



MUSEO DELLA ROCCA
MALATESTIANA DI
MONTEFIORE
CONCA

MEDIEVAL CUISINE.

FOODS, RECIPES AND CUSTOMS OF A THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

What distinguished the rich from the poor more than anything else on the table in the Middle Ages was meat. It could be fresh, salted or smoked. Chicken, bacon, pork, beef, mutton, duck, geese, pigeons, and game such as pheasants and partridges were eaten in the kitchen and on tables at feasts. And it could also include cranes, skylarks, herons, deer, hares and wild boar caught during hunting trips as well as swans and peacocks. The most exotic and costly examples of sea fish were sturgeon and whale, both known as royal fish, and oysters found in numerous waste dumps inside the Montefiore Fortress were also abundant. In the Middle Ages people used to boil meat in large cauldrons to prepare stews and soups or alternatively they would roast or grill it depending on individual taste and the menu. Ravioli filled with minced meat and mixed with eggs and breadcrumbs, then blanched, were common. Another dish required meat to be aged for days with spices and wine. Finally, meat or fish pies, savoury pastries and pancakes were always present on the tables. The most common fish were cod, trout, sole, plaice, salmon, sea bream, pike, mackerel and mullet. The fish could be fresh, smoked or salted so that it could be stored for a long time hanging in kitchens. It was usually fried or cooked in a batter made with beer and salt water. The most common vegetable side dishes were peas and beans, but they also included root vegetables such as carrots, parsnips and burdock as well as lettuce, beetroot, cabbage, spinach, leeks, pumpkins and watercress. Capers and walnuts were favourites. The bread was dark in appearance because the flours were unrefined and as well as being easy to nibble on, it would also be served on a platter while other dishes were served in bowls.

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Desserts were based on cheese, spices and fruit, such as apples, pears, plums, peaches, cherries and berries. On the tables of the wealthier lords, exotic foods imported from abroad would be found such as rice, almonds, sultanas, oranges, pomegranate, figs and dates.

Food was seasoned with salt, vinegar, mustard, aniseed and herbs such as basil, fennel, rosemary, parsley, sage and cardamom. Honey was a common sweetener, while sugar was rare, sometimes made with roses and violets. Sauces were prepared by grinding herbs and mixing them with wine or with the juice of unripe grapes or vinegar. Onion, garlic, ginger, saffron, cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon formed part of a chef's daily spices, while other seasonings such as pepper or nutmeg were only used on special occasions due to their high cost. For example 30 grams of pepper would cost the same as the daily wage of a labourer at the time.

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