Volume XV Number 2 SPRING 1999

ANN ARBOR
CULINARY HISTORIANS

A Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

FOOD AND EXCHANGE

THE FACT OF A CORNCOB

by Randy K. Schwartz

Not often do we think of culinary history as encompassing the actual production of foodstuffs, much less the processes by which various plants and animals were first domesticated for human consumption. But it is impossible for us to grasp how foodways developed on a global scale if we do not wield some knowledge of the cultivation and diffusion of food crops around the world. We were reminded of this last November 12 in the talk "Native American and Colonial European Food Exchange," presented to our group by Prof. Richard I. Ford of the Department of Anthropology and the Ethnobotanical Laboratory, University of Michigan.

Those of us who like to think about food and its history come up against questions of this type again and again:

- Did the American Indians eat anything like "fry bread" before the arrival of Europeans?
- Did the "Jerusalem artichoke" come from Jerusalem?
- Could the dish "butternut squash ravioli" conceivably pre-date the voyages of Columbus?

Teams such as that led by Prof. Ford help us to solve such puzzles. To reconstruct the global food record, they synthesize three different types of evidence. They sift through their own *archaeo-botanical* evidence, mostly burnt plant remains uncovered from dig sites around the world. They study other *archaeological* findings such as bones, paleofeces, etc. And they gather more recent *historical* details from information found in written documents. The ultimate goal is to be able to reconstruct the lists of foods, meals, and menus that were known to peoples living in a variety of times and places.

Such evidence shows us that a corncob or a beanstalk, for example, is the culmination of hundreds, even thousands of years of conscious efforts to tame a food source for human consumption. In its own way, a cultivated plant is as much an artifact of human labor and ingenuity as is a baked *polenta pasticciata* or a soothing *crème vichyssoise glacée*. And in fact, the latter are among the myriad of dishes that could not have been known but for crops that were domesticated

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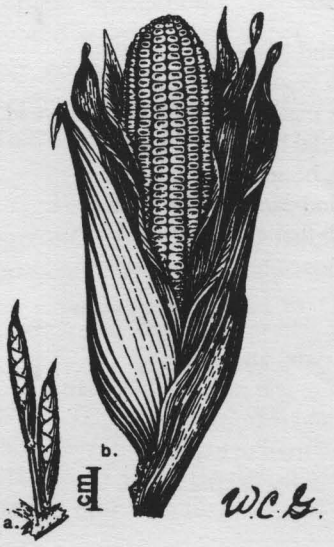

Comparing "ears" of domesticated maize (b) with those of its wild ancestor, *teosinte* (a), reveals how much effort must have gone into the domestication process. (Drawing used, with permission, from Walton C. Galinat, "Domestication and Diffusion of Maize," in Richard I. Ford, ed., *Prehistoric Food Production in North America* [Anthropological Paper No. 75, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, 1985].)

VOICES FROM THE PAST

by Jan Longone

At the turn of the century there was a fad for printing recipes and food vignettes in rhyme. Some of the poems were excellent; others quite awful. Here is one from the 1897-98 volume of *The Boston Cooking-School Magazine* (p. 377). You can decide if this is one of the excellent ones, or one of the quite awful. There is both social commentary and culinary history involved in this poem!

BREAD vs. DOUGH

by H. MacDonald

A great deal of trouble, and much of the woe,
Is caused in this life when the bread tastes like dough ;
The yeast may be poor, or the stove doesn't bake,—
But something's the matter with biscuit and cake.
You've poured in the water, you've stirred in the flour,
And mixed it, and turned it, for nearly an hour ;
But, somehow or other, the mixture don't rise,
And down in the basin, like putty, it lies.

It does seem so *easy* to make good, nice bread,
And you think you have got the whole thing in your head ;
But your brain and your fingers don't seem to connect,
So it tastes in a way that you did not expect.
It went into the oven, which was too plaguey hot,
And, oh ! what a roasting and scorching it got !
It was burned on the top, it was burned down below,
But its heart was as soft and as tender as *dough*.

Sometimes a young husband will say to his wife
(And this, often, is but the beginning of strife) :
"My mother could *always* make light, wholesome bread,
But now I get something like brickbats instead."
This last shot just hits her, he sees by her eyes,
For, bursting with anger and passion, she cries :
"Why didn't you stay with that excellent cook—"
Then, biting her lips, she gives him such a look.

She would have said more, but words failed to express
The feeling of anger, and pain, and distress,
Which burned in her bosom, and raged in her heart,
And made the lip quiver, and teardrops to start.
He said he was joking, and tried to explain,
But she vows she will never try baking again,

And the biscuit and cake she will get from the store,
And, as for the brickbats, he'll eat them no more.

For ignorance, now, there's no further excuse,
So, a truce to the jokes, and the scorn, and abuse,
Which have freely been shower'd on each young women's head
When first starting in life to make biscuit or bread :
We have cooking-school teachers all over the land,
So that cooking and baking all may understand ;
And thus the beginner is sure to start right,
And learns to make biscuit and bread that are light. ■

Ann Arbor Culinary Historians Newsletter

Published quarterly by the

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor (CHAA)

Editor:
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THE FACT OF A CORNCOB *(continued from page 1)*

by the indigenous peoples of the New World.

EUROPEANS AS CROSS-POLLINATORS

At the same time, it was Europe that played a key role in dispersing the foodstuffs—not to mention entire human populations and cultures—across the planet. Consider the peanut: it was first brought to North America stowed as food for African slaves, who were likewise cargo on the European ships. Peanuts had been eaten in Africa for some time (our word "goober" is African Gullah) but, Prof. Ford tells us, it is a popular misconception that peanuts were actually native to Africa. Rather, they were domesticated in tropical or coastal South America, and only arrived in Africa by way of Portugal! Reflecting this, when peanuts were transplanted from Portugal to Portuguese settlements in Africa, they were at first called New World groundnuts, and they gradually replaced the older native Bambara groundnuts.

Such "cross-pollination" of foodstuffs was extensive and, for the most part, extremely rapid. The chili pepper (*Capsicum*), first domesticated in Mexico, was brought to Hong Kong by Spanish Jesuits in 1518, only 25 years after Columbus first returned from the Americas. From Hong Kong, the plants soon found their way to Szechuan; in the same century, the Portuguese introduced them to India and Thailand. We often think of the hot chili as the quintessence of the spicy foods of Asia, but before the arrival of European traders and settlers, Asians had nothing hotter than the peppercorns for spicing purposes.

Perhaps most impressive is the diffusion of foods *within the Western Hemisphere* following European settlement. The two varieties of the common bean, for instance, which have quite different protein profiles, stood apart for centuries in their respective homelands of Mexico and Peru. It was the Spanish newcomers from across the ocean who first admixed them.

At least five major New World crops—large-kernel corn, pumpkins, tomatoes, and white and sweet potatoes—were unknown in what is now the United States until their introduction there by European settlers. Prof. Ford's team discovered that the ancestors of dent corn were introduced to North America by Spaniards bound from Veracruz to the port of New Orleans, and from there they were traded further up the Mississippi River. A similar route brought some of our squashes from western Mexico. Tomatoes and white potatoes, which were native to Mexico and Peru, respectively, seem to have arrived *by way of Europe* in at least certain portions of North America.

The new foods did much more than increase local culinary diversity. Ultimately, they reshaped regional economies and populations. Prof. Ford informs us that in China, for example, corn introduced by the Spaniards in 1521 (along with peanuts and sweet potatoes) was at first grown only on marginal land unfit for rice. Corn in China became a hedge against famine and, in time, a major food crop, helping to bring about a population explosion. A similar process occurred with the white potato in Ireland and other impoverished parts of Europe, and with the cassava in Africa. The potato and cassava, known also as yucca, manioc and tapioca, had both been transplanted from South America.

MORE THAN A MATTER OF TASTE

Sometimes people fall into the error of thinking that palatability alone underlies the adoption of new plant crops, or of new ways to use them. But many other factors—including economic, political, and religious—can play a key role in hastening or retarding this process. This is often the reason why different foods are accepted at different rates after they are introduced to a particular region.

In the domestication of cucurbit gourds, Prof. Ford noted, the native Americans originally selected for hardness of rind and for the edible seeds, not for tastiness of flesh, since cucurbits were hollowed out mainly for use as containers. Only with the invention of clay pottery did these hard rinds become superfluous. From that point, domestication veered toward selecting for fleshy edible squashes. The peoples indigenous to the Western Hemisphere devoted a great deal more attention to this than did their counterparts across the ocean, where a wider selection of foods was available. (See accompanying article on butternut squash ravioli, page 5.)

Tomatoes and potatoes (from the New World) and eggplants (from Asia) were at first supposed by Europeans to be poisonous. Acceptance of the potato was especially hindered in Catholic countries because nothing like this tuber is mentioned in the Bible. In Spain, for example, potatoes were introduced only as animal feed. Nonetheless, they began to be eaten by poor peasants there. In European wars, cavalry units fed potatoes to their horses, and this helped introduce the plant to other countries.

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THE FACT OF A CORNCOB *(cont'd from previous page)*

On the opposite extreme stands the sunflower, a native of eastern North America that was particularly prized in Europe because its seeds were a non-proscribed source of oil during the yearly 40-day penitence of Lent. In the Orthodox Church, Lenten and other dietary laws were especially strict, mandating nearly 200 meatless "fast days" per year, and this prodded Russian growers during the 18th and 19th centuries to breed the sunflower toward the mammoth varieties that we now see worldwide. The sunflower still accounts for the majority of vegetable oil produced in Russia today.

The Jerusalem artichoke, a nondomesticated cousin of the sunflower, was used by Europeans originally as an animal feed, and later for making a soup fancifully dubbed "Palestine." But the Jerusalem artichoke has no real relation either to Jerusalem or to artichokes. A native tuber of North America, it was first called by the English the "Canada potato" and the "French potato," only later by the word "Jerusalem." The latter is believed to be a corruption of the Italian *girasole*, "sunflower." The sunflower and the Jerusalem artichoke are, according to Prof. Ford, the only two cultivated plants in North America that had not been seen by Europeans prior to their arrival there.

NEW RESEARCH

Economic botany is a lively field whose issues have been fought out on contentious terrain. Recent findings have turned the tables on accepted answers, even as they have raised new questions.

Earlier in this century the eminent Russian plant geneticist Nikolai Vavilov and his followers mistakenly thought that *Cucurbita pepo*—an important group of squashes and pumpkins—had originated in the Middle East. They cited as evidence the great number of varieties found there. In this case, however, it was precisely because it was a species *not native* to the region—thriving so well in the absence of its natural predators—that it had flourished and that many, many types had been developed. It has since been discovered that *C. pepo* was in fact native to Mesoamerica and South America, and had only been introduced to the Middle East around 1500 AD.

Until the 1970s, the late American botanist Paul Mangelsdorf and his school believed that the wild ancestor of domesticated maize was a small popcorn whose kernels were encased in pods. The prevailing view today is that this popcorn was itself a product of human selection, and that the wild precursor of our corn was actually *teosinte*, a coarse Mesoamerican grass with large disarticulated kernels (not arrayed on a cob), which would have made harvesting them difficult. This discovery underlines just how protracted an effort was required to domesticate corn.

This woodcut illustration of a sunflower by Pieter van der Borcht, the first drawing of the plant in Europe, appeared in the herbal of Rembert Dodoens, *Florum, et Coronariarum Odoratarumque Nonnullarum Herbarum Historia* (Antwerp, 1568). Note the early designation of the plant as "Peruvian chrysanthemum." (From Charles B. Heiser, Jr., *The Sunflower* [Norman, OK: Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1976].)

One of the many remaining mysteries of paleobotany, Prof. Ford noted, is exactly where the sweet potato was developed. Remains are found archeologically in Central and in northern South America, as well as on the Pacific Islands. Some theorize that the sweet potato floated westward to the Pacific, while others maintain that it was domesticated there independently.

Two articles by Prof. Ford will interest readers who want to study these questions in more depth:

- "The Introduction of the Spanish Plant Complex into Florida, Mexico, and the American Southwest," in H. D.V. Pendergast, N. L. Ertkin, D. R. Harris, P. J. Houghton, eds., *Plants for Food and Medicine* (Richmond, U.K.: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, 1998).
- "The New Pueblo Economy," in *When Cultures Meet: Remembering San Gabriel Del Yunge Oweenge: Papers from the October 20, 1984 Conference held at the San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 1987, pp. 73-91).

Prof. Ford is also the editor of the following two books in the Anthropological Papers series of the UM Museum of Anthropology: *Prehistoric Food Production in North America* (Paper No. 75, published 1985) and *The Nature and Status of Ethnobotany* (Paper No. 67, published 1978). ■

A RELIC OF RENAISSANCE WEALTH AND CULTURE

ACROSS OCEANS: BUTTERNUT SQUASH RAVIOLI

by Randy K. Schwartz

At the Ann Arbor restaurant Mediterrano—where our group gathered over dinner last November—chef-owner John Roumanis serves a wonderful main course called butternut squash ravioli. Mr. Roumanis, whose family hails from Cyprus, fills his pasta with a deep yellow mash of cooked butternut squash, ricotta cheese, eggs and nutmeg (other chefs might use Parmigiano cheese and acorn squash, pumpkin, or even sweet potato). With a pastry cutter he forms two-inch-square pillows, which are boiled and then served in a sauce of cream, caramelized red onions, shallots, pecans, and fresh oregano.

After my first taste several years ago, I began to wonder: "How and when did this dish come about? Could it conceivably pre-date the voyages of Columbus?" By pursuing this question, we are able to glimpse some of the actual mechanisms by which food exchange occurred historically.

FROM DUMPLINGS TO TARTLETS

Italians were certainly eating something called ravioli by the 1200s, but the details have been a matter of contention. Six decades ago the *Larousse Gastronomique*[1] popularized the idea that the word "ravioli" derives from the Genoese dialect, where *rabiole* (or *robiole*), we are told, signifies something of little value, "refuse." Genoa, later the birthplace of Columbus and of John Cabot, had become in the 1200s the greatest sea power in the Mediterranean, and according to this school of thought ravioli was devised on the Genoese ships as a prudent way to make use of food scraps. Another school argues that the word "ravioli" stems from the Italian verb *ravvolgere* ("to wrap or wind around"), a reference to its pasta casing[2].

Modern etymologists, however, trace the word "ravioli" all the way back to the Latin *rabiola*, that member of the turnip family known to us as "broccoli rabe" (or rape) and from whose seeds canola oil is produced nowadays. Giuliano Bugialli explains[3] that the earliest ravioli were actually little dumplings, so named because their round shape resembled the root of this plant. The dumplings were boiled in broth until they had a texture similar to what we call *gnocci*; they were not wrapped in pasta. Frequently they were served floating in the broth in which they were boiled, like wonton noodles. Giovanni Boccaccio, the Florentine poet, might have been referring to such dumplings in his verse *Decamerone* (c. 1350) when a ravenous peasant is lured by tales of people who live atop a mountain of grated Parmigiano cheese, and who do nothing but make "maccheroni" and "raviuoli" boiled in capon broth[4]. Simone Prodenzani, Boccaccio's disciple in Umbria to the south, might also have had such dumplings in mind in his verse *Saporetto* ("Good Taste," c. 1400) when, describing a feast, he refers to a platter of "raviol" as an intermezzo between the early courses of *tortelli* in blancmange, "French" soup and lasagna, and the main courses of salted pork and wild boar, roasted chicken and plover[5].

Over time, the meaning of "ravioli" shifted to denote a kind of stuffed pasta, taking the place of the word *tortelli*. The older unwrapped dumplings came to be known as *ravioli ignudi* (today *gnudi*, or *nudi*), i.e. "nude ravioli," to distinguish them from the pasta-type ravioli. The latter were made by rolling a thin sheet of egg pasta, and dotting this with regularly spaced bits of filling (cheese, eggs, and chopped greens such as spinach, beet tops or Swiss chard). A second sheet of pasta was then placed atop this, and fingers were used to press the sheets together around each bit of filling. The individual ravioli were then separated by cutting them in squares, which were boiled. This newer sense of the word was an early carryover to English, for as our member Robert Lewis informs us[6], a manuscript of *The Forme of Cury* (c.1400) provides instructions for making such "ravioles" of thin dough encasing a mixture of cheese, eggs, butter and saffron; the recipe also refers to them as "turteletes," i.e. tartlets (akin to *tortelli*).

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Before Columbus set sail, then, the Italians were already enjoying stuffed pasta, and perhaps already calling it "ravioli" in certain regions. When might something like butternut squash have appeared on the scene?

A Whole New World of Squashes

Stefano Milioni, in a monograph published to mark the quincentenary of Columbus' first voyage, recounts a recipe for *torta di zucche secche* from an anonymous 14th-century Venetian cookbook. To make this pie, a pastry crust is filled with a mixture of squash pulp (boiled and then pounded with lard) and cheese, along with eggs, pepper and saffron. Of course, this pre-Columbian Italian pie is still a world away from our ravioli—not least because the squash would have lacked any sweetness. For as Milioni points out, the Old World squashes (perhaps more accurately called gourds) are so tough in their mature state that they have to be harvested when they are still young, green, and bitter[7].

Modern botanists have determined that all of the proper squashes are indigenous to the Western Hemisphere alone. In fact, they are the earliest known domesticated New World plants. In the Guilá Naquitz Cave in Oaxaca, Mexico, archaeologists have found seeds of domesticated *Cucurbita pepo* (a varied species that includes what we call zucchini, acorn squash, yellow crookneck, pumpkin and others) dating from c. 8000 BCE. From about the same date, likely remains of domesticated *Cucurbita moschata*, the species that roughly corresponds to the common name "butternut squash," were found at a site on the southwest coast of Ecuador[8]. A third species, *Cucurbita maxima*, a pumpkin-sized squash typically having a dark green rind and luscious yellow flesh, is of much more recent domestication, with the earliest finds dated c. 650 AD. Although squashes, with their modest nutritional value, never became a major food source in the New World, they did enhance variety in the native diet. The cultivation of both *pepo* and *moschata* had spread from their respective homelands to what is now the American Midwest prior to the arrival of Europeans, while *maxima* had not spread beyond South America in pre-Columbian times[9].

The diffusion across Europe, of course, was much more rapid. Unlike tomatoes, potatoes, and

Cucurbita maxima squash at a market in La Paz, Bolivia. (Photo courtesy of Hugh Wilson, Texas A&M University Herbarium.)

maize—all of which were slower to be adopted by the Europeans—the new squashes shared the fate of the haricot beans in that they were reminiscent of an Old World vegetable, and in Italian they were in fact called by the old name (*zucca*, plural *zucche*; diminutive *zucchina*, plural *zucchini*). Then again, they were clearly more palatable than the Old World gourds. Only decades after Columbus got his first glimpse of "pompions" in Guadalupe on his second voyage to the New World, in 1493, seeds were being sown in a few gardens of Europe. By 1571, a botanist in Tuscany was already listing the best ways to cook such pumpkins. "It is the practice to eat it either boiled or fried in the pan or roasted," Pietro Andrea Mattioli wrote about the pumpkin. "Boiled, it has little appeal in itself. When roasted...or fried in the pan, it releases a great deal of its moisture. Nonetheless, because of its natural water, it should be eaten with oregano."[10] The rapidity with which the cuisines of Italy and the rest of Europe adopted the squashes of the Western Hemisphere had, then, two key ingredients: these squashes were both similar to, and superior to, a familiar vegetable.

Thus far, we have established that pasta ravioli and sweet squashes could have coexisted in Italy during Columbus' generation, but no earlier. How long did it take before these two ingredients were brought together in a single dish?

THE MARRIAGE WITH *MINESTRA*

If you accost a random Italian to ask about dishes in which pasta is wrapped around sweet squash, almost certainly he will mention first the *cappellaci di zucca* of Ferrara. The people who inhabit this region, a rural, marshy corner of Emilia in the lower Po valley of northern Italy, are famed as *magnazoca*, sometimes translated as "pumpkin eaters." Their favorite is the large, sweet *C. maxima,* which they call *zucca comune* ("common squash"), or *zucca barucca* when roasted.

The stuffed pasta tradition of *cappellaci* and *cappelletti* (or in local parlance, *caplazz* and *caplett*) is also characteristic of Emilian cuisine. Both names refer to a small hat—exemplified by the traditional hat of a cardinal—which suggests the final shape of this noodle. In making *cappellaci*, pasta is formed into circles or squares that are folded over some filling; each of these is then curled around a finger and sealed in a ring shape before boiling. (The result is quite similar to what are called *tortellini* in other parts of Italy. In Emilia-Romagna, however, *tortellini* instead denotes a sweet kind of *tortelli*—except in Bologna, where such sweets are actually called *ravioli*![11]) Originally, *cappellaci* and *cappelletti* were meatless dishes functioning as *primi piatti*, the first course of a large meal. They were of the type known as *minestra*, meaning that they were served as a sort of soup, based on the broth (capon broth if available) in which they were boiled. By the 19th century even the peasants of Emilia-Romagna indulged in a simple *cappelletti* of cheese, eggs and spices on the special occasion of Christmas Eve. In the region's more recent culinary past, these pasti continued to function as first courses but were consumed on more occasions, and more frequently "dry," i.e. drained of broth and instead served with melted butter and, perhaps, more grated cheese or herbs[12].

It was a brilliant innovation to partner this savory stuffed pasta tradition with the sweet New World squashes. Carol Field reports[13] that the first known recipe for *cappellaci di zucca* appeared in a book of culinary instructions from Giovanni Battista Rossetti, published in Ferrara in 1584. Rossetti occupied the post of court chef or *scalco* (literally "carver") for Lucrezia, Duchess of Urbino and sister of Alfonso II, the Fifth Duke of Este. Historians believe that the dish must have been invented in Ferrara some years prior to this publication[14]. Mario Batali, chef-owner of Po restaurant in New York City, stated that it was first served in conjunction with the 1569 wedding of the brother of the Duke of Este to a woman named Ann[15]. A variation popular in nearby Mantua, in which pulverized *amaretti* (almond biscuits) and *mostarda di Cremona* (a concoction of candied fruits and mustard seed), with their notes of bitterness and piquancy, are added to the sweet squash filling, has been attributed to the Gonzaga family of nobles, who were strongly connected to the Estensi through politics and intermarriage. Granting that some of these details might have become garbled[16], nevertheless the basic point that this dish originated in the mid-Cinquecento court of the Este certainly rings true.

It rings true because the Estensi, who claimed to be descendants of Hercules, presided from Ferrara over a state that was one of the brightest jewels of the Italian Renaissance. At various times, their domain traversed the breadth of Italy, from the Po river delta to the Gulf of Genoa. Although the dukes had steered Ferrara itself in an agrarian direction by suppressing the craft guilds that sprouted elsewhere in Italy, their patronage of Titian, Petrarch, and other writers and artists had produced "a degree of intellectual cosmopolitanism quite remarkable for a small Renaissance city."[17]

Imagine what a culinary triumph it would have been in such a court to present a new *minestra* based on a plant that had been seized from across the ocean by the *conquistadores*! Even more than other Renaissance Italian nobility, the Estensi were famous for breathtaking banquets, brought to a high art by Cristoforo di Messisbugo, carver at the court beginning in 1515 (his *Banchetti, Composizioni di Vivande e Apparecchio Generale* was published posthumously in 1549). The Estensi had a particular fondness for sweet foods and for combining them strikingly with savory ingredients. As one modern scholar marveled, "There was more food consumed in a single day in this court than in eight or ten other courts of Italy."[18]

To get a sense of these grand banquets, consider the one held at the Estense moated castle in Ferrara in January 1529 to celebrate the marriage of Ercole (Her-

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cules) II, the Fourth Duke of Este, to Renée, daughter of French King Louis XII. Supervised by Messisbugo, the banquet was modeled on the feasts of ancient Greece and Rome. The 104 guests were seated in the Great Hall at tables lit with candles of white beeswax and decked with flowers of perfumed silk. The faience dinnerware, emblazoned with the Este coat of arms, included fingerbowls filled with rosewater, and 566 spice-plates alone. The banquet lasted nine hours, from evening until dawn, reaching a crescendo through carefully sequenced performances of music and dance, and stagings of Ariosto's "Cassaria" and a madrigal of Ruzzante. Also unveiled before each course was a different figurine of drawn sugar depicting one of the labors of Hercules. There were nine food courses comprising about 100 different dishes, prepared and assembled in almost every conceivable manner: caviar sprinkled with orange juice; risotti, and puff pastries filled with layers of cheese; capon, quail, pheasant, woodcock, and peacock in full plumage; grouse, sandpiper, teal- and shoveller-ducks taken from the marshes, and swans snared from the Po; pike and trout caught in Lago di Garda; oysters, sturgeon, turbot, bream, *lieu*, *langoustine*, shrimp, crab, turtle and lamprey eel hauled from the Adriatic; hare, kid goat, and wild boar *endoré*; fritters, tarts, and other confections made from sugar, almonds, strawberries, figs, citrons, quince marmalade and candied Persian melons. The final surprise was an enormous golden cake concealing name-cards used to distribute prizes of precious jewelry[19].

CUCURBITS WITH EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS

Inquiring how the Estense nobility might have obtained the squash used in *cappellaci di zucca*, we first note their fame in collecting often exotic flora and fauna. These were maintained in the Pavilion garden at the center of Ferrara, and in the magnificent hanging gardens at their castle. And in 1550, when Cardinal Ippolita d'Este was made governor of Tivoli, east of Rome, he began constructing the ostentatious family villa whose gardens and fountains are still world-famous. The voyages of northern Italian mariners must have been a key source of these plants and animals. An Estense herbarium (a collection of preserved, mounted plant specimens) from this period, comprising 146 pages, carried such notations as "true senna of the type that comes from the Levant" and "herb that Andrea Doria carried to Italy."[20] Doria was the Admiral of the

This drawing of a kitchen appeared in *Banchetti, Composizioni di Vivande e Apparecchio Generale* (1549) by Cristoforo di Messisbugo, chef of the Estense ducal castle in Ferrara, Italy. From Luciano Chiappini, *La Corte Estense* (Ferrara, 1984).

Genoese navy, whose military expeditions ranged throughout the Mediterranean.

The Spanish throne and the Roman papacy might also have played a role, for during this period the monarchs of Spain not infrequently bestowed the popes with plants from New Spain in appreciation of the Holy See and its Bull of Demarcation (1493), which had declared the New World as Spanish property. There is evidence, for example, that Popes Clemente VII and Pius IV forwarded Spanish gifts of bean seeds and potato plants to notables in Bologna and Vercelli, respectively[21]. The House of Este also had blood ties to the Spanish nobility. Alfonso I, the Third Duke of Este, was the son of Eleanor of Aragon, and he married Lucrezia Borgia, daughter of the Spaniard, Rodrigo Borja (who later became Pope Alexander VI). Lucrezia played a leading role in the cultural efflorescence at Ferrara. Given all of this, it is not difficult to imagine how the New World squashes could have made an early appearance at the Estense gardens in Ferrara by the 1560s. Among the parallels is the introduction of the potato to Tuscany as an ornamental plant in the Boboli Gardens, at the palace of the Medici in Florence.

As a realm long claimed by the Roman Catholic Church, the dukedom of Ferrara and Modena had particularly strong ties to the papacy. Over the previous 100 years, several men from the House of Este had been appointed cardinals; in the Italian phrase, they had *ricevuto il cappello cardinalizio*, i.e. "received the cardinal's hat." At the same time the dukedom had asserted a measure of independence from Rome, and this had sometimes fed into armed conflicts. It seems possible, then, that a grand unveiling of the new dish *cappellaci di zucca*, shaped like a cardinal's hat, might have made a statement regarding ties to the papacy. I would be grateful if any readers can suggest further details.

Crossing the Ocean between Rich and Poor

In the Tivoli gardens of the Este family villa, a chain gang of 50 Turkish slaves managed to break free one day in the 1580s. Although shackled to one another at the neck and feet, they were able to kill their caretaker and escape[22]. The Estensi, like other Italian aristocrats, relied heavily on slaves and servants, especially in their kitchens and gardens. I mention this because we sometimes forget that the ostentation of Renaissance wealth and culture—of which the culinary invention of *cappellaci di zucca* serves as symbol—had a dark aspect alongside the resplendent one. As suggested above, among the social classes in this era of history it was only the aristocracy that would have had the global connections and the sheer cultural *élan* to gracefully meld such disparate ingredients as traditional savory pasta and the sweet squashes of the New World. On the other hand, their all-conquering spirit was based on the ruthless exploitation of resources—people, plants, animals, land, minerals—in both hemispheres.

We learn something else, however, in the fact that the *zucche* of northern Italy did not long remain exclusively the food of aristocrats. Traditions that arose among the lower classes included *pane di zucca* (pumpkin bread) in Piacenza[23], *polenta di zucca con sapore* (pumpkin/cornmeal mush with fruit marmalade) in Vignola near Milan[24], and *passato di zucca* (a thick, hearty squash soup) in Venice[25]. A century ago, "fried pumpkin, together with beans and onion, was the main food of the Modenese farm workers during the harvest."[26] The tradition of *cappellaci di zucca* itself spread across Emilia-Romagna and was transformed: in the hilly regions to the south, mashed potato was added to the filling; in Modena to the southwest, the filling was augmented with sausage; in Parma further west, it was made with a simpler shell; and in still other places, pine nuts, raisins or grape syrup were added. Debate still rages over the "truest" recipe[27].

By tracing such traditions, we understand better why foodways are ever-changing. New ways of consuming foods emerge to satisfy the shifting economic fortunes and world outlooks of people. Novel ingredients are adopted from elsewhere and are integrated alongside old ones in sometimes surprising combinations. Each region, each generation, and each social stratum puts its own unique stamp on traditions received from elsewhere. When we consider the native Americans who first tamed these squashes and made them palatable, the Renaissance courtiers who partnered them with pasta in a brilliant wedding, the Italian peasants who devised novel ways to satisfy their hunger, and an immigrant Cypriot restaurateur who adapted a European dish to the tastes of a Midwest American college town, we cannot help but observe that in the realm of culinary invention, no one can make an exclusive claim to creativity. ■

Notes

1. Prosper Montagné, *Larousse Gastronomique* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1938), p. 913.
2. See, for example, Pellegrino Artusi, *The Art of Eating Well* (translated by Kyle M. Phillips III [originally *La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiar Bene*, 1891], New York: Random House, 1996), p. 30.
3. Giuliano Bugialli, *Classic Techniques of Italian Cooking* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), pp. 93-4.
4. Harold McGee, *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* (New York: Collier Books, 1984), p. 317.
5. Emilio Faccioli, "La Cucina," in Giulio Einaudi, ed., *Storia d'Italia* (Turin, 1973), vol. 5, part 1, p. 998.
6. Robert E. Lewis, "Middle English Culinary Terms III," in *CHAA Newsletter*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1995), p. 3.
7. Stefano Milioni, *Columbus Menu: Italian Cuisine After the First Voyage of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Italian Trade Commission, 1992), p. 83.
8. Heather Pringle, "The Slow Birth of Agriculture," *Science*, vol. 282 (20 November 1998), p. 1446.
9. Frances B. King, "Early Cultivated Cucurbits in Eastern North America," in Richard I. Ford, ed., *Prehistoric Food Production in North America* (Anthropological Paper No. 75, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, 1985), pp. 73, 75.
10. Milioni, pp. 78-79.
11. Piero Camporesi, *The Magic Harvest: Food, Folklore and Society* (translated by Joan Krakover Hall [originally *La Terra e la Luna*, 1989], Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1993), p. 88.

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ACROSS OCEANS *(cont'd from previous page)*

12. Camporesi, pp. 26, 86, 108-109.
13. Carol Field, *Celebrating Italy* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1990), p. 260.
14. Lynne Rossetto Kasper, *The Splendid Table: Recipes from Emilia-Romagna, the Heartland of Northern Italian Food* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1992), p. 148.
15. *Molto Mario* show #MB5728, Food TV Network.
16. Alfonso II was duke during the period 1559-1597, but the historical record does not show any of his brothers or half-brothers marrying in 1569, nor marrying a woman named Ann, Anne, or Anna.
17. Werner L. Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 274-278.
18. A. Lazzari, cited in Luciano Chiappini, *La Corte Estense alla Metà del Cinquecento: I Compendi di Cristoforo di Messisbugo* (Ferrara: Stabilimento Artistico Tipografico Editoriale, 1984), p. 60.
19. Anne Puaux, *La Huguenote Renée de France* (Paris: Hermann, 1997), pp. 93-96; and James Trager, *The Food Chronology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1995), p. 89.
20. Luciano Chiappini, *La Corte Estense*, p. 65 (facing photos) and p. 78.
21. Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *A History of Food* (translated by Anthea Bell [originally *Histoire Naturelle et Morale de la Nourriture*, 1987], Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Reference, 1992), pp. 45-46, 722.
22. Luciano Chiappini, *Gli Estensi* (Varese, Italy: dall'Oglio, 1967), pp. 275-6.
23. Camporesi, p. 27.
24. Camporesi, p. 87.
25. Joyce Goldstein, *The Mediterranean Kitchen* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1989), p. 85.
26. Camporesi, p. 88.
27. Kasper, p. 148; Camporesi, p. 87; and Claudia Rosen, *The Good Food of Italy— Region by Region* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 51.

SPEAKING OF CHEESE

Ari Weinzweig, one of the founder/owners of Zingerman's Delicatessen, spoke to our group about cheeses, and kindly provided a tasting of several blue cheeses, at our February 21 meeting held at the deli. A past president of the American Cheese Society, Ari wrote the Foreword to the recently published *The Cheese Companion: The Connoisseur's Guide* by Judy Ridgway (Running Press, 1999).

While cheese certainly has its connoisseurs today, Ari emphasized its humble origins, which were not those of a "gourmet" food. Cheese was invented by pastoralists and by farmers as a way to preserve milk. In Europe, cheese was known as "white meat" or "the meat of the poor," providing the peasants with their main source of winter protein.

Production of farm cheese was traditionally carried out by women as part of their household cookery. Ari described the process for a number of different types of cheese. For example, *ricotta* (literally "recooked") was developed in the area around Rome by a process of recooking the whey, and skimming off the solids, that remained from the initial cooking of sheep's milk. Ari also reviewed the interesting evolution in the use of bread mold in making Roquefort, also from sheep's milk. Regions that lacked the proper topography for producing cheese often developed networks of exchange to procure it from nearby areas. For example, the Ligurians of the Italian Riviera, who harvested salt from the Mediterranean, traded this to nearby Emilia for the *Parmigiano* that became a classic ingredient in the local *pesto* and other dishes.

Cheese only became popular in cities when trade between urban and rural areas was regularized. Eventually, however, cheese manufacture became a commercial enterprise (in the U.S., this began in 1851 outside Rome, NY), which led to a lowering of quality standards. Cheese was no longer made by individual producers who controlled the entire process and had a direct stake in quality. With tanks of milk from different dairy farms pooled into a single production vat, the drive to produce milk of the highest quality was lost. In their book *Kitchen Science: A Guide to Knowing the Hows and Whys for Fun and Success in the Kitchen*, Howard Hilman, Lisa Loring and Kyle MacDonald note that efforts to rationalize the production of food, and to make its quality more consistent, ironically entailed an overall reduction in that quality. Pasteurization of milk, for example, a safety measure whose use accelerated at the turn of the last century in this country, kills many of the bacteria that had traditionally given cheese its flavor. It also opens the way for older and poorer milk to be incorporated into the cheesemaking process. Today in the U.S., Ari concluded, a key difficulty in manufacturing artisan-quality cheese is that dairy farmers routinely contract to sell all of their milk to commercial creameries, where it is invariably pasteurized. ■

MORSELS & TIDBITS

Our founding member **Jan Longone** is the author of the Introduction to the latest in Dover's fine series of cookery re-issues, a facsimile edition of *Miss Leslie's Directions for Cookery* by Eliza Leslie (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999; 544pp., $14.95 paper). Initially published in 1837, Leslie's was one of the most widely used cookbooks of the century. It had gone through 38 printings when the author carried out a full revision that was published in 1851, and was reprinted in Philadelphia in 1863.

Our same Jan appeared, this time in the flesh, before a joint meeting of the Culinary Historians of New York and the New York Historical Society on April 13. Jan's talk was on "200 Years of American Cookbooks," and we gather that it was very well received by members of both groups. In addition, Ann Arbor freelance writer **Roy Meador** profiled the Longones' bookshop, The Wine and Food Library, in an article in the February issue of *Biblio* entitled "The Joy of Cookbooks: A Midwestern Sanctuary for Bibliophiles, Gastronomes, and Oenophiles the World Over."

We are also pleased to report that two different CHAA members made guest appearances on the recent PBS-TV series "Jewish Cooking in America," hosted by food writer Joan Nathan. **Ari Weinzweig** appeared in a January episode "America's Great Delis: A Tour of Then and Now," which characterized Zingerman's Delicatessen as an example of "the deli of the future." **Jan Longone** appeared as a guest expert on the April episode "Everybody Doesn't Like Something, But Everybody Likes Cheesecake," which also included an appearance by "the real" Sara Lee Schupf of New York. That episode explored the multi-millennia history of cheesecake, including how it came to be viewed as a "Jewish" dessert.

Food in Russian History and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1997; 280pp., $17.95 paper), jointly edited by **Musya Glants** and **Joyce Toomre**, is a recent offering in the Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies. The papers are drawn from a 1993 conference sponsored by Harvard Univ.'s Davis Center for Russian Studies. A few of the focuses include: stovelore in Russian folklife; fasting in Russian peasant culture; communal dining in the early years of the Revolution; early Soviet culinary arts; food and national identity in Soviet Armenia; and the role of food in the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Mandelstam. Both editors are Fellows at the Davis Center: Glants is an historian of Russian art, while Toomre is a Slavist and culinary historian, co-founder of the Culinary Historians of Boston. (The Fall 1997 issue of the *CHAA Newsletter* included a brief review of Toomre's work of translation, *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets'* A Gift to Young Housewives.)

Since this issue of our newsletter has focused on food exchange, we would be remiss not to mention **Charles Corn**'s new book *The Scents of Eden: A Narrative of the Spice Trade* (New York: Kodansha International, 1998; 337pp., $16 paper) It is a popularly written chronology of the European scramble for control of the East Indies spice traffic, from the imperial partition of the world by Portugal and Spain in the 1500s, through the mercantilist heyday of the Dutch and English East India Companies in the 1600s and 1700s, to the ascendancy of Derby, Bowditch, Peabody and other entrepreneurs of Salem, Massachusetts in the 1800s. Corn's book helps show that the European lust for spices was not only a pivotal chapter in culinary history, but a major factor in propelling the emergence of western capitalism and its global hegemony.

For a more localized study of the spice wars, check out the recent *Nathaniel's Nutmeg: or, the True and Incredible Adventures of the Spice Trader Who Changed the Course of History* by **Giles Milton** (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999; 388pp., $24 cloth). Milton details the 1616 military expedition of British seaman Nathaniel Courthope to battle the Dutch navy for control of Run, the most lucrative island of Indonesia due to its harvest of nutmeg. "Even in the East Indies, where spices grew like weeds," Milton writes, "nutmeg was a rarity; a tree so fussy about climate and soil that it would grow only on a tiny cluster of islands, the Banda archipelago, which were of such impossible remoteness that no one in Europe could be sure if they existed at all. The spice merchants of Constantinople had scant information about these islands and what they did know was scarcely encouraging." I'll give the ending away here (so if you wish to follow the yarn on your own, skip to the next paragraph): eventually Holland gave Britain the island of Manhattan in exchange for unrivalled control of Run.

A number of interesting food essays were included in "The Best of the Millennium" issue of the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (April 18, 1999). Celebrated Italian author and semiotician **Umberto Eco** weighs in with his interesting "How the Bean Saved Civilization," arguing that the "best invention" of the last 1000 years was not a mechanical device at all. Rather, it was the increasing practice, by European peasants, of cultivating and consuming legumes beginning in the 10th century, allowing the continent to sustain a much larger and healthier populace. A piece by **Ruth Reichl**, new editor of *Gourmet*, names as "best meal" of the millennium the hemispheric food exchange that Columbus ushered in when his ships landed in the Bahamas. And resident food writer **Molly O'Neill** celebrates garlic as "best herb" of the millennium in her "This Bulb's Life: Shunned for Centuries, Garlic Triumphs Again." ■

CHAA CALENDAR

25 July – A Southern Country Picnic

CHAA NEWSLETTER
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ANN ARBOR, MI 48105-2316

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor Volume XV Number 2, Spring 1999

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