

To Make Eggs

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The book *Eenen seer schoonen ende excellenten Cocboeck* (UB Amsterdam, 1593) was published in 1593 by Carel Baten, who according to the fashion at the time, Latinized his name to Carolus Battus. He was a doctor of medicine who practiced in Dordrecht, and was one of the first translators of medical texts from French into Dutch. The source for the original work that I have used is a transcription of the original document done by Marleen van der Molen-Willebrands. Ms. Molen-Willebrands is a renowned Dutch scholar and dietician who has created a transcript from the 1593 edition of this cookbook. Hers is currently the only publicly available transcription of the *Cocboeck*, and the extensive food background that she brings to the transcribing of the work is also a great benefit.

A brief survey of the manuscript uncovers an amazing breadth of recipes, which are not arranged in any consistent fashion. Organization of this text was provided by later editors and translators, including Ms. Molen-Willebrands. The influences seen are from a broad spectrum of European cuisine (most notably French, English, and German), and includes the lesser known cuisines of the Wallonians and Belgians (specifically the Flemish). It also shows an influence by three well known Dutch cookbooks: *Een notabel boecxken van cockeryen* (1513), MS 476 (late 16th Century), and *Eenen nyeuwen Coockboeck* (1560) (Molen-Willebrands, 2003), and was itself an important source for *De verstantige kock* (1667). There are 298 recipes, some of which are directly related to modern Belgian “traditional” foods (such as Tiense Cheese, a pie from Doornik ('Dornijpe taert') and a cream-custard from Moerbeke). Strangely, only six recipes mention the word “Lent”.

The order that was imposed upon this collection by Ms. Molen-Willebrands is the following: 1) pottages, porridges and gravies, 2) meat dishes, 3) fish, 4) sauces, 5) brewet, 6) stuffing, 7) pastries, 8) pies and tarts, 9) baked and boiled dishes, 10) beverages, 11) confectionery, 12) vegetables, 13) dishes for the sick, 14) miscellaneous.

Original Recipe (Carolus Battus):

1. Om eyeren te vollen

Neemt herde eyeren, peltse, ende clooftse in den midden ende neemt de doyeren uut. Meemt dan groen cruyt, te weten: roosmarijn, margeleyn, ende diergelijcke. Neemt dan eenen pot waters, ende letet op de seude commen, doet er dan u cruyt in, ende latet een walleken ofte twee opsieden. Neemt dan het cruyt weder uut het water, ende doetet in eenen mortier, ende doet er de herde eyeren by, stampet tesamen wel cleyn ende doet er dan by: suycker, cannell, foeylie, gyneber, gepoedert, ende roeret wel onderen. Alsdan so vollet hol van den witte der eyeren met desen cruyde, elck half ey besonder. Alsdan soo neemt een panne met boter, laetse bruyn werdern, endelegt de halve gevolve eyeren daerin, met het cruyt tegen de panne, ende laetse so roosten. Ghy moechtse oock wel om keeran, ende als u dunckt datse genoech zijn, so dientse ter tafelen, ende strooyt er suycher op.

Translation (by the author of this paper):

1. To make eggs

Take hard egg, peel and cut in the middle and take the yolk out. Take then green herbs to soak: rosemary, marjoram, and such. Take then a pot [or quart] of water and leave in the steam bowl. Put there then you herbs in and let a small boiler or two boil take then the herbs again out the water and put in a mortar and put there by the hard egg. Stamp together² much smaller and put there then sugar, cinnamon, mace, ginger [possibly melted ginger] and stir much together also. Thus fill hollow of the white of the egg with the same herbs each half separately also as take a pan with butter let brown become and lay the half filled egg therein with the herbs toward the pan and leave as roast you might also much how turn and also you think that enough be. Thus serve for the table and strew there sugar on.

Redaction (by the author of this paper):

6 eggs, hard boiled
 3 sprigs fresh parsley
 2 sprigs fresh thyme
 1 sprig fresh rosemary
 1 t dried marjoram³
 1T grated sugar
 ½ t ground cinnamon
 1 t ground ginger
 1 t ground mace
 2 T salted butter

I boiled six eggs according to the modern best practice of starting with cold eggs in cold water, placing them on a burner set on “high”, and cooking for 20 minutes. They were then cut in half and set aside, yolk side up.

Rinse the fresh herbs and pluck the leaves off of the stems.

Bring a pot of water to a boil and add the fresh herbs. Boil the herbs for two minutes and then remove from the water. Then put the boiled herbs, dried marjoram, and egg yolks into a mortar.

The yolks and herbs were then mashed together until it was a chunky paste. To this paste, add the sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and mace.

Continue mashing the yolks until the herbs and spices are evenly distributed.

Using a spoon, place a scoop of the yolk into the hollow of the whites of the egg and set aside.

² From <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/tezamen>. The word “tezamen” is part of the modern Dutch lexicon. The Middle Dutch word “tesamen” is listed in this resource as a misspelling of the modern Dutch “tezamen”. The etymology of the word (a joining of the words “te” and “samen”) also suggests that the modern and medieval meaning of the word is the same.

³ I used dried as there was no fresh available.

Melt the butter in a pan and place the eggs yolk side down in the pan.

Fry until brown.

Garnish the finished product with more grated sugar and serve.

The Ingredients

According to humeral theory, the albumen (white) of the egg is cold and moist and the yolk is warm and moist. The Tacuinum of Liège states that you can neutralize the dangers by eating only the yolk (Butlān & Arano, 1976). There is nothing specifically indicated in the recipe that indicates that the white is to be consumed, therefore, given this information, it would not be outside of reason to eat the yolk and not the albumen. The information about the humeral natures of the various ingredients were gathered from the Medieval Health Handbook (Butlān & Arano, 1976), unless otherwise cited.

Rosemary: Warm and dry.

Marjoram: Warm and dry.

Sugar: Sugar is warm and humid, but purifies the body, produces blood that is not bad, and is good for all ages, in all seasons, and in all regions. Because of the overall good benefit of sugar, it may be approached as having more benefits than drawbacks.

Cinnamon: Cinnamon is warm and dry. Cinnamon would have been in the form of cassia, rather than true cinnamon (d'Allemtejo, 2004). I am not entirely sure of the accuracy of this comment as true cinnamon is native to Sri Lanka, which is located off of the southern coast of India and theoretically could have been imported to India and carried to Western Europe via one of the Silk Roads. There is no differentiation given between true cinnamon and cassia given in the primary source cookbooks with which I am familiar so it can be logically assumed that the medieval cook may not have known the difference, or did not have a different term for both ingredients.

Mace: Mace is warm and dry. Mace is the covering of the nutmeg plant and has a taste similar to, but sweeter than, nutmeg.

Ginger: Ginger is warm and dry. Ginger would have been found in a dried state, as transporting the fresh roots would have been prohibitive given the transportation methods available during our period of study. Further, ginger was preserved in sugar for shipping (d'Allemtejo, 2004). The reference to molten ginger would fit with this where the sugar that was included with the ginger as a preservation tool would be melted along with the ginger, to make it sweeter.

Butter: Warm and moist.

In the first section of the recipe, there is a reference to “green herbs” it then goes on to name rosemary and marjoram followed by “and such”. I chose to use parsley and thyme as they worked most harmoniously with the rest of the flavorings. In an analysis of the frequency in

which certain flavorings appear in the cookbook, parsley is referenced seventeen times, thyme seven times, and sage six times (Strobel, 2009). Parsley is also identified as being warm and dry and thyme is also warm and dry (Butlān & Arano, 1976). This follows the same pattern as was established by the warm and dry ingredients already included.

The herbs and spices are of a nature that would balance the nature of the egg. In addition, the recommendation from the Tacuinum of Liège says that the best way to mitigate the dangers of eggs is to consume only the yolks. This leads me to believe that the whites may not be intended to be eaten and are only a vehicle for the flavored yolk. I tried it both ways and the yolk alone is quite nice.

The eggs that I used require special mention as they are from the chickens that I own. The breed is the white crested black polish, which is a breed descended from the Polish, also called the Paduan, breed which is documented in Europe during our period of study. There is a direct mention of the Paduan breed is in Platina's *De Honesta Voluptate*, Book V, Chapter 10, "The hen is useful to people for the egg, the pullet, the capon, and the rooster, whether it is large, like those from Padua, or of a species of dwarfs." (Milham, 1999)

The eggs that my chickens lay would be modernly classified as medium sized eggs and bear very close resemblance to medium sized eggs purchased at a grocery store, as you can see from the picture below.



The Process

The equipment that would have been available to a sixteenth century cook to prepare food would have been similar to the equipment that is available to the modern cook. Reviewing the full details of the tools and equipment available to medieval cooks would take more space than is reasonable here, so I will restrict myself to discussing the preparation and equipment pertinent to the recreation of the recipe being reviewed in this paper.

The manor cook in sixteenth century Netherlands would have had available to them three legged pots that would have been placed on a table top that had a space towards the back of the top for a fire. The pots would have been used for boiling and the temperature would have been controlled by moving the pots closer to or further away from the fire. There would have been an oven available that would have been placed near the wall of the kitchen that would have had some

means by which to vent the smoke out of the kitchen itself. There would have been pans looking similar to modern pans with a long handle for the cook to move the pan as needed. This would also have been used on the table top, which would retain heat from the fire built upon it.



This woodcut (provided courtesy of godecookery.com) shows a scene from a well appointed German kitchen that shows the kinds of equipment that I have described. The oven in this woodcut is located in an archway in the back wall and is recognizably a beehive style oven.

My Process

I did use modern equipment: a household stove, pot, and pan. I also purchased my herbs locally as growing them during the winter months proved to be more than my herbs could handle. The spices were purchased from my local Penzey's as they were the highest quality spices that I could find. Purchasing spices is not entirely modern as medieval cooks would have purchased their spices at market in their ground or solid forms depending on availability and preference.

The fresh herbs and egg yolks were ground using a mortar and pestle as it provided the best product. Attempts to use a food processor ended in rubbery yolk that did not taste good.



I made my own butter, using heavy cream, beating it until the butterfat separated from the butter milk. I used a hand mixer to achieve this as I have nerve damage in my wrists and doing it by hand would have been excruciating. During our period of study, butter would have been made by using a churn and by agitating the milk (which would not be homogenized and the milk fat would be able to be separated out of the milk) until separation occurred. The illustration to the left is from the Luttrell Psalter (courtesy of godecookery.com) and shows a cook churning butter using the equipment that I described.

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