



What they ate
food and foodways in Mdina and beyond
From Roman times to the Middle Ages

George Cassar
Malta · 2015



Published by: Heland Project

Promoting socio-economic sustainable development through innovative technological actions for Mediterranean tourism-heritage and landscape protection clusters.

This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union under the ENPI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the University of Malta - Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union or of the Programme's management structures.

Copyright © Heland Project – University of Malta – 2015

Heland team: Nadia Theuma, George Cassar, Sarah Faith Azzopardi, Giusy Cardia

No part of this publication may be produced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the previous permission of the publisher.

The 2007-2013 ENPI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme is a multilateral Cross-Border Cooperation initiative funded by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The Programme objective is to promote the sustainable and harmonious cooperation process at the Mediterranean Basin level by dealing with the common challenges and enhancing its endogenous potential. It finances cooperation projects as a contribution to the economic, social, environmental and cultural development of the Mediterranean region. The following 14 countries participate in the Programme: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Syria (participation currently suspended), Tunisia. The Joint Managing Authority (JMA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy). Official Programme languages are Arabic, English and French (www.enpicbmed.eu).

The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

Front cover: Jean-Baptiste de Saive (circle) – *Kitchen interior with maid* (1563)

Back cover: Floris van Dyck – *Still life* (1610)

Title page: Lucas Van Valckenborch (circle) – *The Kitchen Maid* (16th cent.)

This book is not for sale

Design and Printing: Best Print Co LTD, Qrendi • Tel: 21 680 789

ISBN: 978-99957-886-3-6

Contents

Introduction	iv
---------------------------	-----------

Roman Times (218 BC – 4th century AD)

A brief historical note	1
Agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing	4
Food and dining habits	6
A wealthy family at dinner	9
The kitchen	11
Recipes	12

The Muslim Presence (870-1249)

A brief historical note	15
Agricultural activity and animal husbandry	17
The food and dining habits	18
Recipes	21

The Medieval Age (1127-1530)

A brief historical note	24
Agricultural activity and animal husbandry	27
The food and dining habits	30
Recipes	43

References	46
-------------------------	-----------



Jacopo da Empoli – Still-Life (detail) (16th cent.)

Introduction

To eat is surely a necessity, but it can also be a pleasure. Studying the theme of food and foodways is highly interesting as we discover what people ate, the recipes they invented, how they cultivated the raw products which they then turned into dishes, the traditions which are tied to such recipes, how these were developed and adapted to cultural and ethnic realities, variants that are found in different countries and societies, religious and social exigencies, and so much more.

This book looks at food and foodways with special focus on Malta. It looks at the Roman, Arabic and Medieval periods in the life of the Maltese Islands. Furthermore it takes Mdina as its departing point as it was the main urban settlement; the other inhabited areas were no more than villages and hamlets. The only other two places that had some socio-political prominence and significance were the *Borgo* and the Rabat *cittadella* of Gozo. Yet Mdina remained the city of Malta and the place where the political, religious and social elites lived. It was thus the leader of an otherwise rural population. It was a forward looking and enterprising city when all the casals were conservative and circumscribed. It was from Mdina that the island of Malta was administered through the *Universitas* which set rules, regulations and directions.

Food is no different from other sources of power. Those who have food and can control it, also have authority. Those who are wealthy have access to more and better food, also to a wider variety of foodstuffs. Mdina was thus the place of the affluent, of those who owned the land, the herds, and the properties which they leased to commoners, to herdsmen, to farm labourers and to craftsmen. They ate food which was much more interesting and varied, and who could afford more refined and expensive items. After all, in Roman Melite, Arab Medina and Medieval Mdina, many of the residents constituted the top stratum of the population of Malta. In other words, Mdina had the cream of Maltese society and as one testimony to this, these had access to the best and more expensive food, eaten around proper tables and prepared by cooks using refined and sometimes exotic ingredients. Those others who were not so fortunate had to content themselves with that which they could buy from street and shop vendors or cultivate in their gardens and small fields. When fresh food was not available or was too expensive, they then turned to salted fish or meat, dried fruits and other foodstuffs which may have lacked quality but still served their purpose for human need. One ubiquitous food item was bread, the commodity *par excellence*. It could be made from wheat flour for the affluent or from *mablut* for the poorer classes.

This book looks at people and food. It relates a human story that rarely changes if not in historical details.

The study of food and foodways was inspired by the Heland Project. To address the scope of the Project, the University of Malta – Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture, took Mdina as its pilot site and looked at its cultural heritage which it aimed to present in a better and more intelligible way to the visitors of the old city of Malta but also to the locals who may not be aware of the real cultural wealth of ‘the silent city’ as it is popularly known in touristic literature. It is hoped that this book and its theme will help to build on the aims and objectives of the Heland Project and enhance the image of Mdina as a prominent and historically significant city – worthy of appreciation and conservation.

Roman Times (218 BC – 4th century AD)

A brief historical note

After the long presence of the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, it was at the beginning of the Second Punic War in 218 BC that the Romans took control of the Maltese islands.

A first attempt at conquering the islands by the Romans was made in 256 BC during the First Punic War when Consul Caius Atilius Regulus overran Maleth (the Punic name for Malta) and destroyed all that came in his way while his soldiers carried off all they could put their hand upon.

The Roman poet Gnaeus Naevius (254-195 BC) in his poem *Bellum Punicum* (transl. The Punic War) described this Roman attack: “The Roman crosses over to Malta, an island unimpaired; he lays it waste by fire and slaughter, and finishes the affairs of the enemy.” In other words the Roman force raided and burned the island, which up till then had been untouched, and destroyed everything that belonged to the Carthaginians.

Livy records when Malta and Gozo were effectively incorporated within the Roman world. Thus, Consul Tiberius Sempronius Longus while checking the defence of the Sicilian coast,

directed his fleet to Malta which was garrisoned by the Carthaginian army under the command of Hamilcar, son of Gisco. Though having about 2,000 troops at his disposal, Hamilcar decided to surrender the island without fighting and the Maltese garrison was taken prisoner. The Roman Consul returned to Lilybaeum (today Marsala) in Sicily and sold all the prisoners, except three, by auction.

The Maltese local population of Melite and Gaulos (the Roman names for Malta and Gozo) thus gradually became Romanised in habits, character and attitudes.

The only town of Malta at the time, called Melite, had been initially developed by the Carthaginians. It was situated on the hilltop where Mdina and Rabat stand today. In fact, during the Roman period this town sprawled over an area reaching up to where the



A mosaic freeze at the Roman Domus, Rabat, showing a face surrounded by fruit



The map of the world by the Roman geographer Pomponius Mela, done in c.43AD (reconstruction by K. Miller in 1898)



A mosaic showing the unloading of cargo boat and a bas-relief of a merchant ship with spritsail from the 3rd cent. AD

Rabat church of St Paul stands today. The ditch that protected the town passed along present-day St Rita Street in Rabat and it was the Carthaginian residents that initiated its excavation.

During the republican period (up to 27 BC) of Roman domination, Malta, and later on also Gozo, were allowed to mint some copper coins for local use. There are indications that towards the middle of the first century BC, Melite, perhaps separately from Gaulos, had its own local government based on the republican decision-making structures embodied in the people's assembly and the senate. These political organs were then withdrawn with the accession of Augustus as the first emperor of Roma.

When Rome finally dominated all of North Africa, after having reduced to rubble the city of Carthage in the Third Punic War, the Maltese islands became a quiet archipelago divested of any real strategic importance in the Mediterranean Sea as this gradually but steadily became a mere Roman lake. The Roman dominions entered a period known as the *Pax Romana* which extended between 27 BC and 180 AD. The period of the 'Roman Peace' was typified by economic prosperity and peace throughout the Roman possessions from England to North Africa and further on to Iraq.

This did not, however, mean that the Empire was an absolutely tranquil haven of peace. Piracy for example was rife, not least in Melite, as is testified by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC). The renowned philosopher, politician, lawyer, orator, political theorist, consul and constitutionalist, indicated that both prior to his time as also while he was writing, Melite was a regular refuge for pirates during the winter season. The piratical infestation was truncated during the time of the great military leader Pompey in the year 67 BC and from then onwards it could be assumed that Malta became a freer and safer place to live on.

Cicero also indicates that the town of Melite, which he explained bore the same name of the island, had been turned into a manufacturing base for the weaving of women's clothes. This was during the governorship of Caius Verres (73-71 BC) whom he was accusing of abuse of political power and authority. In his *Verrines* written in 70 BC, Cicero the prosecutor speaks of the temple to the goddess Juno (which was at Tas-Silġ) and how important and sacred a shrine this was for the Romans (the site had a long religious use going back to prehistoric times).



Roman coin

Other writers give some more information about Malta during the Roman period. For example, Ovid, in his *Fasti*, says that Malta was much more fertile than Cossyra (today Pantalleria). Diodorus Siculus in the years spanning between 60 and 30 BC indicates that Malta had much better harbours than Gozo as the former enjoyed exceptional qualities and

provided a safe haven for ships. Diodorus also highlighted the skills of the Maltese in various crafts and especially in textile manufacturing, and indicating specifically linen weaving. Maltese houses were also very well constructed and with cornices decorated in stucco – putting in evidence the workmanship of the craftsmen.

In Roman Malta, similar to what was happening in other territories, money was an essential means of transaction. Yet for the first two centuries the Maltese inhabitants used coins which showed a mixture of linguistic if not also cultural realities. A process of overlapping influences give evidence of a gradual and slow transformation from a Semitic / Punic predominance which moved in stages till it established itself in the Latin Roman reality. The coins struck in Malta along the two hundred years under republican Roman rule, indicate the cultural development of the people of Malta. The overlapping cultural trends move from Egyptian religious imagery, to Punic language, Punic divine iconography, to Greek language, Hellenised divine iconography to finally settle with the Latin language and Roman images.

Architectural remains, though few, do give us some hints as to where and how people in Roman Malta lived. The best example is the *domus* which was discovered by Temi Zammit in 1922 just outside the walls of contemporary Mdina. During Roman times this house was within the main town of Melite (which extended over land which today forms the town of Rabat). What

was uncovered gives evidence to a certain level of life along the period spanning from the last part of the second century to the middle of the first century BC. The refined mosaics are one indication of this. Some mosaics also hint at food current at the time as they include motifs of fruits such as grapes and pomegranates. At the countryside villa at San Pawl Milqi then, agriculture is a central theme and the discovery of equipment to press olives also emphasises the oil production activities. Pottery found at various urban and rural sites indicate types of tableware which give us an indication of the pottery ware utilised to carry and hold food and liquids. The Arretine fine ware and the Italian *terra sigillata* decorated in relief, are among the quality earthenware – plates, bowls, beakers, jars – which the Roman residents of Malta, as also the locals, used. Cooking ware unearthed from Tas-Silġ shows that this was produced locally.



A collection of amphorae after Heinrich Dressel: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (1899) and an amphora at the Roman domus, Rabat

Other pottery recipients for the carrying of oil, wine and water, and more solid food such as the *garum*, were also found. Amphorae say much about provenance of food and commercial activity. The Tas-Silġ site revealed that the Maltese imported wine and olive oil from Rhodes for example, as the Rhodian amphorae are recognisable from their shape and stamped handles. Other amphorae indicate imports from Italy, Spain and North Africa.

The Roman dominion on Malta and its people continued for centuries and when the islands passed over to the Byzantines this could be considered an extension of such domination and influence that stretched for another 300 hundred years.

Agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing

One of the earliest books on Roman agriculture was written by Cato the Elder who lived between the years 234 and 149 BC. He entitled his book *De Agricultura*, written around the year 160 BC and it discussed farming, sacrifices, and food among other things. Speaking about his ideal farm, Cato explains that it should measure 100 acres and be subdivided into six sections. On this farm the essential components would be a vineyard, vegetable cultivation, willows for fencing, an olive yard, grain fields, a woodlot, and a tree-lot for vines, besides an acorn/beechnut forest for pigs. Activities of great emphasis were wine and olive oil production. Wood was another principal element as this provided a resource for fencing and other needs, while the vegetables would serve to supply the household with fresh produce. Cato suggests also to have a grain field. Much of the grain or *frumentum* was, at the time he of writing, brought from Sicily or the East.

Agriculture was an essential activity as it supported life through the cultivation of vegetables and fruits. On farms there would also be animals which were very important as these supplied meat, eggs, milk and other products used for cooking and the preparation of other food. Villas, which were dwellings erected by the affluent in rural areas, have been excavated in various parts of Malta such as at San Pawl Milqi, Żejtun, Marsaxlokk and Ghajn Tuffieħa. The presence of olive presses is a clear indicator to the extraction of oil



A farmer ploughing with a team of oxen



A flour mill driven by two men



Part of an olive press now found in the grounds of the Roman domus, Rabat

from the olive. It also confirms that olive trees – which had most probably been introduced in Malta by the Phoenicians – must have continued to be cultivated for their fruit and products. A perfect example of this activity comes from one of the Roman villas found at San Pawl Milqi, a rural estate which was active till the Byzantine period. On this site one finds the first clear evidence that olive oil production did indeed take place in Malta. A number of *trapetum*, or huge stone mills which were used to crush olives in them to get the oily paste, were found in this villa indicating that here was a centre for the production of oil. It is not known if such pressing was only for domestic use or whether some of it was also exported. Maltese-produced amphorae found in other countries may indicate such a commerce – though it can also mean that it was the Maltese-made amphora itself that was the exported product.

One interesting olive grove is that at Bidnija. The trees still surviving go back to around 2000 years ago according to carbon dating tests, and must have been planted in the later Punic era or in the early Roman period. They are known as Bidni trees and still produce olives to this day.



Still life with a glass bowl full of fruit and vases by a Pompeian painter c. 70 AD

Wine was also produced in Malta but it is probable that the quantities did not suffice for the level of local consumption. Importation of wine was thus quite evident and this can be deduced for the various amphorae of foreign manufacture. These came from Adriatic, Tyrrhenian, North African, and Greek provenance. For agricultural as also domestic use, water was an essential commodity. It was needed to water the crops but also to use for drinking. To collect water was pivotal – the more so on a rather arid island such as Malta. Cisterns had to be constructed and maintained everywhere on the territory. For example at the Ta' Kaċċatura villa, situated close to Birżebbuġa, there is a large capacity cistern, not to mention the remains of olive presses and channels leading to storage pits, everything cut in the live rock, which are associated with the pressing of olives for oil. Agricultural activity as a central activity is unmistakable.

From Tas-Silġ there has merged clear evidence that grain and other cereals were staple agricultural products, possibly grown in Malta but could have also been imported from Egypt or North Africa. The temple of Prosperina, goddess of grain, referred to in one of the inscriptions on a slab found in Malta, as also coins struck locally featuring ears of corn, reinforce the centrality of cereals in the people's diet. The main product would be bread in a variety of forms which in Roman times was an important food item.



The Bidni olive variety going back to Punic/Roman times



A mosaic showing fish and an olive sprig

The state tapped income from agricultural produce in the form of taxes. Thus producers were charged a tenth of the grain and barley harvest and this was shipped directly to Rome. Money taxes were also charged – possibly also a tenth of the value – on olives, fruits and vegetables as also on wine.

The Maltese farmers and owners of agricultural lands cultivated a number of vegetables and fruits such as carobs, pomegranates, figs, beans, cabbages, peas, onions, and garlic. Such products helped to

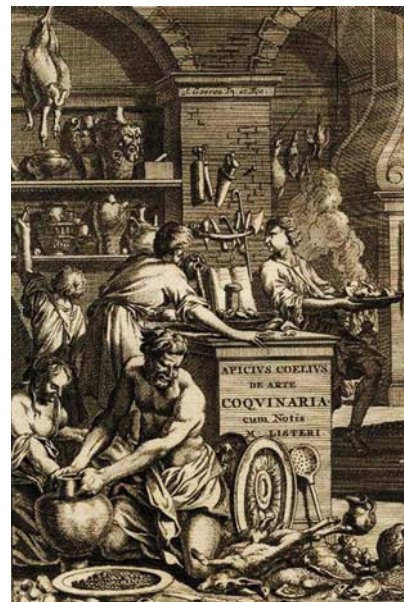
put variety in the daily diet. Meat was more a dish for the richer classes, so a diet consisting mainly of vegetables and fruits was more affordable and within the reach of many more people.

Animal husbandry was surely practised in Malta; Tas-Silġ indicated the presence of sheep and goats through the sacrificial bone remains that were excavated. Herdsmen had to pay a cash tax on their herds which was levied by Rome. Added to this there must have been some fishing activity, especially given that Malta was an island and thus surrounded by the sea. The fishing activity included the catching of fish but also of sea-urchins and marine molluscs among other marine creatures. At Tas-Silġ and at the Rabat *domus* for example, fishing hooks were unearthed showing that the Maltese in Roman times also helped themselves to what the sea around them had to offer.

Food and dining habits

The Romans had a varied mix of dishes from which to choose when they were preparing their meals. The more affluent the diner was, the vaster the choice. One book that has survived the challenges of time is a cookbook *De Re Coquinaria* (transl. The Art of Cooking) written by one named Apicius and attributed to Marcus Gavius Apicius, the famed gastronome who lived during the reign of Tiberius early in the first century AD. The surviving earliest copy of his book was compiled in the fourth / fifth century AD.

Food and how it was served was tied to social class. To show one's wealth and status, expensive food items were prepared and lavish banquets organised for important guests. As the Empire grew and expanded, more and more foods and goods from the different provinces found their way around the Roman territories and possessions. This would mean that in theory anyone could buy or import a range of foods such as, for example, meats and poultry that included



The title page of the 1709 edition of the cookbook *De Re Coquinaria* by Apicius



Bread being sold from a shop (top), an artist impression of a bakery with a man-driven flour mill (bottom), and a real loaf of bread found at Pompeii



wild goats, mutton, lambs, kids, sucking pigs, hares, dormices, chicken, geese, pigeons, doves, thrushes, and ostriches. It is known that the Romans had few inhibitions regarding food and they would try anything, even if only for at least once in their lives. Exotic meats were, however, rarely consumed and the more affordable and much more common meats were those derived from the sheep, goat, chicken and especially the pig. The fresh meat would be bought from the surrounding countryside farms and slaughtered in the city. The spontaneity of choice depended very largely on the spending power and thus those belonging to the lower plebeian ranks would

have found it quite difficult to access some of these products. For example, the meat which these would have had more chance of obtaining due to it being less expensive and therefore more affordable, was salted pork. It is most probably this form of meat that the poorer classes would have had access to. Besides salting, other methods to conserve meat were drying, smoking, curing, pickling and preserving in honey.

The poor and the common people, as also the slaves, went on a basic diet of bread, porridge and stew. The first food of the day early in the morning consisted of some bread or biscuits made from wheat and enlivened with some honey. Lunch then, consisted of a

simple meal which included eggs, cheese, some cold meat, and fruit.

Cereals were a staple in the people's diet. While the more common were wheat and barley, other consumed cereals were oats, rye and millet. Bread and porridge were the most basic products with bread being rather coarse and dark coloured. The better quality loaves had a lighter colour and were finer in texture but even with improvements in milling techniques and finer sieving, the coarseness of the texture was only partially reduced.

As a general trend, many Romans, including emperors, only nibbled something light during the day while they ate a more substantial meal in the evening. Roast poultry or fish would be the main dish for the not so poor person while the more affluent would look forward to a



A detail from a mosaic showing a pomegranate tree

more lavish and varied dinner especially when in the company of guests.

In fact, the wealthier citizens rose early in the morning and sometimes began their day with a breakfast or *ientaculum* consisting of a slice of bread or a wheat pancake accompanied with dates and honey or a little cheese. They drank some wine to wash down the food. After some hours of work, at around 11.00 or 12.00 noon, the rich Roman would sit for lunch, called *prandium*, and ate items such as bread, cheese, olives, figs, nuts and maybe a little meat. The *cena* or main meal took place in the late afternoon or early evening and it was at this time that lavish dishes were served.

Not full enough after dinner, the well-to-do would nip a light supper of bread and fruit before they went to bed.

The eating moments and how these were known changed with time. During the early Republic the main meal of the day was taken at lunchtime and this was called *cena*. In the evening, then, a lighter meal was consumed known as *vesperna*. Gradually the *cena* became the meal taken later on in the day till it eventually became the main repast of the evening. The noon meal in due course became known as *prandium*.

Food that was available for those who could afford it included an assortment of fish. The Maltese had little problem to find fish in the market as the sea was everywhere only a short distance away. Fish came freshly caught, salted, smoked, pickled or fermented. Fresh fish would presumably have been more expensive than the salted type. A popular element on the Roman table was the fermented fish sauce, made from small whole fish or the interiors of bigger ones, called *liquamen* or *garum* which was largely a Punic recipe. It was produced in such places as Spain, North Africa and the Black Sea and many a time would have been imported though some may have been produced locally. *Liquamen* was transported in amphorae.

Fruits and vegetables were always present on the Roman table. Prices naturally fluctuated in relation to seasonality. Popular fruits were grapes, olives, figs, pears, pomegranates and blackberries. Evidence of some of these fruits is found in the Rabat *domus* where mosaic friezes feature a variety of fruits such as pomegranates and grapes. It is known that peaches became available in Italy from around the middle of the 1st century AD



An assortment of food

but these were expensive. Whether they arrived in Malta at any time along the 1st century or later is not known but if the affluent wished to taste them, then the probability is that peaches were imported as were many other items. Common vegetables included onions, cabbages, lettuce, leeks and garlic and some or all of these, besides others, would have easily been grown in Malta. People could also find a variety of nuts, such as walnuts, chestnuts, almonds, pine nuts and hazelnuts. To preserve fruits and vegetables and use them at times when they were not naturally available, these were pickled in brine or vinegar or conserved in wine, grape juice or honey.

Besides water, wine was the main drink available at all times of the day and of which people in Roman times drank large quantities. It is known that there were about 200 types of wine all over the Roman Empire and thus the choice was quite varied. One could buy the wine that suited his pocket from cheap local plonk to the expensive Falernian wine from the Bay of Naples. Moreover, Romans could enjoy wines which were either spiced or sweetened with honey called *mulsum*, while wine was normally diluted with water. According to table etiquette, those who drank wine in its undiluted state were not respectable persons. Another table manner during the days of the Roman Republic required women not drink wine. Not so, however, in the centuries of the Empire, when women were considered at par with men with regard to the drinking of wine. One could also accompany the food by drinking unfermented grape juice known as *defrutum*, or goat's milk. Finally, water was always available and could be brought from public fountains where these were available.

A wealthy family at dinner

Meals were held in a room which had couches for people to recline on round the table. It was called a *triclinium*. In those other, more numerous, occasions when the meal was an informal one, this was eaten around normal tables with the diners sitting on chairs.

In a rich patrician family a dinner or *cena* involved a three course meal. It opened with snacks or *gustationes* where the diners helped themselves to dishes such as an egg dish, small rolls sprinkled with poppy-seed and honey, and hot sausages. Other items would be lettuce and olives. If the dinner was a feast, then the starters would include dishes such as shellfish, thrushes, asparagus, a fatted hen, goat or wild boar. One would also find pasties with rich meats.



A banquet given by a rich man

The second course would then be introduced. It might include fowls such as a Guinea hen, a woodcock, a flamingo, a pheasant and a thrush. A more expensive bird was the peacock and it was a favourite with the upper classes. A delicacy was capon liver marinated in milk and dressed with pepper. Meats on offer would include pork, bacon, boar and venison. With regard to fish dishes, these comprised any from the turbot, to sturgeon, mullet, eel and prawn in sauce. As



Guests and host reclining around a table ready to have dinner

a condiment, pickles and sauces were served together with truffles, mushrooms and other vegetables. For sauces to be tasty, cooks added vinegar, honey, pepper, herbs and spices to the mix.

The dinner would then slowly come to an end with the third course which was the *bellaria* or dessert. Nuts and fruits were there for the helping. The diners could regale themselves with almonds, dried grapes, dates, sweetmeats and confections. Sweets could include cheesecakes, almond cakes and tarts.

At table the Romans normally used their fingers to eat, lifting the food from the plates. Forks were not used but the wealthier classes made use of knives. Spoons made of bronze, wood, bone or silver were also utilised to scoop food from large bowls. They came in two sizes – the *ligula* was the big type while the *cochlear* was the smaller one. The continuous use of the fingers to touch and lift the food meant that the hands had to be washed many times during the meal. The mouth was wiped with a napkin called *mappa*. This was a piece of cloth, large enough to be thrown over the edge of the couch when one sat in the reclining position. Each guest brought his own *mappa* and used it to blot his lips as necessary. Before departing after the meal, the guest was also allowed to fill his napkin with leftover delicacies and this was a sign that the meal had been appreciated.

Especially in the hot Mediterranean climate, diners were bound to sweat. For this eventuality a pocket-sized piece of cloth called a *sudarium* or handkerchief was carried and was used to wipe the brow.



A ladle and various spoons all made from metal and used in Roman times

The kitchen

Food was normally cooked in kitchens but not every habitation had such a facility. In the towns the very poor, but also those belonging to the lower and middle classes, may not have had access to any real cooking facilities. In the town they would probably be living in buildings with multiple floors called *insulae*. These structures contained apartments, some of which had limited space where sometimes different generations from the same family would be living together. This did not mean that there were no upmarket spacious apartments with better sanitation and more amenities. On the other hand, only the wealthiest members of society coming from the upper middle and upper classes would have afforded to live in a *domus* equipped with all the cooking and kitchen facilities.

Being deprived of a proper kitchen, people in the poorer *insulae* generally consumed cold food or else bought freshly prepared hot food from the shops or *thermopolia*. These food retail outlets lined the streets of the town and some were even situated on the ground floors of the same *insulae*.

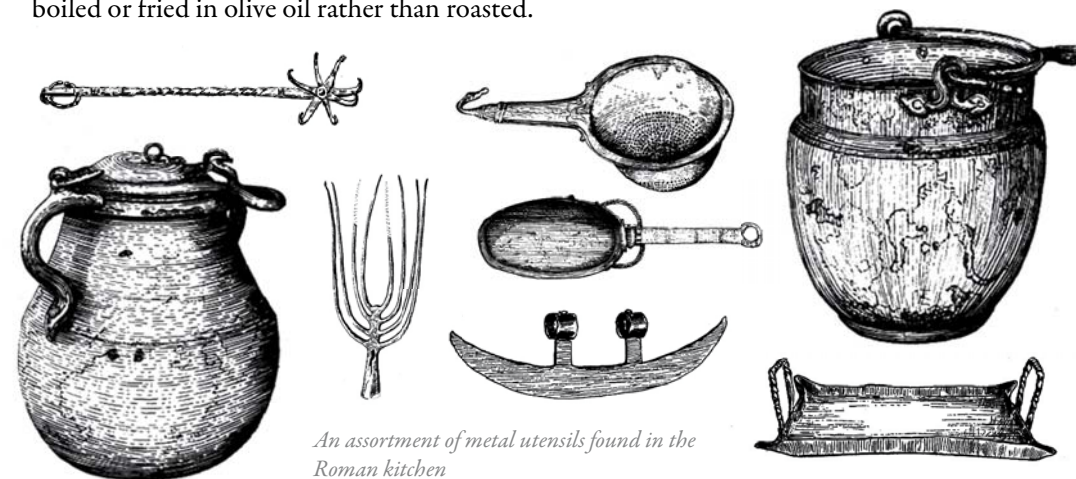
In the houses where there was a kitchen, this would have generally consisted of a small room in which there was a raised hearth with fire on top and a storage space underneath where to stow wood or charcoal fuel. Bronze was one of the materials used extensively for cooking purposes and for kitchen utensils. The metal was easily worked and was an efficient heat conductor. On the negative side, the bronze which is derived from copper, sometimes reacted chemically with some foods and could poison them. It is known that some pans had silver coating to make them safer for cooking.

Terracotta was also used for cooking utensils. A terracotta bowl called *olla* or *caccabus* was used in which to cook porridge, vegetables, meat and fowl. In his cookbook, Apicius indicates this bowl for the cooking of fish, porridge, beans, peas, fowl, pork and rabbit.

With cooking on braziers being the most common method, meat and fish were usually boiled or fried in olive oil rather than roasted.



A woman cooking in a drawing of the 1880s



An assortment of metal utensils found in the Roman kitchen

Recipes

Bread

Ingredients

- 400 g *biga acida* (sourdough)
- 12 g yeast
- 18 g gluten
- 24 g salt
- 532 g water
- 405 g spelt flour
- 405 g wholemeal flour

Method

1. Melt the yeast into the water and add it into the *biga*.
2. Mix and sieve the flours together with the gluten and add to the water mix.
3. Mix for two minutes, add the salt and keep mixing for another three minutes.
4. Make a round shape with it and leave to rest for one hour.
5. Put some string around it to keep its shape during cooking.
6. Make some cuts on top before cooking to help the bread rise in the oven and cook for 30 to 45 minutes at 200 degrees.



A Roman mosaic showing a young boy with food for the month of June

Cheesecake

1. Take 1/2 pound of flour, 2 1/2 pounds of cheese, and mix together.
2. Add 1/4 pound of honey and 1 egg.
3. Grease an earthenware dish with oil.
4. When you have mixed thoroughly, pour into the dish and cover with a crock.
5. Bake the mixture and pay attention to the centre as it is deepest there.
6. When it is done, remove the dish, cover with honey, sprinkle with poppy-seed, place back under the crock for a while, then remove from the fire.
7. Serve in the dish, with a spoon.

Steamed Lamb Cutlets

Ingredients

- 10 lamb cutlets
- 1 l white wine
- 100 ml oil
- 2 big onions, diced
- 1 tbsp liebstoekl (lovage or celery)
- 200 ml *liquamen* (which can be replaced by 2 tsp salt)
- 2 tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground pepper
- 1 tsp ground cumin

Method

1. Put cutlets in a pot together with diced onion and spices.
2. Add *liquamen* (or salt), oil and wine.
3. Cook 45 to 60 minutes.
4. Pour the sauce into a pan and thicken it with starch.
5. Serve cutlets together with the sauce.

A sweet

1. Take the crusts from a white loaf and break the bread into largish pieces.
2. Soak them in milk.
3. Fry them in hot oil or fat.
4. Pour honey over them and serve.

Sea Urchins

1. Take a new porridge pan, add a little oil, *liquamen*, sweet wine, and ground pepper.
2. Bring the mixture to heat. When it is simmering put the sea urchins in, one at a time.
3. Stir them and bring them to the boil three times.
4. When they are cooked, sprinkle with pepper and serve.

Arda Ita Fit (Tuna)

Ingredients

- 500 g cooked tuna fillet
 - 1/2 tsp ground pepper
 - 1/2 tsp liebstoekl
(lovage or celery)
 - 1/2 tsp thyme
 - 1/2 tsp oregano
 - 1/2 tsp rue
 - 150 g dates (without stones)
 - 1 tbsp honey
 - 4 hard-boiled eggs
(in quarters)
 - 50 ml white wine
 - 2 tbsp wine vinegar
 - 50 ml *defritum**
 - 2-3 tbsp green olive oil
- * *defritum* was made by boiling down grape juice (called must) until it had been reduced by at least half.

Method

1. Cook tuna fillet.
2. Mash fillet together with dates, honey, wine, vinegar, *defritum* and oil.
3. Put the mixture in a bowl and garnish with egg quarters and serve

Honey and Nut Dessert

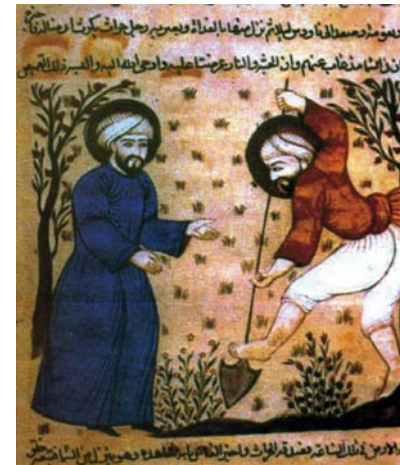
Ingredients

- 200 g fresh or dried dates
- 50 g coarsely ground nuts or stone pine kernels (pine nuts)
- honey, or red wine with honey (to stew)
- a little salt

Method

1. Take the stones out of the dates and fill them with nuts or stone pine kernels.
2. Sprinkle a little salt on the filled dates and stew them in honey or honey sweetened red wine. The dates have to be cooked on low heat until their peel starts to come off (approximately 5 to 10 minutes).

The Muslim Presence (870-1249)



Two Islamic field workers engaged in agricultural work

A brief historical note

The Aghlabid Arabs that captured Malta in 870AD came from North Africa. The Aghlabid emirate occupied the lands of Ifriqiya which included present day Tunisia, the eastern part of Algeria and Tripolitania. The founder of this emirate was Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab who was given the governorship of Kairouan as hereditary emir in the year 800. Aghlabid society was a stable one. They had vizirs, chamberlains and *diwan* – these officers were in charge of government areas such as the Chancellory (*kitaba*), the post (*barid*), the army (*jund*), and taxation (*kharaj*). Money in gold coins (*dinar*) were also minted by the Aghlabids.

While they already ruled over a big expanse of territory from Tripolitania to Setif, the Aghlabids decided to embark on the conquest of Sicily in the year 827. While consolidating their hold over the whole of that island, an exertion which took them up till 902 to complete, they also conquered Malta in the process in the year 869/70. In this way they obtained control over the central Mediterranean Sea and easy access to southern Italy, which in turn led to the development of trade links with Christian Europe.

It was in the year 869, that Muhammad II, the Emir of Ifriqiya, sent a fleet under Ahmad al-Habashi to attack Malta. The Byzantine soldiers that were garrisoning Malta received some reinforcements which helped them to break the Arab attack. This initial setback did not, however, discourage the Aghlabids and in 870 they tried again and on 29 August they succeeded in capturing the fortress of Malta. The Byzantine governor of Malta surrendered and the town of Melite was looted by the Arab troops. It is said that their commander, Ahmad al-Habashi, took the marble columns of the cathedral back with him to decorate his palace. The Arabs also destroyed the fortifications of the town.

The Aghlabids lost hold of their territories after insurrections broke out in 902. The last Aghlabid emir fled to the east in 909 as the Fatimids rapidly moved in and conquered Ifriqiya. From the year 909, Malta too passed over to the Fatimid Arabs and thus the Muslim domination continued. The Fatimids reached a high level of creativity which was not easily rivalled around the Mediterranean in general as also in the Muslim world. The Fatimids ruled Malta for more than a hundred years.



The Tabula Rogeriana made in 1154 shown upside-down with the north oriented up

With the coming of the Arabs, after the main town had been destroyed in 870, it is probable that it was rebuilt when a Muslim community seems to have settled in Malta in the year 1048/49. The newly build town was called Medina. Alas, there are no substantial architectural remains that tell us where the Arabs and the people under them lived and what their houses looked like. It would be assumed that habitations were quite similar to those in the North African lands and Sicily. It is thought that the main mosque in the Medina of Malta was built on the spot where the cathedral stands today. Of importance is a gold quarter dinar coin that was discovered in 2008 which was not only used in Malta but was also minted on the island and dated 472 AH of the Muslim calendar, that is, 1080/81. This indicates in more stable terms that Malta was inhabited by the Fatimids at this time and having settled in the island they also minted their money locally.

When Count Roger the Norman, who had won Sicily from the Arabs, invaded Malta in 1090/91 and won it, the Muslims were allowed to continue to live on the island and little changed. Therefore, for some time the Arab emirs resumed with the administration of the Maltese islands against the payment of a tax on mules, horses and weapons.

Muslim domination stretched till the 13th century. So much so that some Maltese Arabs became quite renowned and their feats were recorded in various sources. It has emerged that in 1122 the Muslims of Malta rose against the Christian rulers, and in 1127, King Roger II of Sicily realised that he needed to attack Malta to recapture it and affirm his rule. This time, different from what his father had done, he took it under his direct authority. During this period one notes the presence of Maltese Arab poets in Roger's court. Known names are Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ramadān al-Mālītī, Abd Allāh Ibn al-Samtī al-Mālītī, Abd ar-Rahmān Ibn Ramadān, and Uthmān Ibn Abd ar-Rahmān.

The Muslims were allowed to remain in Malta till the year 1249 but from then onwards no one was permitted to practice Islam if he or she wished to continue to live in the archipelago.

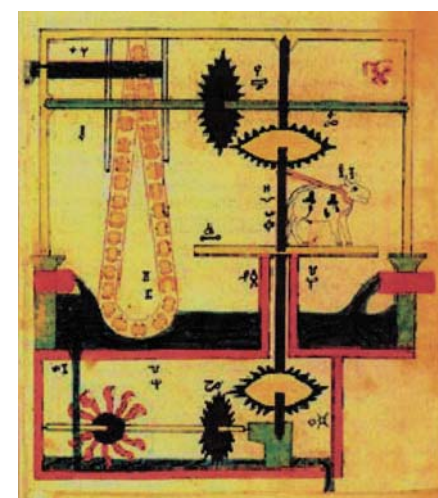


An Arab coin

Agricultural activity and animal husbandry

The geographer Ash-Sharīf al-Idrīsī (1100-1165/66) was commissioned by King Roger II to write a geography book that covered the known world. In 1154 al-Idrīsī finalised the *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (transl. The pleasure excursion of one who is eager to traverse the regions of the world). In it, among the many other lands, he described the island of Malta, which is labelled 'Melita' in his map. From al-Idrīsī's entry it is revealed that Malta was "a large island with a safe harbour which opens to the east. Malta has a city, and it abounds in grazing land, flocks, fruit, and, above all, honey." The emphasis made by this geographer on grazing land and flocks, gives one to understand that the islanders may have been engaged in extensive pastoralism and therefore grazing animals were abundant. Sheep were possibly the more widespread. The geographer Ibn Hawqal, author of the book *Sūrat al-'Art* (transl. The face of the Earth), lived during the 10th century. He visited Sicily and wrote a book about that island. We learn from his text that sheep were exported from Malta to other places. There is also mention of the existence of wild asses roaming the island, which were hunted and caught for export, but it is suspected that this detail may have referred to another island nearer to the Tunisian coast. The flesh of the sheep was consumed by the Muslim population and milk products were part of their diet as well.

Tapping the observations made by al-Idrīsī it is revealed that Malta had an abundance of fruit, and especially, honey. In neighbouring Sicily, the Arabs introduced particular agricultural



A page showing a water raising device from Al-Jazari's *Kitāb fī ma'rīfat al-hiyāl al-bandasiyya* (The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices)

practices and crops and one would assume that some, if not all, of these would have also been brought to Malta. Such crops included cotton, linen, rice and sugarcane. Land was parcelled into small plots and irrigation channels were dug up to facilitate the supply of water for more intensive farming. They were also accustomed to lemons, bitter oranges, bananas, dates, pistachios, mulberries, watermelons, apricots and tangerines, all of which they enjoyed and cultivated in Sicily. Agricultural practices were quite advanced as Arabs adopted methods to combat insect pests, discovered ways how to use fertilizers and became experts at grafting trees and crossing plants so that new varieties could be obtained. It could be that the animal-driven water mill was introduced at this time to help in the irrigation of the fields on a generally arid island like Malta.



The *Kitāb al-Filahah al-Andalusiyah* (The Book of Andalusian Agriculture) by Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Muhammad ibn al-Awwam al-Isbbili (d. 1185) deals with agronomy, cattle, poultry, and beekeeping



Fruits from Arab agriculture – the lemon, citron and orange

Another Muslim writer, al-Himyarī, who lived in the 14th century, taps works from earlier Muslim writers such as al-Bakri and al-Qazwīnī. Malta seems to have been wooded during Arab times as the account furnished by al-Himyarī points to the existence of pines, junipers and olive trees. The author indicates that for a longish stretch of time Malta was more or less uninhabited or very sparsely so, yet was regularly visited by shipbuilders as the wood found on the island was of the strongest kind. Other visitors were fishermen who were attracted by the abundance and tastiness of the fish that abounded in Maltese waters. Yet other visitors were those who came to collect honey, which al-Himyarī announced was a most common item on Malta.

The food and dining habits

Muslim society had its own food and foodways. While some food items and practices were taken over from those of other peoples, they also adopted further practices and recipes that were completely new. For example wine and pork were eliminated from the Muslim diet as these were considered impure and prohibited for religious reasons. Others were relegated from primary food items such as vinegar and honey and were replaced by citrus and sugar. Sugar cane was introduced into the Islamic lands by traders who brought it from northern India around the year 750AD. The availability of this new food item prompted the use of sugar in food and candy became a favourite delight around the Islamic world. Citrus fruits were also bred by the Arabs with the result that they also managed to produce lemons by merging citrons and bitter oranges which had been available in West Africa from thousands of years before. Thus, around the year 900 AD Islamic food scientists introduced lemons and by the 1100s Egyptian Jews created lemonade when they began to mix lemon juice with sugar.

Wheat and olive oil continued to retain their place in the Arab kitchen. Flatbreads were adopted as a replacement of the leavened bread and this was used to accompany foods like meats.

Eating was done by using three fingers of the right hand – the thumb and the first two fingers – after these had been washed, thus eliminating the presence of the knife from the table. Spoons were however used when liquid foods needed to be lifted to the mouth. Meals were taken sitting on the floor with crossed legs around low tables. It was not considered polite to lick the fingers.

Types and qualities of food were always linked to social classes. It was similar to other societies that the higher one was in social rank, the better one ate. The poor would always

depend on what they could find in the territory and what they could afford from that which was available. Depending on the seasons, vegetables were common among the rural folk and those of lower status and this meant that soups and flatbread were the staple everyday diets. Cabbages, cauliflower, onions, carrots, lettuce, garlic, chickpeas, beans and cucumbers were among the vegetables available. For example, around the year 800AD, Islamic food scientists began to grow purple carrots in Iran and Afghanistan and these were quickly passed on to peoples in other lands such as those in North Africa and Islamic Spain. With time the red and yellow carrot varieties were developed and became available everywhere in the Islamic world.

Fruits were also part of the diet of peasants and common workers, as also the more affluent. All could enjoy melons, watermelons, figs and peaches as also grapes which were not turned into wine. Dates too were a popular fruit which was used both as a dessert in themselves as also to make other desserts.

The rich lived in a different culinary world as they had the means to pay for important specialities such as expensive rare herbs and many imported food items derived from different parts of the Arab territories. Spices used for cooking and for a special taste included ginger, turmeric, cardamom, and coriander. For meat one could choose from veal, lamb and chicken, but other fowl that were consumed included geese, pigeons, and doves. Dairy products were also a central element of the Arab diet.

A food product that has for centuries been associated with Marco Polo and his travels to China is *pasta asciutta* or dry pasta. Many have thought that pasta was brought to the European continent around the end of the 13th century when Polo returned from his travels in the Far East but this assertion had been challenged as many historians believe that it was during the time when Sicily was dominated by the Arabs that pasta – balls and strings of dried flour – may have been introduced. As the Arabs were always on campaign and at war, they needed practical food that did not spoil which could be carried and eaten by the soldiers who travelled from battle to battle. A Jewish physician who lived in Tunisia in the 800s, Isho bar Ali (Arabic: 'Īsā b. 'Alī) compiled a dictionary in which he indicated the presence of a food product called *itriyya*. This was made from string-like shapes of semolina which were dried before cooking. The Muslim writer al-Idrīsī corroborates the presence of *itriyya* in Sicily when, in his book written for King Roger II in 1154, he speaks of this product as one of the exports of Sicily. This pasta



The fig



Sugar cane described in an Arabic manuscript on natural history



Honey and beans from the Tacuinum Sanitatis, a medieval handbook on health largely focusing on the growing and preparation of food, based on the Taqwim al sihha (Maintenance of Health), an 11th cent. Arab medical treatise by Ibn Butlan of Baghdad



was sent to Calabria and many other Muslim and Christian countries. Malta was one of the territories under Roger II and it is not farfetched to assume that pasta was also consumed in these islands at this time and even before when Muslims still dominated the Maltese islands.

Cooking was normally done in the open air. For frying, Arabs mostly used olive oil or butter. Food on the table was quite varied for those who could afford and one element which was important related to the contrasting tastes within the same dish. This was achieved by mixing various products such as meat, which had been marinated for some time in herbs and then cooked, with fruits and nuts. The presence of a bitter-sweet palate was typical of Arab cuisine.

The preferred drink was water but this could also be flavoured with mint syrup, lemons, violets, bananas, roses and other substances that sweetened the liquid.

The explosion of tastes, especially for the more well off, was enriched by the spread of various culinary traditions which the Muslims of the Mediterranean and beyond, carried with them in every place they settled or conquered. It stands to reason that in Malta some or all of these tastes arrived at some point and the more so as there was very close communication with Muslim Sicily, North Africa and other territories in the Mediterranean Basin. Thus dishes originating in Persia, Lebanon, Berber Africa and Muslim Spain would meet each other and transform themselves according to the local traditions and adaptations. With Malta being in the crossroads of these lands, it may be somewhat plausible to assume that many such dishes also found their way to the island.

The names of some food items one finds to this day in Malta sound Arabic and clearly betray their ancestry. Small cheese dumplings (Arabic: *mujabbanat* / Maltese: *gbejniet*), various types of pasta (Arabic: *itriyya*, *fidawish* / Maltese: *tarja*, *fdewwex*) cooked in broth, and semolina pastry filled with date paste (Arabic: *maqrud* / Maltese: *maqrut*).

Recipes



Islamic sculpture at the Alhambra, Spain showing pomegranates

Al-Sikbaj

- 600 g lamb shoulder without the bone, cut in small cubes
- 3 medium onions, sliced
- 3 medium eggplants, peeled, quartered and then halved, pricked with a fork
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 4 tsp ground dried coriander
- 1/2 cup apple cider or white wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup honey
- a large pinch of saffron
- 5 dried figs, quartered
- some raisins
- some almond pieces, flaked or halved
- 1 tsp rose water
- olive oil

Boil the eggplants for 15 mins in a covered pot. Drain the eggplant when ready and set aside. Pour olive oil to cover the bottom of a heavy based pot and heat up. Thoroughly brown the meat and onions, add the cinnamon and coriander and stir for some minutes. Completely cover the meat with boiling water up to about 1 cm over the top and add a little salt. Boil the meat on medium heat for 20 mins, and skim the froth that rises to the surface. Place the eggplant on top of the meat without stirring. Mix the honey and vinegar together for a sharp and sweet mixture and pour it on the eggplant. After 5 mins take some of the liquid from the pot and add the saffron to it and pour it back on top of the eggplants. Simmer for about 45 mins until the liquid has reduced and thickened. Add the raisins, almonds and figs on top of the eggplants. Decrease the heat to the least possible and clean the sides of the pot with a damp cloth and cover. Continue to cook for about 30 mins. When it is done, sprinkle some rose water and serve. You can also serve it cold.

Tharid

- ◉ 1/4 cup cooked chickpeas, drained
- ◉ bouquet garni, tied with kitchen string, consisting of 1 celery stalk and 5 sprigs fresh parsley
- ◉ 1 young chicken, quartered (about 1.6 kg)
- ◉ 2 tbsp clarified butter
- ◉ 2.4 litres water
- ◉ 1 1/2 tsp *bahārāt* *
- ◉ 2 large eggs
- ◉ juice of 1 lemon
- ◉ 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- ◉ 1/2 loaf day-old French baguette, cut into croutons
- ◉ salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

* *bahārāt* – spice mix (Tunisian)

- ◉ 1 tsp ground cinnamon
 - ◉ 1 tsp dried rose petals
 - ◉ 1 tsp very finely ground black pepper
- Mix the ingredients together and store in a small jar.

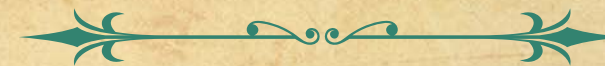
Put the chickpeas, *bouquet garni*, chicken, salt and pepper, clarified butter, and water in a large pot and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer for 1 hr. Remove and discard the *bouquet garni*. Remove the chicken from the pot. When it is cool enough to handle, separate the meat from the bones. Lightly sprinkle the chicken meat with the *bahārāt* and salt to taste and set aside. Beat the eggs in a bowl with a quarter of the lemon juice. Whisk a few tablespoons of hot soup into the beaten eggs. Transfer the beaten eggs back to the soup, whisking quickly so that they do not thicken. Keep the soup warm over a very low heat.

In a large skillet or casserole, heat 1/4 cup of the olive oil and cook the chicken pieces with the remaining lemon juice over a high heat for 1 to 2 mins browning all sides. Transfer to a serving platter when the pieces are ready. Add the remaining 1/4 cup olive oil to the pan, reduce the heat to medium, and cook the bread croutons in the olive oil and the leftover juices for about 3 to 4 mins, until lightly golden.

Place the croutons at the bottom of the serving bowls and ladle the soup on top. Serve the chicken on the side or with the soup.

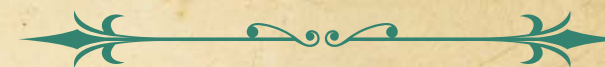
Bedouin Chicken

Cook the chicken with water and salt, pepper, chopped onion and lots of oil. Cover the contents of the pot with eggs, sprinkle with spices and serve. You can add a little vinegar, or cilantro.



Orange Paste

Take the peel of red oranges, after immersing them in water, and cut them in strips. Take one *ratl* (about 468.75 g) of peel and add to it three *ratls* (about 1.4 kg) of honey, until it takes the form of a paste. Eat at meals. It helps digestion, dissolves catarrh, increases the urine, and helps against colds.



Syrup of Apples

Take a *ratl* (about 468.75 g) of sweet apples, those that the common people call *sarāj* [this might mean 'little lamps']. Put them in a pot, cover in water and cook until they disintegrate and their juice comes out. Filter it and take the clear liquid and add it to a *ratl* of sugar. In a bag put an *ûqiya* (39 g or 7 tsp) of pounded aloe stems. Put in the pot and cook everything until it becomes syrup. Pour an *ûqiya* of syrup in two *ûqiyas* of hot water. This drink fortifies and pleases the heart.

The Medieval Age

(1127-1530)

A brief historical note

The Arab and Muslim influence did not end with the Norman invasion of 1090. Count Roger imposed taxes on the Fatimid Arabs and the Maltese subjects but left them to continue with their ways and traditions. This system was also adopted by King Roger II when he decided to invade Malta once again in 1127 to reassert Norman ownership over the islands. Under King Roger II, people in his kingdom were employed according to their abilities, while religious and cultural affiliations did not influence one's chances. Therefore, Muslims in Sicily and Malta continued to practise their beliefs and follow their customs including those culinary. According to King Roger's geographer, al-Idrīsī, Malta seems to have been quite active with trading ships calling at its port while transiting between Scicli in Sicily, Calabria in southern Italy, and Africa.

From a document of 1198 issued by Empress Constance on behalf of her son Frederick II, who was still a minor, it is revealed that there had been some strife between Muslims and Christians in Malta during the reign of Roger II. It seems that this clash had ended with the Maltese Christians killing a Maltese Muslim. As a punishment, and probably to exert some control over an escalation of the situation, Roger had imposed an annual payment on the Christian community of Malta and Gozo. With Constance's charter of 1198 the annual payment was withdrawn. This episode indicates without any doubt that there was a Christian community which had existed since the reign of Roger and was now established. Muslim and Christian culinary and other traditions thus existed side by side.

With the accession of Frederick II to the throne of Sicily and the integration of the Maltese islands within the Royal Domain, things began to change for his Muslim subjects. He decided to send away all the Muslims from Sicily and this he did also in the case of Malta. The historian Ibn Khaldūn records that after the Sicilian Muslims were sent to Lucera, the king delivered the same fate to their Maltese brethren when he also abolished the law of Islam in the Maltese islands. The date of this break with the Muslim presence in Malta is put in the period 1221-1225 by Anthony Luttrell, and is very probably 1223-1224.

By 1268 the Hohenstaufen dynasty had lost its kingdom including the Maltese islands which were now taken over by Charles, Count of Anjou, Maine and Provence, the younger brother



A typical rich man's banquet complete with peacock and an abundance of delicacies

of King Louis IX of France. The French domination of Malta was to last only 15 years (1268-1283) but during this time the administrative structure was quite strong. The Maltese islands had castellans appointed by the king to manage the three castles, but they also had the captaincy which was probably an office based in the Maltese town, as also the town bailiff (*baiulia*). This did not mean that all was going smoothly. It is known that the Angevin king imposed some stiff taxes on the Maltese islands from 1271, which were to be paid in gold *uncie*, to help in the financing of pressing and demanding business of the kingdom. The Maltese people however refused to pay their share of the taxes called *collecta* and *subvention* and the royal envoys to



The feudal lord's official supervising serfs during the wheat harvest

Malta were instructed to use all means to compel the people to pay up.

In the 1270s Malta had become a place where people from various parts of the realm settled or stayed. One met people coming from towns in Sicily such as Modica, Palermo, Gela, Avola, Milazzo, and Messina. Others came from the Italian mainland such as Capua and Tuscany, but also from further away such as Picardy from the north of France and Provence in the south.

There were also Genoese merchants and

mariners, as also people from Lucca and the Catalan lands. This mix of cultures, traditions and influences began to transform Maltese society and enrich it with the various traits that were taken up and adopted by the residents of Mdina and the rest of the islands.

By the year 1282 the Catalan-Aragonese and Angevin kingdoms were locked in combat over Sicily. The Maltese were at this time split in their loyalties. The *castrum maris* was still under Angevin control and with no sign that the garrison intended to surrender, even though the Aragonese had already appointed officials to administer Malta. Thus, Manfredi Lancia in command of the Aragonese troops, laid siege to the Birgu castle. The Provençal garrison could still be serviced by sea as the French ships found no impediment to enter the Maltese harbour until July 1283. It was on the 8th of that month that a decisive sea battle was fought in the grand harbour and this event contributed significantly towards turning Angevin fortunes around. With a fleet of about 25 French ships under the command of William Cornut already in the harbour, the Aragonese admiral Roger de Lauria sailed with his fleet for Malta after stopping at Gozo for provisions. Mdina sent a Catalan soldier to update Lauria on the latest moves of the Angevins. Though the sea battle was a resounding victory for the Catalans, yet, the Angevins were not immediately ousted from the castle and they held on to it till the first months of 1284. While the *castrum maris* was still resisting, Lauria turned to Mdina to eliminate any thought of resistance to the Aragonese. The people of Mdina came out of their town and declared their loyalty to the new rulers and also took an oath of allegiance along with the people of Malta to this effect. Gozo was also attacked by the Catalans and the Gozitans too pronounced themselves in favour of the king of Aragon. Garrisons were left in both Mdina and the *castello* of Gozo.

Malta and Gozo now entered an era of their medieval history that reflected the Aragonese structures. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were marked by the domination of the Counts of Malta and the feudal lords. However, the population of the islands was not a homogenous whole. While cultural changes were quite evident and dynamic in the urban areas of Mdina and its *rabat*, and of the *castrum maris* and its *borgo*, little changes were detected in the countryside *casali*. These continued to follow their traditional routines inherited predominantly from the Arab/Muslim past and this lingered on throughout the medieval and early modern periods.

Another cultural presence until 1492 was that of Maltese Jews who had their own *Università* or council. They numbered hundreds and lived in the town of Mdina, the *borgo* and its *castrum maris*, and in the *terra* of Gozo.

Medieval Malta and Gozo experienced many difficulties up to 1530, when the islands finally passed over to the Order of St John. Till that year the Maltese and Gozitans had endured disease such as the Black Death in 1348; and other epidemics such as those recorded in 1427-8, and 1453. In the 1500s at least three instances of note were: 1501, 1519 and 1523. They suffered riots, the most classical of which was when the Gozitans, and then the Maltese, after their islands had been given to Don Antonio Cardona as a fief who passed it on to Don Gonsalvo Monroy, rose in rebellion against Monroy in 1425-27 and risked being outlawed by King Alfonso, and having to pay 30,000 florins to be readmitted into the Royal Domain. Razzias by Barbary corsairs were also expected dangers which visited every now and then. One may mention the 1429 attack by around 18,000 Moors on 70 galleys from Tunisia under Kaid Ridavan who laid siege to Mdina and failed to capture it only because the city had been strengthened enough to offer stiff resistance and would have needed more time than the Moors had at their disposal to take it. To make up for this setback, the invading Muslim horde trampled all over the countryside and took around 3,000 inhabitants into captivity. To pay ransoms for their release meant that the rich saw



Field workers picking fruits



Ploughing the fields with a team of four oxen

their accumulated wealth drained and the poor villagers never saw their relatives again as they did not have the monetary means to pay for their relatives' freedom from slavery.

Agricultural activity and animal husbandry

Malta of the mid-twelfth century was described by al-Idrīsī as having a safe harbour, a city, and an abundance of grazing land, flocks, fruit and honey. This may indicate that pastoralism was a strong activity with herds roaming and pasturing.

From the report prepared by Gilberto Abbate sometime after the year 1240 for his king, Frederick II, it transpires that the royal estates on the Maltese islands consisted of 40 *paricole* on Malta and 15 *paricole* on Gozo. The actual size of each *paricola* was 30 *salme* of land, each *salma* measuring 1.75 hectares or 4.3 acres (while it is known that there was also a *salma* measurement which equated to 2.2 hectares). The *salma* was the Latin translation of the Arabic *mudd*, while the Greek *boidion paricium* (*paricola*) was the equivalent of the Arabic *zawja* and comprised as indicated above, thirty *mudds* of land, that is, 52.5 hectares or 130 acres. The term refers to a yoke of oxen and thus can be taken to mean plough-land. At this time the major part of the revenue for the king's treasury came from agricultural produce showing that Malta's agrarian activity was quite strong, reflected in the high amount of money garnered from the ten gardens and three orchards in the royal property.



Sheep shearing for wool



Taking care of the farm

During this time, the three royal castles of the archipelago – Mdina, Birgu and Rabat in Gozo – were garrisoned and defended by around 220 soldiers. Living with them in the same castles, many had their wives and presumably also their children. There were also servants and slaves. It is known that the soldiers were paid a salary but they also received food rations, which included cereals, meat, cheese and butter. Malta and Gozo also had four *curatuli agrorum* – or estates managers. The servants and the slaves who worked in the king's fields, other slaves, as also the herdsmen and husbandmen, were given more modest food, mainly barely. Each of the three strongholds, that is, the *castrum maris* (the castle near the sea – Birgu), the *castrum civitatis Malte* (the castle of the city of Malta – Mdina) and the *castrum terrae Gaudisii* (the castle of the island of Gozo – the Rabat *Cittadella*), had a *centimolo* or mule-driven mill for the grinding of cereals, and a bakery for the baking of bread. The agricultural supplies for the three strongholds mainly came from the surrounding royal properties.



*Cuminum Cyminum L. –
the bitter cumin variety*

With the takeover of Malta by the Angevins, land that had been left uncultivated after the Muslim owners had been expelled from the islands or was vacant and which belonged to the crown, was now leased out to the Maltese after these petitioned the king to this effect. The lands were thus occupied against the payment of an annual sum of money. After 1270 Naples, which was now the new capital of the Kingdom, imposed a *cabella herbagii* on the Maltese and Gozitans, which meant that pastureland was to be taxed.

During the Aragonese dominion of Malta starting from the late thirteenth century and stretching till 1530, food production continued through intense agricultural activity but this did not generally suffice to feed the whole population who predominantly consumed wheat, barley or a half-half mixture of the two known locally as *mahlut* (mixed cereals).

To remedy this shortage the Maltese annually imported large quantities of wheat, other cereals and pulses from Sicily, which were exempted from Sicilian export duties. The Maltese had, however, to pay the Sicilian exporters for the goods, with such payment being covered from the earnings sourced from the local export of cotton and cumin. There were, however, occasions when the Maltese and Gozitans also exported quantities of wheat and barley, such as in the years 1371, 1377, 1437 and 1454.



*A woman milking a cow from a woodcut of
1547*

Farming activity was in fact quite strong and served to cover the buying of all that the Maltese needed from abroad. It also provided enough income on a national scale to support the livelihood of the peasants as also the many other occupations and professions including the 40 to 60 big landowners who resided in Mdina and who found it too demeaning for their social status to work and thus lived off the profits made from their estates.

Agricultural land cultivation was divided into that which could be irrigated where there was a substantial water supply – usually stored in wells and other reservoirs – and dry farming, which relied on the clemency of the weather. Rains were not always forthcoming and there were spurts of drought which stunted agriculture production and thus field rents could not be paid with the farmers having no products to sell. There were also swampy areas where rain water did not drain efficiently and these patches were exploited for the retting of flax. Where water was in abundant supply, horticulture was actively carried out. This included the cultivation of vines for the



*Stomping ripe grapes to make wine (top) and
pressing unripe grapes to make verjuice to add to
sauces and condiments*



Harvesting the wheat

production of wine. Where the terrain was karstic, the Maltese peasant utilised these terrains for the rough grazing of his sheep and goats. The thistles and thorns that grew in the uncultivated lands were used as a source of fuel – the only form locally available.

Vines were cultivated in areas where a water supply was abundant such as close to springs or streams. The agriculturalist could not rely on rain alone as this was not a reliable source in a climate such as that of Malta. Vineyards thus were located in valleys and on the slopes north of Mdina, in such places as Fiddien, Bahrija, Ghexierem, Mtarfa and many other places in Malta and Gozo where springs and other water reserves were available. In fifteenth century Malta viticulture was not only carried out by wage-earning labourers but many others from the higher and lower social classes owned a vineyard. Besides the major landowners who would have possessed at least one vineyard, it is documented that notaries, lawyers, other professionals, craftsmen and even peasants had a vineyard.

Agriculture and farming went hand in hand with animal husbandry. Cattle were raised not only for their products but also for their service. They were in fact used to pull the plough and thus help in the cultivation of the fields. In the aftermath of the 1429 Moorish attack on Malta and Mdina, for example, which left the islands in a mess, farmers in both islands lamented that with so many farm animals dead, a scarcity had developed to such an extent that the fields could not be worked and seeds sown. After the 1469 drought, agriculture suffered a hard blow as the crops of wheat and cotton failed. Furthermore, cattle and other animals did not find pastures where to graze and thus died. As a direct consequence ploughing became impossible as no cattle could be found, and one assumes that the few that were still alive were too weak for the arduous work in the fields. Oxen were the main draught animals due to their superior strength. The ox was surely used to pull the plough but was very probably also used for the threading of wheat to achieve the separation of the chaff prior to winnowing. Many of

the cattle owners lived in Mdina and these did business with people from the villages who bought cows and oxen from these wealthy townsmen. The richer townspeople also owned whole flocks of sheep and goats. Shepherds were then engaged to take care of these flocks and were paid by the flock owners who conceded part of the produce of the herd as agreed between the two parties or as established by the town authorities. The herdsman would then make his living by selling from the produce received as payment.

Grazing was done in the common open lands where flocks were let loose to eat the grass and vegetation that grew on the rough terrain, while the peasants collected thorns which they used as firewood for the hearths, to cook and to warm their habitations.

The food and dining habits

From the time when the Normans set foot on Malta, the archipelago slowly but steadily emulated that which was taking place on the neighbouring and much bigger island of Sicily. The ways of life of the Maltese, including food products and dishes, became evermore part of the life of the people of Mdina and beyond. A form of Sicilianisation of Maltese society had begun and would continue to increase in its significance up till the time when Malta became



Peasants breaking bread



The medieval baker putting his loaves in the oven

the complete domain of the Order of St John, that is, from 1530 onwards. Products coming from Sicily were considered as superior to those from Malta and cost more both in terms of money and of other values.

Wheat was an essential commodity for Malta and though the local farmers did cultivate this cereal, the amounts harvested were never enough to feed the islands' population. In the Middle Ages, Sicily was considered the storehouse of the Mediterranean region. This was a clear indication of the island's standing with regard to the cultivation and supply of wheat from which bread was made – this being a main food item in the life of people. As Malta imported wheat every year, some business-minded persons began to import it and sell it to the Maltese. By 1530 the amounts of imported wheat had reached around 9,000 *salme*.

With bread being the main item of food, all else was described as *companionicum* – that is, all that accompanied bread, or, was eaten with bread. Though all social classes ate bread, yet, for the lower, poorer classes, it was simply the fundamental item in their daily diet. These ate it with some oil and accompanied it with vegetables such as beans and onions. With the low and meagre wages paid to labourers and other manual workers, half of their income for the day would go to buy the daily bread – their means of survival. And that was one sure reason why the authorities regulated the price of bread. Occupations such as the miller and the baker were central in such circumstances and a bad harvest due to drought, disease or a sudden destructive *razzia* by corsairs, meant a miserable time for the less affluent who could not afford more expensive and varied food items.

Maltese wheat was less costly than that imported from Sicily which was also considered of better quality. The law stipulated that no one could mix the two types and that the Maltese product had to be sold before putting that from Sicily on the local market. The latter was sought after by the more well-to-do who lived predominantly in the city of Mdina. This was also a sign of status and followed the praxis in other countries where the quality of bread in the urban areas was better than that in the rural areas. The countryside people ate a darkish bread made from a mixture of grains (of the *mahlut* type). The whiter bread would be found in the cities and larger towns and was made from better quality grain. The whiteness of the wheat flour and the bread which it produced, gradually became associated with times of plenty and with the distinction in social status because it was relatively scarce in the diet of the medieval peoples. The pure white leavened bread was thus highly prized on the dining table during the Middle Ages and was at times called 'cake'. Indeed, physicians during this period even claimed that white bread had special beneficial properties when in actual fact, the darker bread of the poorer classes had more nutritive value due to the incorporation of the wheat bran.



A common medieval table with bread, fruits and nuts

As bread was the most common food item sought by all the people, it was thus found all over Europe. Loaves were of various forms and consequently each had its specific name. Some twelfth and thirteenth century names included the court loaf, the pope's loaf, the knight's loaf and the squire's loaf. The rich were served the 'table loaf', each having a convenient size fit for the normal appetite of a man. Typically the man would first cut off the crust of the bread, which it was considered polite to offer to the ladies who soaked it in their soup. The servants would eat the inferior bread which was called 'common bread'.

Malta had two main cash crops. The most important and the most lucrative in terms of sales, was cotton which was cultivated in both islands. After cotton, the second cash crop in order of importance was cumin of which two varieties were grown. The bitter variety was known as *Cuminum cyminum* L. which was used to flavour foods and drinks but also for pharmaceutical preparations and perfumes. The other variety was the sweet *Pimpinella Anisum* L. (Maltese: *hlewwa*, English: aniseed) which was sprinkled on bread before this was put in the oven for baking. In Malta bitter cumin was cultivated more than sweet cumin.

In the Middle Ages, cumin was one of the common spices but it was also a symbol of love and fidelity. So strong was this attribute that people used to carry cumin in their pockets when they went for wedding ceremonies. On the other hand, married soldiers were given a loaf of cumin bread by their wives before they departed for war as a sign of their love and dedication.

Spices and herbs were an integral part of cooking. The nobles and highly well-to-do enhanced the flavours in their dishes by adding spices which were quite expensive and out of the reach of those who were not wealthy. These were brought from exotic and faraway lands and this increased their price and prestige. Spices marked the family that hosted banquets for friends and socially esteemed persons with a high status among its peers. There was no perception about this fact, so much so that, for example, according to household accounts of the Earl of Oxford for the year 1431-1432, one could buy a whole pig with the price of a pound of the cheapest spice, which was pepper. Other, more expensive and valued, and at the same time enticing, spices included cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and saffron. They were gratifying because of their fragrance and perceived healthfulness but also because they became more satisfying when consumed with others. Those using them had found another way of how to show off their power and standing.

A document of 1345 speaks of spices imported in Malta from Sicily which included saffron, pepper, cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon and others. Importing such items seems to have been a regular occurrence and features with the expenses of the Mдина *Universitas*.

The less affluent and the lower classes also flavoured their foods but they did so with the use of herbs that were more accessible and much less expensive. Thus thyme, bay, coriander, and marjoram were sought and mixed with the more modest dishes they prepared.



Pimpinella Anisum L. – the sweet cumin variety

Wine was a main presence on the local table and among the people. It was produced from the vineyards that were cultivated in various parts of the islands of Malta and Gozo. The existence of vineyards in Malta is testified in a document of 1273 during Angevin rule. In 1361, a particular vineyard belonging to one of the principal notables of Malta, Jacobus de Peregrino, is documented as having been located in Marsa. Later on in the fourteenth century three other vineyards are indicated, one each at Dejr Handul (in Fiddien), iż-Żurrieq and Tewnīt, a district in Gozo (also known as Wied ir-Riħanija). Wine was also imported from other lands. In 1434 the Mдина authorities complained that the presence of foreign wine harmed the local product and its saleability, also endangering the employment and livelihood of a sizable number of locals. Moreover there was a tax on imported wine, the income from which increased or decreased according to the quantities brought in.

Though there is no record of specific independent vintners in Malta, winemaking cannot be excluded and it is most probable that some tavern owners would have produced their own wine from must (*vinum mustum* or 'young wine') bought from local farmers. It is documented that quantities of must was sold around and it is conceivable that part of it, if not all, would then be processed into wine. In the kitchen, must was also added to dishes to produce a fruity flavour.



Wine was a central drink enjoyed by many from the monk to the common man



Drinking wine in abundance usually meant getting sick or becoming unruly



Conserving wine in a medieval home

probably also because much of the food they ate was, many a time, preserved rather than fresh, and was therefore highly salted. This caused more thirst and thus more consumption of liquids. When water was safe and clean, this would have been the preferred consumable for the less affluent and the poorer classes, also because it would have been drawn from a free source. Yet, when one could afford some wine, then people did not stay away from that cup or two. Taverns were spread all over the island and they were frequented by many who dropped in for a goblet of wine, or two, or more!

The wealthy had less of an impediment to drink wine as they could easily afford it. They chose the better quality wines and if the Maltese nobility were any reflection of their counterparts in Europe, reds would have been the preferred wines. A preference which also ran among the affluent was that for wines flavoured with spices. Spiced or mulled wines were given their tastes with the addition of ginger, cinnamon, sugar, clove or cardamom. These wines were called *hippocras* from the name of Greek physician Hippocrates, reputed to have invented it. Some households mixed it themselves following their recipes. Others could buy ready-mixed powders from spice vendors for their *hippocras*.

So popular was wine that it was a sure source of income for the authorities and was therefore taxed, and overtaxed, to finance projects for the country. It is known that Malta already paid a tax on wine at least from 1372. In 1419 then, the viceroy of Sicily permitted a new tax on wine to finance the building of a watch tower on the island of Comino – which was never built and was only completed in 1618 by the Knights of St John. In 1507 yet another tax was introduced by the Mdina *Universitas* to go towards the reinforcement of the fortifications of Mdina and the *castrum maris* in Birgu.

To sweeten foods the Maltese used honey, much of which was of local produce. Bees had been kept in Malta since many centuries before and the activity continued throughout the Middle Ages. Apiaries were found in different localities some still bearing names that testify to the presence of bee keeping. These include Wied il-Ghasel in Mosta (*ghasel* – honey) and

The method of how grapes were crushed for their juice in Malta and Gozo is not clear. One would however assume that stropping or stepping on the grapes was the most common method, similar to how it had been done all over Europe and other places since centuries before. It was recognised that this method damaged the grapes and did not give the best product. Alongside stropping, it cannot be excluded that presses were also used. The grapes were placed in vats of various sizes and a thick and heavy lid placed upon them. This was then pushed down by means of heavy levers or by a rotating threaded wooden shaft fixed to the lid.

Wine consumption was widespread with no social barriers. The lower classes drank quantities of wine that had an affordable price,

Wied tal-Imġiebah in Mellicha (*imġiebah* – apiaries). Maltese honey was produced from thyme, violets and other types of flowers.

The price of honey was regulated like all other food items and besides the local product, the Maltese could also avail themselves of imported honey from Sicily and other parts of Italy. The Maltese islands were also introduced to sugar which slowly but steadily began to replace honey as the main sweetener. By the mid-fifteenth century, sugar became a mainstay especially in rich people's homes and was used in all the recipes prepared in their kitchens. When Grandmaster L'Isle Adam visited Mdina for the first time to take possession of the city, he was given a number of gifts, one of which was a quantity of fine sugar. This indicated the value placed on sugar by the Mdina *Universitas* which considered it a worthy gift for the Grandmaster of the Order of St John. It is most probable that sugar was imported from neighbouring Sicily where a strong industry had been set up during medieval times.

Other imported foodstuff in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries comprised apples, almonds, carobs, biscuit (*galletti*), dried fruits, beans, rice, barley, preserved meats (*salumi*), cheese, oil and pasta.

The Arabs had developed fried semolina pasta in Sicily and in the 1160s the geographer al-Idrīsī indicted the manufacture of flat thin noodles called *itriyya*. Pasta travelled to Malta and began to be made and cooked especially by the upper classes. One type of pasta that is sure to have been prepared was *lasagna*. In the thirteenth/fourteenth century cookbook *Liber de Coquina* attributed to the cook of Emperor Frederick II, *lasagna* is described as layers of pasta with grated cheese and spices and was served on a trencher – hardened bread that served as a plate. The patients in Santo Spirito Hospital in Rabat, which fell under the responsibility of the Mdina *Municipium*, were given *lasagna* or *macaroni* on feast days as a special treat.

Malta seems also to have been quite well supplied with a number of fruits if one follows Jean Quintin d'Autun's description

of Malta written in the first decades of the sixteenth century. Though there were many palm trees, these did not produce any dates. However, there were orchards with olives and vines – which, according to the author were better for the grapes than for the wine – and figs. Besides, the author observed, Malta had every kind of fruit that could be found in Italy at the time.

Fruits and vegetables that were surely available included melons, lemons, oranges, peaches, pears, apples, broad beans, pumpkins and onions. Many people had a field or a small patch of soil where they could grow their own fruits and vegetable, but for those who did not and could afford it, the variety was quite large.



Making pasta

Other food products that were quite abundant during medieval times included those that were made from milk. Cattle, sheep and goats were animals which had been on the islands from many centuries before. They served as a source of meat for those that afforded to buy it, such as the owners of the flocks – who were normally the rich families generally living in Mdina – and well-to-do others. Kids and lambs provided meat for the table, and the milk of cows, goats and sheep was turned into types of butter, cheeses including ricotta cheese and other products. Milk was rarely consumed in its liquid form if it was not taken as soon as the animal was milked. It spoiled easily and could not, for example, be sold in the marketplace. Also it had already been realised that certain diseases could be transmitted from animal to human being through the consumption of raw milk. Physicians thus discouraged milk drinking and especially prohibited consumption by younger children. The processed milk products having salt added to them and through the practise of other processes, retarded the spoiling of the milk and gave the food items more life and durability. Butter, one milk by-product, was a means by which frying was done.



At the butcher's shop

meats which were available for consumers included among others, mutton, lamb, beef, and veal. As meat was more affordable to people who lived in the towns, prices were higher in Mdina and Rabat where the upper classes resided.

Meat was a sign of wealth, respect and bounty. It was a central food item in one of the most important happenings in Malta's Late Middle Ages. And it was also in the message the Mdina *Municipium* wanted to send to the new master of Malta when the island was taken over by the Knights of St John. Malta was offered to the Order by Emperor Charles V after it lost the island of Rhodes to the Ottoman Sultan. Before Grandmaster L'Isle Adam committed himself to accept Charles V's offer, a delegation was sent to review Malta, Gozo and Tripoli – the three localities in the Emperor's Donation. The viceroy of Sicily instructed the Mdina *Universitas* to treat with the highest regard the gentlemen of the delegation who were to visit

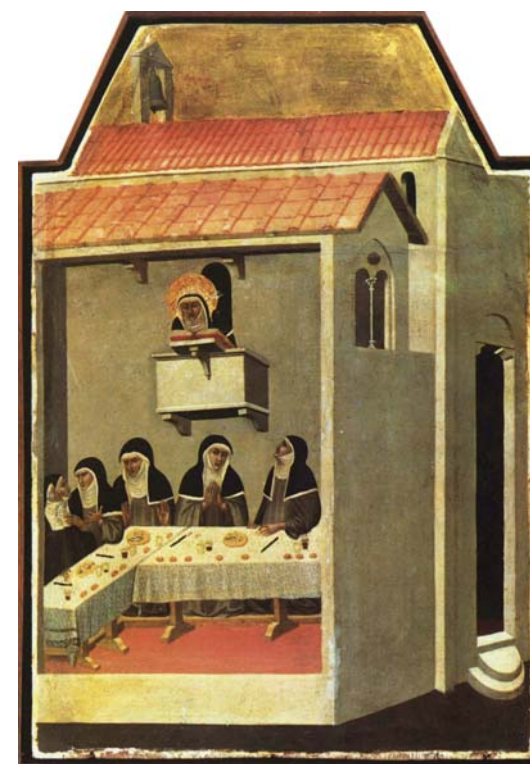
Pigs were also present on the island. It is documented that in the years 1372-1374 the king owned 29 pigs which formed part of his property in Malta. The pig was quite diffused even in the city of Mdina itself and during the early years of the fifteenth century it seems these were left roaming in the streets and they did occasionally also enter into the cathedral. One way of making a payment was by using pigs as a form of currency. Between 1467 and 1534 it is noticed that there were four pork products on the meat pricelist – pork fed on barley and pork which was left to free-range, and the sow equivalent of each category. Throughout the period the prices were always among the highest if not the highest from the meat products. Other

Malta on their way to Tripoli. Thus between July and August 1524 it is documented that the jurats of the Mdina Council provided the Order's men with the best possible treatment by showering delicacies on them.

Six years from this visit came the day when Malta's destiny was sealed. After signing the Donation in acceptance, Grandmaster L'Isle Adam came to Malta to stay. He disembarked on the island in October 1530 and preparations were made for him to ascend to Mdina and officially receive the keys to the city and hear the oath of loyalty of the people. When in Mdina, he was to stay in the house of Misser Michele Falsone (today Palazzo Falson). Many preparations were set in motion to assure that L'Isle Adam would have a comfortable stay between 20 October and 5 November. Food was a central element in the people's sign of respect, and possibly a statement that the Mdina nobles were nothing less than the noble knights. Thus 4 *salmi* of wheat for the making of bread, 6 *hubari* of suet for frying, 4 *hubari* of honey for sweetening and a large quantity of wine, were all stocked up in the larder of Falsone's house. In terms of meat, the jurats authorised payment for two calves and a heifer. The Grandmaster was also given a number of gifts including a calf to take away with him.



Roasting meat on the spit



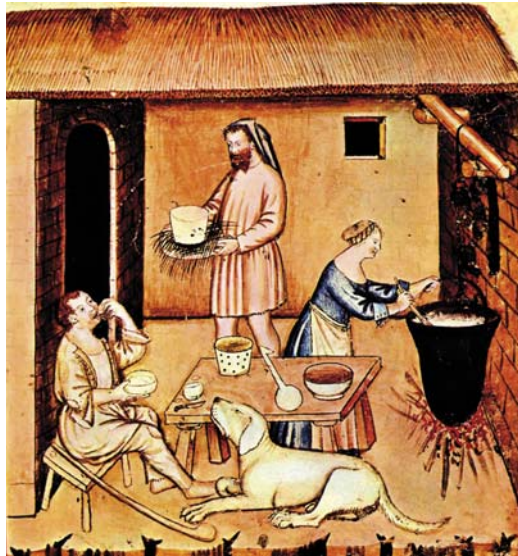
Nuns eating in their refectory while hearing the Scriptures

In a Catholic country such as Malta, as also all over the Christian world of the time, all meat items, and also the dairy products, had one important limitation – they were proscribed by religious requirements on certain days of the year. Such particular dietary prohibitions included the abstention from consuming these food items every week on a number of days as also during certain periods such as Lent and Advent. Under the strictest interpretation of the Church's obligations Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays were weekly days when no meat from four legged animals as well as fowls and food products derived from them could be consumed. It was thought that meats over-heated persons who ate them and this led the eater to vice. Sourcing Galen's theory on humours, it was held that the body was made up of the four elements: earth in the flesh; air in the breath; moisture in the blood; and fire

in the vital heat. Thus theologians arrived to the conclusion that eating most meats was to partake of a warm nature and this produced a sanguine or choleric temperament leading to lustfulness and other scandalous excesses. The Church therefore concluded that people had to stay away from foods that were exceedingly warming in their effects. Red meats and those products extracted from them – and therefore shared of their nature – could be dangerous to people's moral health. It was thus salutary for Christians to avoid such meats even if only on certain occasions.

Carnival, was the name of those days prior to the beginning of Lent when one could eat quantities of meat. Thus the word 'carnival' indicated the time when this indulgence in meat would stop, thus *carnilivari* – the stopping from taking meat. Advent, similar to Lent, had its own *carnilivari*. In such cases cooks and housewives needed to use vegetable oil substitutes for frying instead of butter for example. Olive oil could also be used.

Fasting was one Christian way of making people learn self-restraint and be reminded of the humanity of Christ. With such restrictions, the only flesh that could be consumed on such days of prohibition was that of fish.



While the lower classes ate frugally, the wealthy were lost for choice



The nobles adapted themselves to the restrictions and circumvented them by having their cooks prepare fish dishes which were as sumptuous as the ones with meat. The poor would not have had much problem in complying with the Church's directions as, in any case, meat was scarcely found on their table due to its price. In continental Europe, it would have been the middling classes who lived in the inner lands far away from the sea that found it more difficult to comply with the religious obligations. Fish would have been expensive to buy especially closer to the prohibitive periods of Lent and Advent and thus stocks of preserved fish would have been needed to counter this situation. For Malta the middling classes would not have found it such a problems as the sea was always a short distance away and fish would be more readily available at reasonable prices.

The importance of fish in Malta seems to have been more or less centred on the fasting periods. Its importance associated with penance and fasting downgraded the value of fish in the perception of people. The expenses of the Mдина *Universitas* regarding fish was minimal when compared to what was spent on meat. There were regulations to control the sale of fresh fish as there was for other food items and it was imposed by law that such fish had to be sold from the market and only from there. A popular way how to cook fish was by frying in olive oil. For long preservation fish was also salted and this rendered it less expensive than the fresh variety. The poorer and less well-off would have to satisfy themselves with the salted fish especially during the days when meat and dairy products were prohibited for religious reasons.

In the Middle Ages dining times took on a different schedule from preceding eras. People normally settled on particular times of the day to have their snacks or meals. The people who were poor would eat whenever they found food available and they needed to grasp the moment. Those who were not as tight would have generally eaten three times in a day as the food available could be spread along the working day. Thus their first encounter with food was in the very early morning and this was breakfast – the breaking of the fast of the night.

During the Late Middle Ages, in England a debate picked up where writers discussed the reasonable number of meals per day. There were those who argued that three meals were acceptable for the labouring classes but two would be enough for anyone else. This meant that breakfast was not considered a necessary first meal accept for children, women, the sick, the elderly and the workmen who needed the sustenance to start off a hard and long day of exertion. Moralists and members of the Church frowned upon those who broke the fast of the night too early if not constrained by personal circumstances. Besides, men felt ashamed having breakfast because they did not want to fall into the sin of gluttony specified in the Bible. Eating breakfast thus made them feel morally weak. Alcohol, gambling and crude language during feasts was also considered immoral by the righteous.



Cooks busy in the kitchen of their lord

However, by the fifteenth century three meals had generally become a standard routine.

After breakfast, the next meal would be taken at around 9.00am but not later than 10.00am and supper, which would be the last substantial meal, would be eaten at around 3.00pm in winter to catch the available daylight. Of course these times would be adjusted the more the light of day gave one the chance to eat comfortably. The eating times were linked to the hours of devotions of the Church. For example, monks ate their daily main meal in the monastery after the celebration of nones – nine hours after daybreak – which meant that the food was taken between noon and 3.00pm. The other meal was consumed by the brethren later on towards sunset, at or after vespers.

In the Middle Ages, etiquette at table was a very important element which distinguished social groups and further reinforced the class structure. Yet, in those houses that belonged

to the middling classes, meals were shared among all the members of the household – from the master to his servant. Later on this practice began to give way to a more formalised structure where the master of the house sometimes sought to eat meals in private, possibly with a small number of important companions and selected servants.

In a religious society an integral part of the meal was the prayer to start off the dining. Politeness was expected from everyone and children were educated in the correct manners so as not to risk offending persons of higher rank, even unintentionally.

In aristocratic households the system was quite rigid. One of the most important elements was cleanliness. Thus, before, between, and at the end of the meal, guests and hosts were supplied with towels and small bowls to keep themselves clean all the time while eating. The washing of the hands before the feast began was considered a table manner that could not be evaded as this would constitute a high act of discourtesy.

Upper class people and guests of honour were seated by a servant. Plates were communal and usually served four persons. Each guest seated at the high table would expect to share the plate with only one other guest.

During these aristocratic meals women did not normally eat with the men as it was thought that the females could not keep up with the pretended standard of cleanliness reached by the males. There was an amount of messiness during these meals and it was normal for men to share cups and break bread and cut meat for fellow diners.

A thirteenth century famous French poem entitled *Roman de la Rose*, gave advice to a woman on her table manners:

“She ought also to behave properly at table.... She must be very careful not to dip her fingers in the sauce up to the knuckles, nor to smear her lips with soup or garlic or fat meat, nor to take too many pieces or too large a piece and put them in her mouth. She must hold the morsel with the tips of her fingers and dip it into the sauce, whether it be thick, thin, or clear, then convey the mouthful with care, so that no drop of soup or sauce or pepper falls on to her chest. When drinking, she should exercise such care that not a drop is spilled upon her, for anyone who saw that happen might think her very rude and coarse. And she must be sure never to touch her goblet when there is anything in her mouth. Let her wipe her mouth so clean that no grease is allowed to remain upon it, at least not upon her upper lip, for when grease is left on the upper lip, globules appear in the wine, which is neither pretty nor nice.”



*The interior of an Italian kitchen from the cookery book *Banchetti composti di Vivende* (1549) by Christoforo di Messisburgo*



A woman preparing a cauldron of soup

There were a number of rules when at table and these needed to be known by everyone so that courtesy and good manners would prevail and thus neither the host nor the guest would have any cause for embarrassment. Among the many dos and don'ts, the following were some of the most important. Persons who came from a lower class or group were to stand up as soon as the master of the house or an important guest entered or left the room. The knife which was never supplied by the host was therefore always to be brought by oneself while one was not expected to use the fork as this was considered to be a cooking utensil. To pick up pieces of food one was to stab these with the knife but the knife was never to be brought to the mouth with the food. The pricked piece of food was to be taken from the knife by the fingertips and eaten. The selection of food was not to be exaggerated and what was chosen was to be put on one's plate. Elbows were not to be placed on the table while eating. Belching and spitting were prohibited as was the overstuffing of one's mouth. Meat or fingers were not to be dipped directly into the salt bowl. Salt was to be picked from the bowl by the tip of the knife. When one is ready eating from a dish, the spoon should be removed. For any pieces of food that get stuck between the teeth one was not to pick them off with the knife.

To show one's politeness, the guest was not to choose the best morsels for oneself. The meat was to be cut from the joint, while bread was to be cut and not broken and the crust offered to the guest. Morsels, tarts and fruits could be selected using one's fingers. Broth was to be eaten with a spoon but the plate was never lifted to one's mouth to drink the liquid directly. The trencher which was made of stale bread and served as a plate was never to be eaten. To assure cleanliness the diner was to keep napkins on one's left shoulder or left wrist and use them as necessary. Wiping the mouth was to be done with the napkin and not on one's sleeve. The cup was to be taken with both hands before drinking from it if this was a shared vessel, and before drinking the mouth was to be wiped on the napkin. If a drink is offered from the host's cup, this was not to be passed around after one drank from it.



Serving meat on a platter

On the dining table, especially when a big banquet was given with guests being hosted, the master of the house would have wished to preserve the relative cleanliness of his best tablecloth. For this reason diners needed somewhere to wipe their mouth and hands without using the tablecloth for this purpose. The solution was to provide napkins.

In the early medieval times this item had disappeared from the table though it had been present along Roman times. Without having anywhere to wipe one's mouth and hands it was



The table cloth and the napkins, a must for a medieval banquet

difficult to get rid of the excess grease and yet continue to eat comfortably. Therefore some used the back of their hand, others found relief by wiping on their clothing or on the host's tablecloth or else used a piece of bread. With time the amenity appeared again and evolved into three cloths. In the French tradition the first cloth was a *couch* – from the French *coucher* (transl. to lie down). This was laid lengthwise in the place where the master was to sit and measured between 4 to 6 feet long and 5 feet wide (approx. 1.2 to 1.8 metres by 1.5 metres). Over the *couch*, the servants laid the *surnappe* (transl. on the cloth) which was in the form of a long towel and indicated where and honoured guest was to sit. The third piece of cloth was the napkin used by the other diners and was hung like a drape from the edge of

the table. It was the size of a modern bath towel. With the passing of time the napkin evolved and became an established part of the dining table. In the sixteenth century napkins were found in different sizes according to the particular event.

Medieval dining in an aristocratic house always included table linen. The best tablecloths were as white as possible and had woven ornamental patterns. Those who could not afford such extravagance would go for a plainer linen cloth and those whose means were limited could put a rough hemp tablecloth. In Western Europe not to afford a tablecloth meant that one was really low in the social ladder.

The lower classes could not afford any real refinements and ate around a short-legged table without chairs. Chairs were, in fact, a later addition to the table which at first was made by placing a number of wooden planks on supports and throwing a tablecloth over them. The table developed later on and was found in the wealthier houses.

Cooking and eating utensils also reflected the social class of the users. The lower classes usually afforded utensils which were made by local potters. The metal wares found their place in the kitchens of the large houses especially in those of Mdina which had a room serving as a kitchen. The middling and lower groups would have to content themselves with a fire lit in an open space on which they cooked their daily meals.

Copper pots, bronze cauldrons, cups and plates, the mortar and pestle, spoons, knives, buckets and other wares as also the iron grate on which meat was roasted, were all essential tools for the medieval kitchen and the table. Those that could afford had many or all of these utensils along with a cook who took care of the meals, banquets and all other food preparations.

Recipes

Lasagna

1. To make *lasagna* take fermented dough and form it into as thin a shape as possible. Then divide it into strips of three fingerbreadths per side.
2. Take salted boiling water and cook the lasagna strips in it.
3. When they are fully cooked, add grated cheese. If you prefer, you can also sprinkle on them good powdered spices, when they are in the trencher.
4. Put on a layer of lasagne and powder again, and continue to add lasagne strips one on top of the other layer and powder each time, and continue until the trencher or bowl is full.
5. Then eat them by picking them up with a pointed stick.

(*Liber de coquina*, 14th Century Italian)



The Cana episode set in a medieval scene

Ravioli

1. Get a pound and a half of old cheese and a little fresh creamy cheese, and a pound of bacon or of loin of veal that should be well boiled, then chopped.
2. Ground some fragrant herbs, pepper, cloves, ginger and saffron, and add a well ground breast of chicken.
3. Mix everything well together.
4. Make a thin dough and wrap in it some of the mixture and form it the size of a nut.
5. Set these ravioli to cook in the fat broth of a capon or of some other good meat, adding a little saffron, and let them boil for half an hour.
6. Put them in dishes, garnished with a mixture of grated cheese and good spices.

(*The Neapolitan Recipe Collection*, 15th Century Italian)

Polpette di Carne de Vitello (Veal Roulade)

1. To make a roll of veal or other good meat, take some lean meat from the haunch and cut it into long slices and beat it on a cutting board or table using the knife handle.
2. Take some salt and ground fennel seeds and spread over the cutlets.
3. Then take some parsley, marjoram, and good lard, and chop together with some good spices and spread this mixture over the cutlets.
4. Roll the cutlets and cook them on a spit, but do not let them get too dry over the flame.

(*Libro de arte coquinaria* by Maestro Martino de Como, 15th century)

Diriola (Custard Tart)

1. Form the dough into the shape of a deep pie and fill it completely with flour so that it will keep its shape.
2. Cook it in a pan until it is somewhat dry.
3. When this is done, remove the flour and take some egg yolks, milk, sugar, and cinnamon and form them into a mixture.
4. Put the mixture into the pastry, cooking it like a tart, moving it from time to time and stirring with a spoon.
5. When you can see it starting to set, pour on some rosewater and stir well with a spoon.
6. When it has set completely, it is cooked. See that it does not cook too much, and that it should quiver like a junket.

(*Libro de arte coquinaria* by Maestro Martino de Como, 15th century)

Fritelle de Pome per Quaresima (Apple Fritters for Lent)

1. Take apples and peel them, then slice them into thin wafers.
2. Make a batter of flour mixed with saffron, and add currants.
3. Put the apples in this batter; then fry them in sufficient oil.
4. Sprinkle sugar over them when cooked.

(*Libro di cucina / Libro per cuoco* by an anonymous Venetian, 14th cent.)

Pickled Eggplant

1. Take medium eggplants and cut off half their stems and their leaves.
2. Half boil them in water and salt, take them out, and dry them off.
3. Quarter them lengthwise and stuff them with fresh celery leaves, a few bunches of mint and peeled cloves of garlic.
4. Stuff them one onto the other in a glass jug.
5. Sprinkle on them a little of the herbs and the finely ground mixed spices, cover them with a good vinegar and leave them until they are thoroughly mature, and then use them.

(*Kitab al-Tabikh*, 13th century cookbook)

Brodo de Ciceri Rosci (Chickpea Soup)

To make eight platefuls.

1. Take a pound and a half of chickpeas and wash them in hot water, drain them, then put them in the pot in which they will be cooked.
2. Add half an ounce of flour, a little good oil, a little salt and about twenty crushed peppercorns and a little ground cinnamon.
3. Thoroughly mix all these ingredients together with your hands.
4. Add three measures of water, some sage, rosemary, and parsley.
5. Boil until the liquid is reduced to the quantity of eight platefuls.
6. When the soup is almost cooked, add a little oil.
7. If you prepare this soup for invalids, add neither oil nor spices.

(*Libro de arte coquinaria*, Maestro Martino de Como, 15th cent.)

References

- Alchin, L.K., 'Medieval Bread', *Medieval Life and Times*. Available at: <http://www.medieval-life-and-times.info/medieval-food/medieval-bread.htm> [accessed 23 Dec 2015].
- Alchin, Linda, 'Ancient Roman Recipes'. Available at: <http://www.tribunesandtriumphs.org/roman-life/ancient-roman-recipes.htm> [accessed 25 Nov 2015].
- Benhima, Yassir, 'The Aghlabids (800 – 909)', *Qantara Mediterranean Heiritage*, available at http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show_document.php?do_id=866 [accessed 14 Nov 2015].
- Bonanno, Anthony, *Malta Phoenician, Punic and Roman* (Malta, 2005).
- Brincat, J.M., *Malta 870-1054: Al-Himyari's Account and its Linguistic Implications* (Malta, 1995).
- Camelot International, 'The Romans – The Roman Diet'. Available at: <http://www.camelotintl.com/romans/index.html> [accessed 26 Nov 2015].
- Carr, Karen Eva, 'Medieval Islamic Food'. Available at: <http://quatr.us/islam/food/> [accessed 5 Nov 2015].
- Cartwright, Mark, 'Food in the Roman World', *Ancient History Encyclopedia* (6 May 2014). Available at <http://www.ancient.eu/article/684/> [accessed 26 Nov 2015].
- Cassar, George, 'Defending a Mediterranean island outpost of the Spanish Empire – the case of Malta', *Sacra Militia*, 13 (2014).
- Crystallinks, 'Ancient Roman Homes'. Available at: <http://www.crystallinks.com/romebuildings.html> [accessed 26 Nov 2015].
- Dalli, Chales, 'Satellite, Sentinel, Stepping Stone: Medieval Malta in Sicily's Orbit', in A. Bonanno and P. Militello (eds), *Malta in the Hybleans, the Hybleans in Malta. Malta negli Iblei, gli Iblei a Malta* (Palermo, 2008), 245-58.
- Dalli, Charles, *Malta – The Medieval Millennium* (Malta, 2006).
- Davidova Orlova Khazarina of Robakovna, Dame Katja, 'Medieval Pasta: History, Preparation, and Recipes'. Available at: <http://www.katjaorlova.com/PastaClass.html#sdfootnote7sym> [accessed 24 Dec 2015].
- Dickie, John, *Delizia! The Epic History of Italians and Their Food* (New York, 2008).
- Doak, Robin, *Empire of the Islamic World* (New York, 2010).
- F.B., 'Fatimid Dynasty (909 – 1171)', *Qantara Mediterranean Heiritage*, available at http://www.qantara-med.org/qantara4/public/show_document.php?do_id=597 [accessed 14 Nov 2015].
- Fiorini, Stanley, 'Drawwiet Maltin – Dokumentazzjoni Bikrija', *L-Imnara*, 31 (2007).
- Fiorini, Stanley, *The 'Mandati' Documents at the Archives of the Mdina Cathedral, Malta 1473-1539* (Malta, 1992).
- Fouad, 'Al-Sikbaj and the Art of Medieval Arab Cookery', the food blog. Available at: <http://thefoodblog.com.au/2009/12/al-sikbaj-and-art-of-medieval-arab.html> [accessed 3 Nov 2015].
- Freedman, Paul, 'Spices: How the Search for Flavors Influenced Our World: Myth, medicine and medieval tastes created a market for the world's first globally traded product', *Yale Global Online*. Available at: <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/spices-how-search-flavors-influenced-our-world> [accessed 24 Dec 2015].
- Gambin, Kenneth & Buttigieg, Noel, *Storja tal-Kultura ta' l-Ikelf* (Malta, 2003).
- George Mateljan Foundation, 'Cumin seeds', Available at: <http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=91> [accessed 13 Dec 2015].

- Gilbert, Rosalie, 'Manners For The Well-bred Medieval Woman', *Rosalie's Medieval Woman*. Available at: <http://rosaliegilbert.com/manners.html> [accessed 24 Dec 2015].
- Granara, William, 'Ibn Hawqal in Sicily', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 3, The Self and the Other (Spring, 1983).
- Hammond, P.W., *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (Gloucestershire, 1993).
- Harcum, Cornelia G., 'Roman Cooking Utensils in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 25/1 (Apr./Jun. 1921).
- Harris, William, 'Marcus Porcius Cato: De Agri Cultura'. Available at: <http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/cato.html> [accessed 25 Nov 2015].
- Hooper, Victoria, 'Ancient Roman Cheesecake', *Vicky Thinks*. Available at: <http://vickyhooper.blogspot.ca/2013/06/ancient-roman-cheesecake.html> [accessed 10 Nov 2015].
- Johns, Jeremy, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Diwan* (Cambridge, 2002).
- Jwaidehm, Wadie, 'Ash-Sharif al-Idrisi' – Arab geographer', *Encyclopedia Britannica* available at <http://www.britannica.com/biography/al-Sharif-al-Idrisi> [accessed 15 Nov 2015].
- King, Carol, 'The Romans: What They Ate', *Italy Magazine* (24 Jan 2014). Available at <http://www.italymagazine.com/featured-story/romans-what-they-ate> [accessed 26 Nov 2015].
- Laldin, Sidrah, 'Muslim Food History – Culinary arts from Baghdad to Cordoba, from Tunis to Palermo', Socialappetizers.Com. Available at: <http://www.socialappetizers.com/muslim-food-history-02.html> [accessed 6 Nov 2015].
- Lewis, Harrison, *Ancient Malta: A study of its antiquities* (Malta, 1977).
- Livy, *The History of Rome*, Vol. III, Rev. Canon Roberts, translator. Available at: <http://www.brainfly.net/html/books/brn0131c.htm> [accessed 20 Nov 2015].
- M. Tullius Cicero. *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero, literally translated by C. D. Yonge*. London. George Bell & Sons. 1903.
- Malta Independent, '2,000-year-old Trees still producing olives' (16 Aug 2011). Available at: <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2011-08-16/news/2000-year-old-trees-still-producing-olives-297296/> [accessed 24 Nov 2015].
- Medieval Cuisine. Available at: <http://www.medievalcuisine.com/home> [accessed 24 Dec 2015].
- Milani-Santarpia, Giovanni, 'ancient roman homes, houses and villas'. Available at: http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm [accessed 26 Nov 2015].
- Musco, Tom, 'The Food of SICILY'. Available at http://www.umass.edu/journal/sicilyprogram/PDF/sicilian_food.pdf [accessed 15 Nov 2015].
- Naevius, 'Fragments of Poems – The Punic War, Book IV', E.H. Warmington, translator (1936). Available at: <http://www.attalus.org/poetry/naevius.html#p31> [accessed 20 Nov 2015].
- Newman, Paul B., *Daily Life in the Middle Ages* (North Carolina & London, 2001).
- Newman, Simon, 'Food & Diet in the Middle Ages', *The Finer Times*. Available at: <http://www.thefinertimes.com/Middle-Ages/food-in-the-middle-ages.html> [accessed 26 Nov 2015].
- oldandinteresting.com, 'Tablecloths in the Middle Ages'. Available at: <http://www.oldandinteresting.com/medieval-tablecloths.aspx> [accessed 24 Dec 2015].
- Perry, Charles, (transl.), *An Anonymous Andalusian Cookbook of the 13th Century*. Available at: http://www.davidfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Andalusian/andalusian_footnotes.htm#fn222 [accessed 1 Dec 2015].
- Rowan, Erica, 'Dormice, ostrich meat and fresh fish: the surprising foods eaten in ancient Rome', *History extra* (19 Mar 2015). Available at: <http://www.historyextra.com/article/food/dormice-ostrich-meat-and-fresh-fish-surprising-foods-eaten-ancient-rome> [accessed 25 Nov 2015].
- Salerno, Adelisa di, 'Food in medieval Sicily'. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/2292026/Food_in_medieval_Sicily [accessed 24 Dec 2015].
- San Andrea School, 'Villa Ta' Kaccatura'. Available at: <http://www.sanandrea.edu.mt/romanmalta/page13.html> [accessed 24 Nov 2015].

- Savona-Ventura, Charles, *Outlines of Maltese Medical History* (Malta, 1997).
- Scully, Terence, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (Suffolk, 1995).
- The British Museum, 'Making 2,000-year-old bread'. Available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/past_exhibitions/2013/pompeii_and_herculaneum/pompeii_live/live_event/bread_recipe.aspx [accessed 2 Nov 2015].
- Trueman, C.N., 'Roman Food', *The History Learning Site* (16 Mar 2015). Available at <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/ancient-rome/roman-food/> [accessed 6 Nov 2015].
- Ushistory.org, 'The Pax Romana', *Ancient Civilizations Online Textbook* (2015). Available at: <http://www.ushistory.org/civ/6c.asp> [accessed 21 Nov 2015].
- vassallomalta.com, 'Battles & Sieges – The 1429 Siege of Malta'. Available at: <https://vassallohistory.wordpress.com/battles-sieges/> [accessed 24 Dec 2015].
- Vella, Andrew P., *Storja ta' Malta*, I (Malta, 1974).
- Vella, Horatio C.R. (transl.), *The Earliest Description of Malta (Lyons 1536) by Jean Quintin d'Autun* (Malta, 1980).
- Von Drachenfels, Suzanne, 'Napkins: A Brief History'. Available at: <http://www.foodreference.com/html/art-history-napkins-729.html> [accessed 27 Nov 2015].
- Wettinger, Godfrey, 'Agriculture in Malta in the Late Middle Ages', in Mario Buhagiar (ed.), *Proceedings of History Week 1981* (Malta, 1982).
- Wettinger, Godfrey, 'The pawning of Malta to Monroy', *Melita Historica*, 7/3 (1978).
- Wettinger, Godfrey, *Place-Names of the Maltese Islands ca. 1300-1800* (Malta, 2000).
- Wright, Clifford A., 'Tharid', CliffordAWright.com. Available at: http://www.cliffordawright.com/caw/recipes/display/bycountry.php/recipe_id/1018/id/8/ [accessed 1 Dec 2015].
- Zaimeche, Salah, 'Agriculture in Muslim civilisation: A Green Revolution in Pre-Modern Times', *Muslim Heritage*. Available at: <http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/agriculture-muslim-civilisation-green-revolution-pre-modern-times> [accessed 18 Nov 2015].
- Ziegler, Vickie L., 'The Flower of Wheat: Bread in the Middle Ages and Colonial Era', *Medieval Technology and American History*. Available at: http://www.engr.psu.edu/mtah/articles/flower_of_wheat.htm [accessed 23 Dec 2015].



The Well-Stocked Kitchen by Joachim Beuckelaer (1566)