes and hewe the whyte, take the pot fro be fyre and cast the whyte berinne. Messe the dysshes berwith, and lay the 30lkes aboue hool, and flour it with clowes.	(Chicken stew) Roasted roosters, broth, bread, strong powder, eggs, salt, saffron, cloves
Corat . Take the noumbles of calf, swyne, or of shepe; perboile hem and kerue hem to dyce. Cast hem in gode broth and do perto erbes, grene chybolles smale yhewe; seep it tendre, and lye with 30lkes of eyren. Do perto verious, safroun, powdour douce and salt, and serue it forth.	(Sheep organ stew) Sheep heart or lungs, broth, herbs, salt, scallions, verjuice, sweet powder, eggs,

Connynges in cyrip. Take connynges and seeb hem wel in good broth. Take wyne greke and do berto with a porcioun of vynegar and flour of canel, hoole clowes, quybibes hoole, and ober gode spices, with raisouns courance and gyngeyuer ypared and ymynced. Take vp the connynges and smyte hem on pecys and cast hem in to the siryppe, and seeb hem a litel in fere, and serue it forth. (Hares in talbotes is similar but contains almonds.)

(Rabbit stew) Male rabbits, meat broth, Greek wine, vinegar, cinnamon or cassia, cloves, cubebs, currants, gingerroot, almonds

Ingredients' Origins

Now, taking each category of ingredient in turn, we will determine how the head cook assembled the ingredients for these dishes if he were to make these specific dishes for Sir Geoffrey. Large manor estates, such as his, did not have access to the shops of large cities like London or Paris.8 Thus, the Lincolnshire manor had to either grow or raise most of the ingredients (or gather them from the forests and rivers). There were, as we shall see, some very specific exceptions.

MEAT: The various animals (cattle such as sheep, cows, etc.) eaten in these recipes were all "home-grown" rather than purchased from local markets or traveling traders⁹. Animals that were not raised on the farm (rabbits, deer, boar, game birds, etc.) were hunted, trapped, or otherwise snared nearby, ¹⁰ as seen in the other images cited in the Psalter.

It is, however, fairly impossible to document (even from household records, government or church regulations, account books, or even literature of the time like Chaucer's Canterbury Tales)¹¹ exactly what ratio of raised to wild animals appeared on Sir Geoffrey's table.¹²

Animals that were not kept alive through the winter (for the spring ploughing and birthing) were slaughtered and their meat smoked, brined or salted in barrels, or dried and hung for storage through the cold months. 13 The English raised sheep from at least the year 82514, not only for their meat (mutton and lamb) but also for their wool, skins (for leather goods and parchment), and milk. 15 Lincolnshire, specifically, focused on raising sheep. 16Like goats, they were very common throughout Northern England and the East Midlands. ¹⁷ Their meat, when freshly killed, appears most often in the recipes as potages and spitted roasts.

Pigs did not need to penned (as cattle did) but rather could be allowed to forage for nuts and other food in the woods (see the Psalter image of the swineherd) before being rounded up and slaughtered; thus, even the poor could often afford a pig or two. 18 The OED cites pigs as being

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⁸ Le Menagier de Paris, a French household manual from this period (1393), frequently directs the author's young wife to purchase certain ingredients from various merchants in the city. "Item, in Paris the goose-sellers fatten their geese on wheat-flour..." "At the pastry-cook order: first, to serve the young women, a dozen and a half conical wafers stuffed with cheese..." "First you need a clerk or varlet to shop for the green herb, violet, bread-crumbs, milk, cheese, eggs, fire-wood, coal, salt..." (Online translation at http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Menagier/Menagier.html.

⁹ Henisch, *Fast and Feast*, p. 146.

¹⁰ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 72.

¹¹ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 97.

¹² Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 72.

¹³ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 54.

¹⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, p. 1738.

¹⁵ Rebora, *Culture of the Fork*, p. 48.

¹⁶ "In the 13th and 14th Centuries many farmers in ...the Midlands switched from cereal growing to sheep farming, so that they could share in the expanding English wool trade." Wilson, Food and Drink in Britain, p. 78. Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p. 76.

¹⁸ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 102.

raised in England from at least 1189 and probably much earlier. 19 The pig's fat, rendered into lard, was the most common frying ingredient next to imported olive oil and was known generally simply as "grease" or "white grease." "Gammons" of bacon appear in multiple vegetable and pottage recipes, pork loins and roasts were used in several recipes²¹, and much of the rest of the animal's meat and organs found its way into sausages that were dried, smoked, and or cooked and eaten as such or used in recipes.²²

Chickens were common in England from at least 950²³, and manors often contained a dovecot and/or poultry yard for not only chickens but also ducks, geese, pheasants, and partridges (raised for both eggs and meat, and fattened on a diet of grains and milk).²⁴ Birds that were hunted throughout the seasons with bows, slings, nets, or falcons included cranes, herons, egrets, quail, plovers, blackbirds, thrushes, and finches.²⁵ In the Midlands as early as the 13th Century, manors that didn't raise or hunt sufficient birds could purchase them from local poulters. As seen in many works of art, fowl was most commonly spit-roasted. The flesh was also often ground or minced fine and combined in potages or stews.

Rabbits were not native to England; they were imported from Southern Europe (primarily Spain) during Roman times²⁶, since the occupying forces highly prized tender hare meat as delicacies.²⁷ Although the nobles coursed greyhounds and spaniels to catch hares, the poor could catch rabbits with nets or other traps;²⁸ they were particularly easy to hunt in the winter by following their tracks in the snow. Although these leaner meats were generally eaten fresh (roasted or stewed), they sometimes potted with grease in ceramic containers or salted and smoked like other meats.²

"WHITE MEATS" or DAIRY: Along with pigs, even the poorest peasants usually owned a chicken or two, so eggs were commonly eaten by all classes on a daily basis, especially since they could not be preserved for any period of time).³⁰ Eggs were collected daily, purchased and sold cheaply if not collected on the manor, and eaten in a variety of ways: hard-cooked, roasted in their shells in the fire embers, and fried in butter or lard when not used as an ingredient in various leaches, fritters, baked goods, and other recipes.³¹ Although Medieval English manors were naturally cold (being made of stone), eggs were generally used fresh rather than preserved. If they had to be stored, they were packed in ashes, grain, or sand in wicker or other containers.³²

Likewise, fresh milk from sheep, cows, or goats³³ obviously had a very short lifespan and had to be converted daily into cheese or butter if not used up in cooking or hot beverages (possets and caudles).³⁴ Heavily salted butter could last in the larder or cold storage (i.e., stone manor rooms) for some time, as could firm, aged cheeses.³⁵ Much of the milk was made into fresh or

²¹ #162 Malaches of pork "Hewe pork al to pecys..." Forme of Cury.

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, p. 1339.

²⁰ Scully, The Art of Cookery, p. 83.

²² #169 Sawgeat "... Take a sausege & kerf hym to gobetes..." Forme of Cury.

²³ Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition, p. 245.

 ²⁴ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 103.
 ²⁵ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 103.

²⁶ Wilson, Food and Drink in Britain, p. 72.

²⁷ See Hare in Sauce, Stuffed Hare, etc. in Apicius, Book VIII.

²⁸ Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p. 82.

²⁹ Wilson, Food and Drink in Britain, p. 88.

³⁰ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 29.

³¹ Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p. 139.

³² Wilson, Food and Drink in Britain, p. 144.

³³ Henisch, Fast and Feast, p. 124.

³⁴ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 104.

³⁵ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 54.

"green" cheese: simple, soft curds that comprised much of the poors' diet and was used in many tart recipes for the nobility.³⁶

"Though easily produced in large quantities, [butter] was almost untransportable. In countries where production was significant, it was heavily salted and could be shipped to distant consumers, but the fresh product could only travel short stretches, and herds were usually far from the large cities."³⁷

GRAIN: Barley, millet, rye, oats, buckwheat, wheat, and yes, even rice were all in use in various parts of Europe (the latter primarily in warmer climes like Italy) throughout this period – ground into flour for breadmaking or cooked into puddings or potages.³⁸ Plus, wheat starch (amydon) and rice flour were used to thicken some dishes.³⁹

We clearly see in the Psalter that the Lincolnshire manor grew at least wheat; it may have grown other grains and have been large enough to have its own bread ovens or bakehouses – we can't tell from the images in the Psalter. If it did not bake the daily bread "on-site," a professional baker would have set up shop next to the mill and sold loaves locally, with the weight and prices of the loaves strictly set by the regulations known as the Assize of Bread. 42

"The mill was closely linked with the manorial system, since it was always the property of the landlord... The bread oven ...took its place in the feudal scheme of things, for such ovens were to be found in the manor or the monastery."

HERBS: What "erbes" would Sir Geoffrey's cook have used? Turning to the **salat** and **erbolat** recipes in *Forme of Cury*, we see a range of possibilities: parsley, sage, scallions, leeks, borage, mint, fennel, rue, rosemary, purslain, savory, tansy, vervain, dittany of crete, onions, garlic, skirrets, and coriander/cilantro. Although some of these were gathered wild from the woods, many were grown in the manor garden, as seen in the images of the Psalter and medical herbals like the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*. (Notice that there is little or no distinction between root vegetables, flowers, and herbs.)

"It is likely that domestic production – that is, the kitchen garden – was able to supply most of the common herbs that are called for in the cookbooks. Parsley and sage, easily grown virtually anywhere, were the primary cooking herbs; as well, bay (or laurel) leaves, sorrel, herb bennet, hyssop, basil, tansy, marjoram, rocket, rue, water and garden cress, dill, mint, spikenard, pennyroyal, even violets and rose petals were valued by medieval cooks...."

NUTS & FRUITS: Fruit trees in England at this time bore apples, pears, quince, plums, and cherries⁴⁵, while bushes bore strawberries, gooseberries, and other berries. Oranges and lemons – which are used to great extent in meat dishes and subtleties during Elizabeth's time – were not yet commonly imported into England. Grapes could not consistently grow in England's cold climate, and thus often were imported from Spain, France, or Italy. Dried fruit (such as currants, raisins, dates, prunes, and figs) and nuts (almonds, pine nuts, and pistachios) came to England from traders of the Mediterranean coast (Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Asia Minor). Almonds were probably THE most commonly used foodstuff in the medieval kitchen; they provided

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³⁶ Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p. 150.

³⁷ Rebora, Culture of the Fork, p. 100.

³⁸ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 68.

³⁹ Hieatt, "Medieval Britain," p. 24

⁴⁰ Henisch, *Fast and Feast*, p. 81.

⁴¹ Sass, To The King's Taste, p. 16.

⁴² Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 99.

⁴³ Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p. 236.

⁴⁴ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ Henisch, "Medieval Britain," p. 24.

⁴⁶ Rebora, Culture of the Fork, p. 93.

almond milk, almond cream, and almond butter: the ingredients that were the basis of most fastday recipes.4

Fruits that were not dried or made into preserves⁴⁸ were packed in jars of honey or candied in sugar (as were some nuts) to remain edible.⁴⁹ Some apples and pears could actually last most of the winter, packed in straw.⁵⁰

WINE AND ITS BYPRODUCTS: The Romans introduced wine production into England during its occupation and some areas (Gloucester, Ledbury, and other Southeastern lands) were notable for their wines. As Christianity spread in England, the monasteries slowly became the major producers of not only wine but also beer and distilled spirits.⁵¹

"The wine trade was one of the most important elements in medieval commerce. Because there are such widely differing wines, and because wine production in different places tends to specialize in different varieties, a lot of money and activity was engaged in buying, transporting, and selling large stocks of wines. There were, of course, local merchants, retailers whose major business lay in handling the production from the vineyards of the region. But money was also to be made in responding to a demand for wines from more distant lands..." (Corsica, Crete, Cyprus, Greece, Flanders, Bruges and the Rhine {Germany}, Gascony {France}, Spain, etc.)⁵²

Although the English purchased vinegar along with their wines from monasteries and other vineyards, the cooks knew how to make a quick wine vinegar substitute if they ran low on the ingredient:53

"Dry grape seeds with the skins of the grapes, grind them into a powder, then mix this with the best vinegar [that you have on hand]; repeat the preceding three times; finally, after having dried the resultant mixture for a last time, put a little of the powder into your wine and it will become vinegar immediately."54

Verjuice is the pressed juice of young, unripe grapes or crabapples – the latter especially used in England, where apples were grown much more easily than grapes. Vinegar and wine were stored in barrels in larders, and would last for several months without deterioration. Verjuice, however, did not travel well and had a much shorter "shelf time" and thus had to be used primarily around apple-pressing time in the autumn.

SALT: English shores provided some of this vital mineral; a salt "industry" evaporated the salt from sea-water and shipped it to certain merchants.⁵⁶ Also, salt was mined in England since Roman times.⁵⁷ Lincolnshire itself was home to salterns that were active throughout our period of study, so Sir Geoffrey's manor presumably purchased its salt locally. It should be noted that the need for salt for preservation and seasoning forced most of England to start importing salt from France in the 13th Century.⁵⁸

SPICES: Pepper, saffron, cubebs, grains of paradise, galangale, cinnamon & cassia, cloves, nutmeg & mace, ginger, anise – these are the single most recognized element of Medieval cuisine... and since England's non-tropical climate is incapable of growing them, these highly

⁴⁸ Henisch, Fast and Feast, p. 117.

⁴⁷ Henisch, *Fast and Feast*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ Henisch, *Fast and Feast*, p.114.

⁵¹ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 140.

⁵² Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 145.

⁵³ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 82.

⁵⁴ de Villanova, *Liber de vinis*.

⁵⁵ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 80.

⁵⁶ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 107.

⁵⁸ Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p. 39.

expensive commodities had to be transported overland from China and India⁵⁹, generally by Venetian or Genoese merchants.⁶⁰ In the later Middle Ages, Spain was able to grow some of the spices and ship them directly to England. These spices were valued not only for culinary purposes but for medicinal ones as well, and carefully tracked in the manor ledgers.

"The mania for spices... was, along with market for silk and wool, one of the driving forces in medieval commerce." ⁶¹

In larger towns, spice merchants or Pepperers Guilds (and later, apothecaries) sold premade mixtures of ground and blended spices, the two most well known being poudre {or powdour} douce (sweet powder) and poudre forte (strong powder). The sweet mixture generally contained mace, nutmeg, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and sometimes cubebs or grains of paradise, mixed with sugar. The strong mixture substituted pepper for the sugar.

SUGAR: Sugar, which was considered another spice, also came originally from India and China around 1100, but was later grown "closer to home" in Italy and other Mediterranean countries⁶⁴. It was processed and formed into loaves or cones for transportation across Europe.

"As a rule, possibly because of its importation from the East, sugar was classified as a spice. Sugar was generally sold in a loaf, the most prized being sugre cypre (sugar of Cyprus)... Since most households kept their own beehives, honey, the other popular sweetener, was rarely purchased." 65

Please note that this paper, by focusing solely on images from the Psalter in question, is providing an incomplete view of the ingredients in Medieval English cuisine and their origins. It is ignoring several major dishes and ingredients: namely, all the fish dishes served on fast-days, the venison hunted by the nobility, and the potages, fritters, tarts, and pies that appear so often in the cookbooks of this period. Plus, although citrus fruits began to be imported into England around 1290 from Spain⁶⁶ and other Mediterranean countries, I have not discussed their impact on English cooking of this time.

However, this paper has proposed a reasonable theory of what is being prepared in the images of the Psalter, and how the cook gathered the ingredients necessary for those dishes.

⁵⁹ Scully, *The Art of Cookery*, p. 30.

⁶⁰ Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain*, p. 280.

⁶¹ Rebora, Culture of the Fork, p. 103.

⁶² Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 108.

⁶³ Hieatt, Constance, An Ordinance of Pottage, p. 232.

⁶⁴ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 107.

⁶⁵ Sass, *To The King's Taste*, p.25.

⁶⁶ Black, "Medieval Britain," p. 106.

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