

Frisian Cuisine: Chicken with Stuffing

The Feast: or Documenting Food without a Cookbook

In order to establish the cultural cuisine¹ of the Frisians, I had to discover: what foods were available in the area known as Frisia during the time period of 800-1000 CE, what flavorings would have been used, how would food have been processed, and what were the cultural meanings of different kinds of foods (what was served to the wealthy, what was served during feasts, what kinds of foods would have been taboo, etc.). This task was made more difficult as there are no cookbooks dating from this period of time in this area. To answer the questions that I needed to answer, I used archeological evidence, mythological information, and written records from that period of time by people who had come into contact with the Frisians.

A Brief and Incomplete History of the Frisians

Ing wæs ærest mid Eástdenum
Gesewen secgum, oð he siððan eást
Ofer wæg gewát. Wæn æfter ran.
Þus heardingas Þone hæle nemdon.

Ing was first amidst the East Danes
So seen, until he went eastward
over the sea. His wagon ran after.
Thus the Heardings named that hero.

-Old English Runic Poem

The Frisians are believed to have originated in the area encompassing Southern Scandinavia and the Weser/Oder region some time around 1750 BCE. This group of people is also referred to as the *Ingaevones*, a name given to them by Tacitus in his *Germania* (c. 98 CE). Around 1000-500 BCE they began moving into Jutland, Holstein, Frisia, and the Danish Islands. By 50 BCE, these groups had evolved into the distinct cultures of the Frisians, Saxons, Jutes, and Angles. The Frisians believe that they descended from the god Inguz (or Ing); this is another name for the Norse God Freyr. Culturally, they are most closely related to the Saxons.

Around 12 BCE, the Roman Emperor Augustus wanted to make the Elbe river the Roman Empire's most northerly border, in order to do so, he negotiated a truce under which the Frisians had to regularly pay taxes in the form of cowhides. By 28 CE, this deal was no longer working for the Frisians and they stopped paying their taxes to Rome, when Rome sent a collector to get the outstanding taxes, the Frisians hung him. Rome responded by sending some legions to punish the

¹ (from Research Methods in Nutritional Anthropology) a cultural cuisine is "the culturally elaborated and transmitted body of food-related practices of any given culture," which include: (a) the selection of a set of basic (staple or secondary) foods; (b) the frequent use of a characteristic set of flavorings; (c) the characteristic processing (e.g. chopping and cooking) of such foods; and (d) the adoption of a variety of rules dealing with acceptable foods and combinations, festival foods, the social context of eating, and the symbolic uses of foods (Rozin and Rozin, 1981, p. 243; see also Rozin, 1973)

Frisians and to conquer Frisia, however at the battle of Baduhennawood, the Frisians drove the Roman legionnaires out of Frisia, and the Romans did not return to the region after that.

Between 47 CE and 250 CE there were a series of interactions between the Romans and the Frisians. Around 250 CE, the Frisians turned their attention away from the Romans as the coastal districts (the area that is now The Netherlands) had to be abandoned due to the sea level rising so high that it was utterly uninhabitable. These districts remained empty for 150 years. During this period of flooding, the Frisians formed a tribal alliance with a neighboring group, the Chaukians. This alliance created the group known as the Franks. This alliance migrates towards the south, away from their flooded lands, and, despite its former history of glory in battle, eventually will be known as the French.

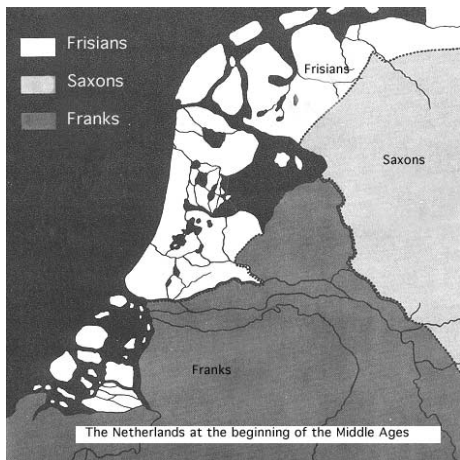


Fig. 2

documented only by the Franks and Anglo-Saxons. There are very few historical documents of Frisian origin from this time period as the Frisians didn't start writing things down until after their conversion to Christianity. Prior to the Frisian writings, extant documents are mostly from church officials who interacted with the Frisians and Romans who interacted with the Frisians.

Frisian Ingredients and their Origins

Finding out the available foodstuffs in Frisia is simplified by the Frisian role in the trade of the North Sea. They controlled great portions of that trade, so there would have been a somewhat steady stream of goods coming in from Scandinavia and England, as well as trade with their German neighbors.

The sources that I used for this feast were archaeological evidence found in sites in Frisia and the regions most likely to have had trade associations with the Frisians: specifically, digs located in Jorvik (York, England), Hedeby (Denmark), Oseburg (Norway), Dorestad (Holland, Friesland), and Tiel (Holland, Friesland).

Obviously there was a disparity between the items available to the wealthy and the common folk. What will be brought to your table today is a reflection of the great wealth and privilege that was afforded to very few. The goal of the original feast was to provide a selection of foods that would be appropriate for wealthy Frisians during the time period, and would also be appropriate for the SCA's lighthearted and fun gatherings with an abundance of food.

As we fast forward through the great migration that sent some Frisians to England and Germany, the Frisians built their Empire, which was established in approximately 400 CE. By the 7th century, this Empire spanned from northern Germany, to northern Belgium (the modern border of Flanders mimics the ancient one for Frisia in Belgium). Figure 2 is provided to show the western parts of the Frisian Empire at the start of the Middle Ages. Their location put them in the position to control a large part of the Northern trade routes.

Most of the time between the establishment of the Frisian Empire and its assimilation into the Frankish empire is

A comprehensive listing of available foodstuffs according to archaeological data²:

Meat: beef, mutton/lamb, goat, pork

Poultry: chicken, geese, duck

Saltwater fish: herring, cod, haddock, flat-fish, ling, horse mackerel, smelt

Estuarine fish: oysters, cockles, mussels, winkles, smelt, eels, salmon

Dairy products: butter, milk, eggs

Grains: Oats, wheat, rye, barley, spelt, millet

Legumes: fava (*Vicia faba* L.)

Vegetables: carrots, parsnips, turnips(?), celery, spinach, brassicas (cabbage?), lichen

Fruits: plum, sloe (*Prunus spinosa* L.), cherries, elderberries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, apples, and pears

Nuts: hazelnuts, walnuts, almonds

Herbs/spices: dill, coriander, hops, garlic, long pepper, salt, “huttentut”(or “dederzaad”) a relative of the mustard family, parsley, cumin, mustard, horseradish

Cooking aids: linseed oil, hempseed oil, walnut oil, honey

Beverages: Rhine wine, ale

The Process of Preparing Food

Most of the cooking processes that are used today would have been used during the Dark Ages, including frying, baking, roasting (on a spit), toasting, smoking (for flavoring, not necessarily preservation), drying, poaching, and stewing. The methods of food preparation were also very similar to modern preparation techniques: chopping, dicing, slicing, carving of meats, grinding of grain and nuts into flours, etc.

There is no solid evidence that details how food was specifically prepared among the Frisians in this time period. For example, we don't know if chicken was stuffed and roasted, or how beef may have been served because there have been no intact food items found. Therefore it is up to the individual cook to come up with preparation methods for the ingredients based upon their knowledge of cooking techniques both modern and medieval.

Food would have been prepared over a fire, either an open fire in the outdoors, with a tripod and a pot suspended over it, or on a stone hearth³ inside of a house. This is the major division in how modern cooks approach cooking and how cooks during our period of study approached cooking; modern cooks have access to ovens and very tightly controlled flame. We do not have to make sure to have a store of the correct woods to ensure that the fire burns as hot as we need, or to start early enough to have the proper amount of coals. We just turn the stove or oven on and cook.

The cooking vessels that would have been used also had an affect on the quality and flavor of the food. Pots made of iron, ceramic, or soapstone depended on the quality of the materials they were made of, and the skill of the craftsman who created them. A cooking vessel also was affected by age

² This listing is based on Carolyn Priest-Dorman's work, *Archeological Finds of Ninth- and Tenth- Century Viking Foodstuffs*.

³ Priest-Dorman, Carolyn. *Archaeological Finds of Viking Hearths*. <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/hearths.html>. 1994, 1998.

and use. A new pot may heat evenly, but over time may be weakened by exposure to high temperatures. The flavor of the food would also be affected by the cook's diligence in cleaning the pot. This makes for an inconsistent product.

With modern cookware, we also must rely on craftsmanship, quality of materials, and cleaning skill. However, our cookware is mass produced and tested for quality and purity. Mass production has eliminated a great deal of the character of cookware, but with that small loss of character we gain simplicity of food preparation and a more consistent final product.

Generally, the food that is produced in a modern kitchen using a range and oven does not fully recreate the food that would have been eaten by those using a wood-based fire as a heating source. The tradeoff, again, is convenience for the modern cook.

These are some archaeological examples of the types of cooking vessels and utensils that would have been used during the Viking Age:

	<p>Flesh Fork and Small Griddle - The fork would have been used to handle meat and the small griddle would have been used for making either small flatbreads, or for moving hot food from one place to another.</p>		<p>Cooking Pot - This is a representative example of the iron cooking pots used by the Vikings.</p>
<p>Pot, Hanging Chain, Soapstone Cooking Vessel, and other cooking tools - These are general cooking tools.</p>		<p>Cooking Spits - This is a scene from the Bayeux Tapestry showing birds cooked on spits.</p>	

The Ingredients

The ingredient choices were made based upon what items would have been available during the late winter. The selection of parsnips and carrots was made not only because of their seasonality, but also because they are root vegetables that keep for longer periods of time than leafy greens or less hardy vegetables. The smoked oysters were selected because Frisia is a coastal region, where oysters would have been available, and smoking would have preserved them for use longer into the winter than other processes. Barley was selected because of its hardiness and frequency of use as a grain. Dried barley keeps nearly indefinitely. It also provides a unique mouth feel for the modern palate, and takes you outside of your own time and place by simply being different. I felt that this added to the experience of the feast. Chicken stock was selected as the event that these recipes were developed for was at a dry site, so, using wine or beer was not possible and water brings no flavor to the dish. It is my opinion that beer would have been a reasonable option for the liquid used in this dish due to the flavor that it brings, and its availability late in the winter.

The chicken would have been cooked over an open fire on a spit, which would have yielded a much smokier and richer flavor than roasting it in an oven or roasting pan. The “stuffing” would have been a side dish, cooked in either an iron or a soapstone pot over an open fire. This also would have given the food a smoky flavor.

I chose to make the stuffing the way that I did based on some later sources in the same area. It bears a resemblance to frumenty⁴ in its form. This struck me as a reasonable solution to the usual problem of offering new food to an audience that may not be receptive. The pairing of chicken and stuffing is familiar to the modern palate, but I gave it a twist with the ingredients and mouth feel by maintaining the historical integrity of the ingredients.

The herbs were selected using the yardstick of; what would have been available and what would have tasted good. Dried herbs would have been more likely to have been used during the later winter. I used fresh coriander and dill because I prefer the sharpness of fresh herbs in my cooking.

Roasted Chicken with Stuffing:

One Roasting Chicken
2 cups barley (pearl, dry)
1 small tin smoked Oysters
2 parsnips cut in 1/4” dice
1 carrot cut in 1/4” dice
1 gallon Chicken Stock
Fresh dill, chopped
Fresh Coriander, chopped

⁴ The earliest reference to “frumenty” by name that I could locate was *Curie en Inghysch*, which was written in the 15th Century. The earliest recipe that I could find that used the same process was in *Apicius*. The process of boiling a whole grain in liquid until soft and then adding flavoring of some kind is basic enough to assume that despite the references being few and geographically removed, the process would have been known during the time of the Frisians.

Soak the barley overnight in water.

Preheat the oven to 450°.

Follow the package directions for cooking the Barley, using chicken stock, rather than water.

Clean the chicken rather well, making sure to wash the cavity out thoroughly.

When the barley is soft, which will take quite a while, put in a large oven-safe container, a casserole dish works fine.

Mix the barley, parsnips, carrots, smoked oysters, walnuts, and coriander.

Add a little chicken stock or water to the stuffing so there is sufficient moisture, and put into the oven on a low shelf.

Put the chicken into a roasting pan.

Cook for 15-20 minutes, and then reduce the temperature of the oven to 375° (this will help to crisp up the skin).

Cook for an hour to an hour and a half, until a thermometer placed in the breast of the chicken reads 170° - 175°.

The legs should move freely in their joints, and if you cut the breast, the liquid should be completely clear.

Serve immediately, while chicken is still hot and juicy.

Conclusions

The greatest difficulty posed by creating a menu based on archaeological data is that archaeology can only tell us about the leavings of a culture long gone, and can not flesh out the true lives of the people who left those things. We are left to archaeological fact, bolstered by our imaginations to fully recreate the lifestyles of the people who we are attempting to reenact.

Even written records of this place and time are colored by the non-Frisian authors of those records. Tacitus brought with him the prejudices and expectations of a Roman, and the Priests who came to convert the masses brought their own agendas and perspectives to their writings.

Recreating the food and dining practices of the Frisians is made difficult because understanding the culture in which a cuisine was created and enjoyed is essential to understanding what was eaten, when, and why. We will never truly know what foods were communicated to recreate a dish “just like Mom made”, to know what dishes were requested when someone was ill, or to know what dishes were dreamt of having served during times of famine. The poetry of the time, to some degree, fill in the gaps of the last item, but were the foods mentioned ones that were actually cooked and served, or were they like the mythological “manna from heaven”?

The greatest joy of creating these dishes was the possibility of introducing something that as closely as possible resembled the food of a particular culture during a particular time, and to prepare and share that food within the culture of the Society for Creative Anachronism. The inspiration that started this research is a great love of bringing people together to share in camaraderie with each other over a meal. I hope that others are inspired to discover more about this cuisine, and to create wonderful meals for others to enjoy.

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handout, perfect for when I started this project, and a good thing to go back to in order to ensure you've caught as much as you can in your research.

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information since 1936. I always ended up double-checking information with the expectation that new things had been discovered in the interim.

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Additional Resources

Private conversation(s) and correspondence with Alexandra 'Raven' Fagelson.

Private correspondence with Christiaan Van de Velde.

Private correspondence with Jennifer Heise.

Private correspondence with Dr. Kees Nieuwenhuijsen.

Private correspondence with Marisca Zweistra-Hoogschagen.

Discussion on the Medieval Dutch email list.

Discussion on the Middle Kingdom Cook's email list.

Private conversation(s) and correspondence with Monica Gaudio.

Private correspondence with Roel Oosterop.

Private conversation(s) and correspondence with Steven Jensen.

Maps of the region acquired from the following sources

<http://www.rabbel.info/mapstime.html>

<http://www.euratlas.com/summary.htm>