

Culinary Excursions

Part 1: Modern Spain,
Medieval Egypt,
Exotic Seaports



Samak mahshī (fried fish smothered in tahini sauce) made using a medieval Egyptian cookbook.
See Nawal Nasrallah's recipe and the whole story on pages 8-11.

C.H.A.A. FALL PROGRAMS

The meeting schedule of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor last Fall included presentations on artisanal bread baking, cheese presentations, and a late, lamented Chicago restaurant. These events were arranged by our longtime Program Chair, Laura Green Gillis. In addition to the capsule summaries below, we report on our December theme meal on page 12 and on three other Ann Arbor events on page 3.

Stephanie Ariganello and **Jeremiah Kouhia**, co-owners of the Mother Loaf Breads bakery in Milan, MI, gave a Sep. 16 talk on "Long, Cold, and Slow: Raising the Bread". Reviewing some history first, they noted that in the Middle East some 4000 years before agriculture, crude flatbreads began to be made as a side-product of gathering wild grains and fermenting them to make beer. Ancient Greeks cultivated grains, and they ground and milled them to produce refined bread flour. Romans mechanized the milling process and turned their mound-shaped baked loaves into a state-subsidized commodity. Commercial yeast first became available in Germany in the 1850s as a result of the biochemical understanding of fermentation. Industrial sliced bread became common in the West in the late 1920s.

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Industrial breads rely on commercial yeast for rapid leavening, and on chemicals to retard spoilage. But there are now on the order of 100 artisanal bakers in the U.S. who make leavened and well-preserved loaves using only natural sourdough fermentation, with starters of yeast, bacteria, and other microbes. Stephanie and Jeremiah began making sourdough in 2010, and a year later set up a community-supported bakery (CSB) with about 40 members. They described to us the sourdough process, which is complex and sometimes seemingly capricious. In a refrigerator, they store and feed 8-10 different types of starter, each appropriate to a type of bread. The starter microbes digest sugars and proteins in the dough and produce gas as waste, which leavens the dough. To properly ferment in this way, the dough needs about two whole days to rise, partially under refrigeration. But the breads that result are more flavorful and healthful than the industrial kind.

On Oct. 21 we heard a talk about Well of the Sea, a celebrated Chicago seafood restaurant, by CHAA member **Margaret Carney**, director and curator of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design. This large, swanky establishment with a long, sweeping bar was operated inside the Hotel Sherman, in the downtown Loop, from 1948 to 1972. Ernest L. Byfield was the famous Chicago hotelier and restaurateur who established the place and its Mid-Century Modern sea motif. At the opening party on Dec. 31, 1948, the fare featured French *bouillabaisse* and a Dutch-Indonesian seafood *rijsttafel*.

Margaret recalled eating there with her family in the 1960s, a four-hour train ride from their hometown, Iowa City. To make diners feel like they were underwater, the place was located down in the basement and lit with aquamarine ultraviolet lights. Under these lights the menus fluoresced, as did Richard Koppe's huge, undersea-abstract murals, and the white tableware and waiters' uniforms glowed. Starting in 1954, the tableware was sturdy china with abstract fish motifs, specially manufactured for the restaurant by Shenango Pottery Co. (New Castle, PA).

On Nov. 18 **Michael Donnelly**, a Certified Cheese Professional, decoded the mysteries of "Curating the Ultimate Cheese Board for Your Holiday Parties". He began by observing that it was in the first half of the 19th Century in England and France that the presentation of cheeses and other foods was elevated to an art. Unfortunately, the rationing of cheese during World War 2 decimated cheese culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Cheese artisans were pressured by the state to lower quality so as to increase volume of production. Thus, a lot of the craftsmanship and recipes were lost, and are only gradually being recovered or rediscovered.

Michael gave detailed advice for those wishing to entertain with a selection of cheeses. For instance, the key factors that degrade cheeses in storage are excesses of dryness, moisture, or light. For a cheese tasting, there should be a well-balanced variety of about five cheeses. They should be arranged on a slate board or other surface in a clocklike circle from mildest to strongest, the order in which to sample them. We also heard advice on how to pair different cheeses with breads, olives, wines, fruits, spreads and confits, nuts, and meats, according to their characteristics. We were able to sample *brie fermier*, cave-aged *gruyère* from the Franche Comté region of eastern France, smoked *gouda*, aged English-style cheddar, and English Stilton blue cheese. ■

OTHER ANN ARBOR EVENTS

In addition to the CHAA's Fall programs (see page 2), we are able to report on three other events in Ann Arbor last year.

Foods of the Ancient Mediterranean

At the Univ. of Michigan's Kelsey Museum of Archaeology on July 14, six members of CHAA were among the participants in "Around the Table", a tour focused on food customs of the ancient Mediterranean. One of a series of "Saturday Sampler" tours at the museum, this one was led by Sarah Mullersman, an archaeologist who coordinates community outreach.

Ancient Greek food, Sarah emphasized, was quite diverse, varying even between major city-states. Spartan food was nutritious but somewhat crude; a premiere dish was pig's leg cooked in pig's blood, vinegar, and wine. Athenians prided themselves on frugality and temperate dining, deriving 70% of their calories from bread. They also relied on olive oil and vegetables. Wealthy Athenians could afford larger amounts of meat and seafood, and were famous for their *symposia*, which were parties for men featuring highly-diluted wine. We saw on display a *kylix*, a large, broad-rimmed drinking cup for wine, and an *amphora*, a tall, two-handled ceramic vessel for olive oil. Besides its use in cooking, such as for frying anchovies and sardines, oil was also used in ritual anointment. Inedible animal parts were used for burnt offerings to the gods. For reasons of religion or health, some ancients advised moderation in meat consumption. Ancient tombs included dishware because the dead were believed to eat in the afterlife.

Karanis, excavated by a UM team in 1924-35, was a town inland from Alexandria, Egypt, that was founded by Greeks and expanded by Romans. The Greeks brought fruits such as olives and peaches into Egypt. Later, this region was a breadbasket for Rome, and we saw on display many specimens of seeds, grains, legumes, and bread unearthed by the team. The ancient Egyptian diet relied heavily on barley and on emmer wheat, used to make bread and beer. A half-baked piece of bread would be fermented in water to produce a slurry (semi-beer) that could be refined into beer. Other common foods included safflower and sesame oil, garlic, figs, dates, honey, and carob. Pyramid laborers were paid in grain, bread, semi-beer, or beer, and they ate pork or mutton about once a week.

Sarah passed out copies of a packet of ancient Roman recipes drawn from Apicius, Pliny, Galen, and others. We saw a huge grain-milling stone, and a replica of a dining room from a villa outside Pompeii, which was a major wine-making region. At such villas, wealthy Romans entertained other families with dinners dedicated to Dionysus (god of wine, theatre, and the good life) that lasted many courses and many hours. They ate from black-gloss or red-gloss pottery but with few utensils, since food was pre-cut. We saw clay cooking pots and frying pans unearthed by a UM team at Sepphoris, a village in Galilee that was part of Roman Palestine. Congested Roman cities had neighborhood bakeries and other vendors of prepared foods, since cooking at home posed a fire hazard.

No Need for Dish Washing

"Unapologetic Dinnerware", an exhibit on the history of single-use dinnerware and kitchenware, was on view last Fall in the Kraft Gallery at Concordia University in Ann Arbor. The curator was Dr. Margaret Carney, a CHAA member who is Director of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design. At the opening reception and talk on Sep. 7, we learned about the surprisingly diverse and global range of disposables through the ages. Examples of displayed items:

- Mesopotamian bevel-rimmed bowls from the 4th Millennium BCE, crude, unadorned pottery that was probably involved in bread baking, on loan from the UM Museum of Anthropological Archaeology
- terracotta *kulhar* bowls from India, useful for making yogurt
- Fold-Pak and other brands of origami-folded cardboard take-out boxes for Chinese food, decorated with pagodas, invented in Chicago in 1894 based on the design of the wooden oyster pail
- the Dixie disposable paper cup, invented in Boston in 1907 out of concern for germs being spread from the single dippers then common at public supplies of drinking water
- disposable ceramic teapots used on Japanese trains, the lid used as a teacup
- the "TV dinner", a packaged and frozen individual meal introduced by Swanson in 1953
- a biodegradable 6-pack ring from Salt Water Brewery (Delray Beach, FL), made of barley and wheat ribbons remaining from the beer-brewing process
- edible Loliware cups and straws
- Hyo-Cups from CRÈME design studio, which are actually gourds grown in 3D-printed molds
- Ika Tokkuri, a Japanese *sake* bottle made of sun-dried squid
- bowls from Leaf Republic in Germany, made by stitching together three layers of fallen leaves of a type gathered in Malaysia.

Bean Pies for Allah

"As Black Muslim as Bean Pie: Food, Faith, and Nationhood in African American Islam" was the title of a Sep. 25 campus talk sponsored by the UM Dept. of American Studies. Zaheer Ali, an oral historian at the Brooklyn Historical Society, discussed the religious, cultural, economic, and political significance of the bean pie that was promoted by the Nation of Islam (NOI) starting in the late 1960s. Made with mashed navy beans, this sweet, spicy custard pie was a high-protein alternative to the otherwise similar sweet-potato pie. It had been invented sometime between the 1930s and the 1950s, most likely in the South. After the publication of NOI founder Elijah Muhammad's *How to Eat to Live* (1967), the bean pie was championed by NOI starting in its base city, Detroit. The pies, typically 5-6 inches in diameter, were made variously in homes, restaurants, and bakeries, and were sold by Black Muslims in grocery stores and on street corners in NOI cities coast to coast. We were able to taste samples from purveyors in Detroit and Atlanta.

continued on page 11

EXPLORING THE WINE AND FOOD OF NORTH CENTRAL SPAIN

by Tom and Joan Overmire

What follows is an edited version of a travelogue that the Overmires wrote after participating in an Oct. 2001 Elderhostel trip in Spain. The couple have lived in Ann Arbor for many years. Dr. Thomas G. Overmire, a retired biologist who spent some of his career at the Univ. of Michigan, wrote a previous article for Repast, "Memorable Eating: The Evolution of a Hoosier Palate" (Winter 2017).

The theme of this two-week Elderhostel trip was the wine and food of north central Spain. A noble adventure for sure! Much of our visit concentrated on La Rioja, Spain's finest wine-growing region.

On previous trips to Spain in 1991 and 1998, we had made the circuit of the big cities and had visited a dozen *paradores*, which are the elegant hotels located in converted historic buildings (such as castles and monasteries) and which are generally owned and run by the government. This trip was centered instead on two small, rather non-descript towns:

Tordesillas (southwest of Valladolid) and Haro (northeast of Burgos).

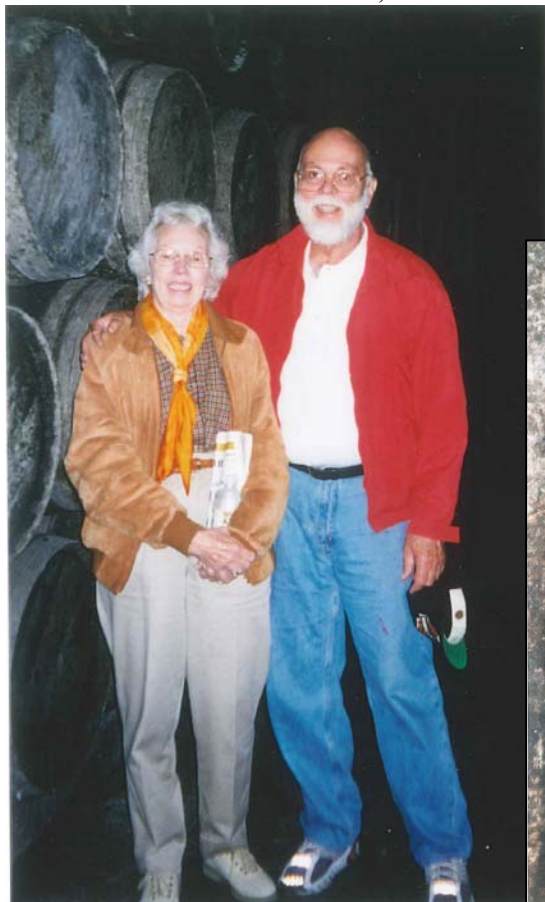


The timing of the trip was unfortunate, coming only three weeks after the World Trade Center disaster. We weren't afraid of traveling, but it still was more complicated. Only 23 of the 34 people who had signed up

for the trip showed up. There were only three serious photographers in the group, and no one was hauling a video camera around. However, there were three wine experts—Eli Shulman, Hugh Rush, and Bob Fortney—and that was a plus for the rest of us. Carol Chrisler was our group leader, and Alberto Hagemann was our local guide.

We started and finished the trip in Madrid, staying a total of five nights at the three-star, downtown Hotel Regina. In Madrid we started learning about olive oil and wines, toured the city and visited the Prado and Thyssen art museums, enjoyed an evening of modern flamenco-style dancing, and had a modified "tapas crawl". *Tapas* are small portions of *tortilla* (potato omelet), ham, shrimp, cheese, sardines, vegetables, etc., to accompany alcoholic beverages during a night out on the town.

We also visited a cooking school in Madrid that was set up not to train chefs but to teach ordinary Spaniards how to prepare traditional dishes and to make them even tastier. We watched, and sampled, as the participants prepared a variety of *tapas*, including pickled anchovies, *tortilla*, *patatas bravas* (fried chunks of potato coated with a spicy tomato sauce), *albondigas* (small Spanish meatballs), and marinated tuna with homemade mayonnaise.



The Overmires (far left) with oak barrels for wine making.

After three days of recovering from jet lag in Madrid, we moved on to Tordesillas and Haro.

Denominación de Origen

We had come to Spain to learn about wine, and we were not disappointed! We arrived just as the grape harvest was starting, so we saw a lot of wine-related activity. Grapes are hand-picked in October, mostly by “transient pickers” who come up from Morocco to do the harvesting.

All Spanish grapevines have been grafted onto disease-resistant American rootstock. The vines are grown as small bushes rather than as climbing vines on fences or trellises. Older vines are less productive but produce sweeter grapes.

Reds are the preferred wines of Spain. “A bad white wine is 10 times worse than a bad red wine”, we were told. However, it seemed that *sangria* was consumed mainly by tourists and the young.

Wine was served every day with our lunch and dinner; at some meals, we tried two kinds of wine. Some of the wine was young (not fully aged) or “plonk” (local table wine— not aged at all), but it was always of good quality.

And how did we know that it was of good quality? We couldn’t always tell by the taste, but we learned how to recognize the signs. The easiest way to check on a wine’s age and quality is to look for a DO (Denominación de Origen) classification on the label. All of the better Spanish wines are DO certified. This entails rigid quality control measures. The grapes must be of certain varieties and must have been grown on registered acreage, and the juice blended only with that of certain other varieties of grapes. All stages of the production must be under strict control, with a defined period of aging in oak barrels and then in bottles. Irrigation is regulated, too, and vines may not be watered after mid-Summer, a measure that keeps the grapes from growing too large and watery. If the harvest of a given *bodega* (winery) exceeds its allowance by more than 25%, its whole crop will be rejected. In addition, a *bodega* must maintain at least 50 barrels of aging wine in order to retain its DO certification (one barrel holds the equivalent of about 300 bottles).

The aging designations for DO wine are as follows:

- Crianza (literally “well bred”): wines at least three years old that have aged at least one year in oak casks
- Reserva: very select wines that have aged at least one year in the cask and two in the bottle
- Gran Reserva: highest-vintage wines that have aged at least two years in the cask and three in the bottle

At first, we tried to keep track of the various labels and types of wine, and to record how well we liked each one. Eventually, though, we realized that this was a lost cause. In La Rioja alone, *bodegas* produce wine under some 250 labels! And since 70% of the output is consumed within Spain, it was unlikely that we would ever see any of these labels for sale in the U.S.

In addition to wine, other agricultural products have DO certification, too: lamb, ham, beef, suckling pig, cheese, even beans and lentils! In all cases the restrictions about origin, health

care, and processing are quite stringent. For example, beef cattle must be raised outdoors where they can exercise as they graze, and they cannot receive supplemental feed. Products can be sold without DO certification, of course, but an artisanal producer needs to have the DO label to get premium prices.

How Wine is Made

The color of wine depends largely on how long the grape skins are permitted to remain in the fermenting grape juice. The time ranges from zero for white wine, to 24 hours for rosé, to several days for red wine (*tinto*).

Fermentation and aging is a complex process. An initial fermentation produces glucose and ethyl alcohol. A second fermentation results in malic acid and lactic acid. If temperatures rise above 86° F. at any time, then the wine will “cook” and turn into vinegar.

The fermented grape juice is filtered and clarified, using egg whites to trap sediments and cause them to sink to the bottom. The juice is then placed into barrels for storage, where it is racked (transferred from one barrel to another) every four months. After this aging, the wine is bottled, corked, and stored for further aging.

When aged in oak barrels, wine absorbs tannins from the oak, which adds flavors to the wine. Anthocyanins, which are red pigments in the grape juice, also break down into tannins. In time, the tannins themselves are broken down. These biochemical changes result in a perplexing variety of products.

A wine’s ultimate quality and flavor depend on such things as the variety of the grapes, the climate and soil where they are grown, how long the wine is aged, and the conditions of temperature and humidity to which the aging wine is subjected. Surprisingly, the best soils for grape growing are not too fertile, because soils poor in nutrients force vines to become stronger.

Wine Tasting

There is a formal ritual to evaluating a glass of wine:

1. Hold the wine glass by its stem so you don’t confuse any odors on your hand with those of the wine.
2. Visually inspect for clearness and color.
3. Sniff for aroma and try to identify the scent.
4. Swirl the wine in the glass and look for “legs”, i.e., hanging ribbons of wine on the inside surface of the glass. An expert can detect the alcohol content this way.
5. Sniff again. It might have a different odor now than before.
6. Taste, and check for flavor, persistence of flavor, and aftertaste.
7. Swallow or spit out, at your pleasure.

At one wine-tasting event, we sampled and graded five different wines, ranging from a young wine to a Gran Reserva. A young wine should be consumed as soon as possible, since aging only lets its quality fade. By contrast, when you bring home a bottle of Reserva or Gran Reserva, it should be allowed to rest a few months (storing the bottle horizontally) to recover from being

continued on next page



Clockwise from left: Pigeons for sale at a market; roast suckling pig; chefs at the *parador* in Tordesillas; *paella*.



EXPLORING SPAIN *continued from page 5*

handled. At one point we purchased a bottle of Marque de Cerques Gran Reserva 1991 for \$18. We had learned about that wonderful label on a previous trip when it was the house wine at one of the *paradores* where we stayed.

On this trip we learned that, contrary to popular belief, red wines should be served cool (60-70° F.). Most of the red wines that we drink in the U.S. have an astringent aftertaste, but proper aging reduces astringency. So maybe it makes sense to pay more than \$5 for a bottle of wine after all!

Neither Joan nor I ever had even slight headaches in Spain, which speaks highly of the quality of its wines.

Cooking and Dining

We really enjoyed the Spanish food. We've had some marvelous meals on sea cruises that we've been on, but everyday cooking in Spain is tastier. Much simpler, but better. Spanish cooking doesn't cover up tastes; instead, it lets fresh flavors come through.

Olive oil is the basis of Spanish cuisine, and it is important to know something about it if you plan to prepare Spanish dishes. It comes in several grades, but for best results use only extra-virgin olive oil. Olive oil is never better than on the day it is pressed.

Memorable meals from this trip included platter-sized veal chops, lamb chops, stews, and several kinds of bean soup with sausage and ham. The seafood was excellent, especially hake and monkfish with its lobster-like flesh. In Spain there is always wonderful bread and superb coffee. *Gazpacho* and *paella* are frequently encountered. Traditional Spanish cooks use paprika and saffron, but no curry powder. Spain also has many excellent cheeses. For \$30 we purchased a 3-kilogram *queso de oveja* (sheep's milk cheese) that had been aged for 13 months.

One lunch that especially stands out for us was at a *bodega* in Haro, a town of about 9500 people. For starters, we had fresh sliced tomatoes in olive oil and garlic, roasted red peppers, and *morcilla* (blood sausage)— along with much red wine, of course. This was followed by a potato and sausage soup, a lettuce salad, and grilled lamb chops. The meal was rounded out with a dessert of poached pear in plum sauce, coffee, and brandy that tasted of



The wine festival in Peñafiel included a symbolic grape-tromping (upper right) as well as folk dancers and musicians.

anise and berries. At this *bodega* we also purchased three bottles of Remelluri Rioja Reserva wine, 1997 vintage at \$8.75 each, to bring back home with us. After a big lunch like that, we would sleep away the afternoon on the bus, then wake up feeling loggy but satisfied.

In our experience, meals at *paradores* have always been excellent, so it was a real treat to spend almost two hours with the chefs at the *parador* in Tordesillas, a 15-minute walk from town. They showed us how to prepare a free-range rooster, which weighed some nine pounds and looked like a young plucked turkey. The only seasonings used were salt, pepper, bay leaves, onions, almonds, garlic, and parsley. And wine, of course. For dinner the next evening, we had strangely cut-up pieces of the rooster (or another one?) served with a sauce. We also learned how to prepare *salmorejo* (a blended, tomato-based cold soup, akin to *gazpacho*) and two desserts: a fried-milk pudding and a cinnamon custard.

In the medieval, walled town of Ávila, we visited a factory that makes candy using the egg yolks left over from eggs whose whites are used to clarify wine. For hundreds of years in Spain, this was how candies were made by nuns as a way to raise funds for their convents. St. Teresa (1515-1582), a Carmelite nun, was born in Ávila and lived in the convent there.

A Wine Festival in Peñafiel

Bus travel is quite pleasant once you leave the big cities. The Spanish countryside is vast and empty. Occasionally we saw

fields of sunflowers, or pine trees planted as wood lots or windbreaks. We also saw several herds of sheep, complete with sheepdogs and shepherds.

Spanish towns and villages are made for walking, and we walked a lot. One Sunday afternoon we went to a wine festival in Peñafiel, a small, picturesque town in the province of Valladolid. We had been in the town two days earlier to visit its extraordinary castle, which sits on top of a hill above the town. The castle is over 600 feet long but only 60 feet across.

The festival was a fine, joyous occasion, an annual celebration of the wine harvest. There must have been at least 500 people there. Three tents were set up in the town square to sell wine and San Miquel (our favorite Spanish beer) accompanied by *tapas*.

The official high point of the afternoon was watching two teenage boys in rubber boots tromp, symbolically but in the traditional manner, on some grapes in a small wooden tub. But the real fun was in watching the entertainment. First, eight costumed girls paraded in, carrying baskets filled with grapes. Then they danced for us with *castañuelas* (castanets). Music for the parade and for the folk dancing was provided by two drummers and two other men playing a double-reed instrument, similar in look to an oboe except only about 15 inches long. This was followed by a 30-piece band that played rousing Spanish melodies. It was really fun to attend. ■

A TREASURE TROVE OF MEDIEVAL EGYPTIAN RECIPES IN TRANSLATION

by Nawal Nasrallah

Nawal Nasrallah, ed. and trans.,
*Treasure Trove of Benefits and Variety at
the Table: A Fourteenth-Century
Egyptian Cookbook*
Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017.

Dr. Nawal Nasrallah, a native of Iraq, was a professor at Baghdad and Mosul Universities teaching English literature and language. She came to the U.S. in 1990, and is an independent scholar residing in Salem, NH. In addition to her recent book, Treasure Trove, she has written Delights from the Garden of Eden: A Cookbook and a History of the Iraqi Cuisine (2003, 2017); Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens (2007), an English translation of Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq's 10th-Century Baghdadi cookbook; and Dates: A Global History (2011). Her previous article for Repast was "The Iraqi Cookie, Kleicha, and the Search for Identity" (Fall 2008).

After surveying all that he had written, reports the anonymous author of a 14th-Century Egyptian cookbook, he chose to name it *Kanz al-Fawā'id fī Tanwī' al-Mawā'id*, or *Treasure Trove of Benefits and Variety at the Table*. With its 23 chapters comprising a total of 830 recipes, it presents a dizzying plethora of dishes that is unrivaled in the medieval Arabic corpus.

True to its title, the book is a treasure trove, covering all of the major food categories known at the time. It includes a massive collection of 142 recipes for main dishes, offering no less than 10 with sparrows, which were cherished in the entire region as snacking dishes valued for their aphrodisiac properties. The book also offers the largest extant collection of fish recipes, 36 in all; a unique collection of 14 table sauces (*ṣulūṣāt*, singular *ṣalṣ*); cold dishes, including 11 recipes for *ḥimmaṣ kassā*, the prototype of our modern "hummus" appetizer of crushed boiled chickpeas with sesame-paste tahini; 75 recipes for pickles; 81 for sweets; and many more.

The *Kanz al-Fawā'id* was written under the Mamluk sultanate, a realm that included not only Egypt but also parts of the Eastern Mediterranean and of the Arabian Peninsula. Cairo had already eclipsed Baghdad as a thriving urban center. The city was a cultural haven for diverse ethnicities and nationalities

from the surrounding regions, including Turks, Kurds, Arabs of the southern Arabian Peninsula, Moroccans, Sudanese, Persians, and Iraqis, particularly after the attacks of the Mongols in western Asia. Mamluk Egypt was a very interesting society, and the *Kanz* reflects its diversity and broad sweep.

Judging from the extant six or so copies that have survived, it does appear that the book enjoyed good circulation among the affluent household circles and gourmets' cooks always eager for ways to enchant their guests. For instance, a recipe for storing fresh mulberries ends with this exciting incentive: "You will stun their minds with it, especially if offered when the sun is at the zodiac sign of Sagittarius." And the book certainly came in handy for apprentices and professional cooks seeking good recipes, as well as aspiring household cooks on the lookout for the new and unique to impress their masters. One of the recipes, for instance, addresses such a cook directly:

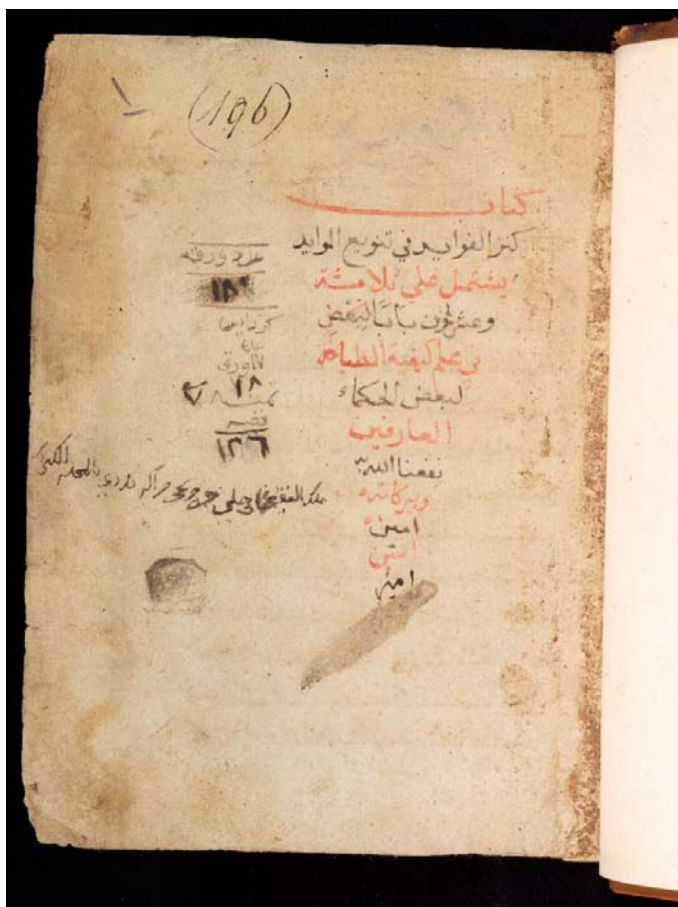
If you want to write words in green on apples, sour oranges (*nāranj*), or citrons (*utrujj*), which will look beautiful served in fruit platters and for which you will be in your master's good graces, mix slaked lime (*kils*), ochre (*maghra*), and vinegar and write with them on the fruits while they are still green on the trees. When the fruits are fully ripe, wipe off what you have written on the fruits. The place where the writing was will look green whereas the rest of the citrons, or whatever fruits you used, will look yellow.

Shopping for Food in Medieval Egypt

Most city dwellers in medieval Egypt depended on the services offered by food markets, either partially or entirely. For those who had small kitchens, the preference perhaps was to put the dish together in a *ṭājin* pot and send it to the *furn*, or neighborhood oven. Otherwise, there always was the *sharā'ihī*, the professional cook who prepared dishes with the needed ingredients brought to him by his customers.

As for those who lived in rented units in the multistoried housing complexes, characteristic of the living conditions of low-income people, their only option was to avail themselves of the services offered by a great variety of cookshops and stalls. There were *harā'isiyyīn*, the porridge-makers; *shawwā'in*, grillers; *qallā'in*, fryers of meat and fish and *zalābiya* (syrupy fritters), and so on. Fear of causing house fires in the chronically-congested city centers was a major factor underlying such services, besides the high cost of fuel.

Cairo in medieval times was renowned for its bustling markets. So crowded were they that the shoppers needed to learn ways to maneuver through the flows of people. The largest was al-Qaṣaba, which in its golden days contained 12,000 stalls brimming with countless varieties of foods and drinks, and shoppers. However, for their daily quick shopping, people did not need to go to the big markets as each neighborhood had its own small shops, complete with a public bath and a bakery. As the medieval historian al-Maqrīzī reports, the Cairenes used to throw out in the trash and the dumpster mounds outside the city one thousand dinars' worth of disposable items, daily, such as earthenware bowls used for selling yogurt and cheese or for serving foods to the diners at cooks' shops. The shoppers



The title page of a surviving manuscript copy of the 14th-Century Egyptian cookbook, *Treasure Trove of Benefits and Variety at the Table* (MS Qq. 196, Cambridge University Library).

disposed of whatever paper and threads the grocers had used to wrap the purchased goods for carrying safely back home.

The food markets included many types of professionals, such as the butcher (*al-jazzār*) and the baker (*al-farrānī*). The baker ran the commercial brick oven or *furn*, used for baking bread and roasting casseroles for the neighborhood customers. The *naqāniqī* was specialized in making sausages for the market, whereas the *kubūdī* sold grilled livers. *Al-bawārīdī* provided customers with cold meatless dishes consumed as snack foods, such as boiled vegetables, dairy condiments, and omelets (*ujaj*). *Al-rawwās* sold offal like heads, trotters, and tripe, already cooked or raw. The fresh vegetables were sold by *al-khudārī* and the fruits by *al-fākihānī*.

Poultry had its own market, called *sūq al-dajjājīn*, where chickens along with geese, sparrows, and other birds were sold. Reportedly, chickens were deemed the greatest of all Egyptian foods. Most chickens originated in one or another chick-breeding factory (*ma'mal al-farrūj*), where they were hatched via artificial incubation. Based on the description of a 12th-Century eyewitness, each factory occupied a large courtyard with up to 20 incubators, each of them big enough to hold 1000 eggs. The incubator was built to imitate the hen (with wings and all) and to provide the same warmth provided by the hen for 22 days. The workers taking care of the eggs were to turn the eggs periodically and test the warmth of the eggs by placing them on

their eyelids, the way the hens did. Young pigeons (*firākh ḥamām*), on the other hand, were supplied by peasants who kept cotes for the wild pigeons to lay and hatch their eggs.

Cooking Inside and Outside the Home

In medieval Egyptian urban centers, cooking in one's own kitchen largely took place in well-off households or those in the suburbs, where the kitchens were well equipped and a good supply of clean water was available. A cookbook like *Kanz al-Fawā'id* suggests household conditions where many hands were put to work to prepare dishes, which required the various chores of pounding, sifting, mashing, stirring, squeezing, tending the fire, and so on.

Good cooking required the use of a wide range of kitchen implements. First, there were several types of knives: a cleaver for splitting bones without splintering them, a strong knife for disjointing meat, a thin and very sharp knife for slicing meat, and a separate knife and board for cutting onion and garlic. Second, several kinds of cooking pots were adapted for various uses. The *tājīn*, mentioned earlier, was an iron frying pan that could also be used for oven baking. Steaming couscous required a special pot perforated with holes at the bottom; it was fit tightly over a pot of boiling stew in order to catch the rising steam.

Among existing culinary sources, only in the *Kanz* do we find mention, let alone description, of an ingenious glass pot used for cooking stewed sparrows. This was touted as a highly aphrodisiac dish prepared and consumed by dignitaries during their long Winter nights of camaraderie and carousing. The pot required for cooking this dish is described as being made of thin glass with a pontil mark in the middle (where an iron rod had held the vessel when it was blown). The sparrows were cooked with vegetables and chickpeas in this pot, which was placed on a slow fire deliberately left in an accessible part of the dining area. While simmering, the sparrows would bob up and down in the pot for long hours. It was meant to be like a 'show', which the recipe describes as being even more fantastic and delightful than eating the dish itself.

In addition, the book of *Kanz* is the only medieval source, including the lexicons, where a blending tool called *mifrāk* was mentioned (see photo on next page). It is operated by rolling the handle back and forth between the open palms of the hand. A tool with the same name is still being used in southern Egypt and Sudan to blend an okra dish called *wika* and to whip the traditional stew of *mulūkhiyya* (Jew's mallow). A similar tool from the Greco-Roman period was excavated in Egypt.

For cooking and baking, stoves were used inside the kitchen, and ovens outside the kitchen. The ovens were of two types. The *tannūr* was an immobile, open-topped, bell-shaped clay oven. Besides baking flat breads by sticking them to its heated inner wall, cooks also used it for roasting meat and for simmering pots of beans in its residual heat. The *furn* was a brick dome oven with a frontal opening and a flat floor, fueled from a separate compartment underneath it. Alternatively, fuel could be burnt on the oven floor itself; once the floor was heated, the ashes were removed and baking started. This oven

continued on next page



Christoph Gerigk

An ancient Egyptian *mifrāk* (blender) in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum.

MEDIEVAL EGYPT *continued from page 9*

was used for baking bread, trays of cookies, and other simple tasks. There was often a professional neighborhood *furn*, especially one used for baking fish.

Spices and herbs were used in all categories of dishes. Each recipe required its own set of seasonings. What most attracts our attention, however, is the use of mastic gum (the resin of the mastic tree) in all of the meat dishes. The rationale for this culinary practice, which is indeed uniquely Egyptian, and still is, may be attributable to the strong gamey smell of the local meats, and the power of mastic to retard spoilage. (Egyptian physicians of the time postulated that it was the region's air and climate that were chiefly responsible for the heightened risk of putrefaction of foodstuffs there.)

In the book of *Kanz*, we encounter a beautiful culinary tradition rarely mentioned by other sources, a trayful of little delights called the *sukurdān*. It was usually loaded with varieties of delicious small dishes served as snacks and nibbles during social gatherings, including those involving drinking alcoholic beverages. In fact, it was the latter that gave rise to the *sukurdān* ritual and to its name, which was said to be a combination of the Arabic *sukr* 'imbibing of alcoholic drinks' and the Persian *dān* 'vessel'. The tray was often loaded with apricot compote, pickles of carrot and quince, yogurt condiment of *jājaq* (prototype of today's *jājīk*, Greek *tzatziki*), lemon preserved in salt, cured olives and capers, and salt-cured sparrows and anchovies (*ṣīr*).

Preparations for the Sick, for Travelers, and for Lovers

Besides the daily dishes, others were intended to comfort the sick, including cures for nausea as well as digestives. These were also the responsibility of the household cook. Like the rest of the medieval Islamic world around them, the Egyptians believed in the healing power of foodstuffs based on Galenic medical theory, which was adopted from the Greco-Roman period. Simply put, according to this doctrine the key to enjoying good health was to keep the bodily humors (*akhlāṭ*) balanced, neither too much nor too little. Cases of imbalance

Samak Maḥshī

(Fried Fish Smothered in Tahini Sauce)

See photo on front page.

Below is my translation of one of the fish recipes from the *Kanz*. Another one, Fried Fish with Sumac Sauce, is available on my website:

<https://egyptianmedievalcookbook.wordpress.com/2017/11/04/fried-fish-with-sumac-sauce>

Makes 2 servings.

½ pound firm white fish, such as cod, cut into two pieces

For the fish rub:

2 Tbsp wine vinegar
1 crushed garlic clove
1 tsp crushed coriander
½ tsp salt

Flour for dusting the fish pieces

Oil for frying the fish (½-inch deep)

For the tahini sauce:

1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 Tbsp oil
¼ tsp of each of black pepper, ginger, nutmeg, cardamom, cloves, rose petals, all pounded
¼ tsp salt, or as needed
¼ cup of each of tahini, wine vinegar, and water
¼ tsp saffron or turmeric

Combine the rub ingredients and smear the fish pieces with it. Put the fish in a colander set above a bowl, and set aside for about an hour. When ready to fry, dust the fish pieces with flour, and fry them in hot oil. Brown them on both sides, and keep them in a colander to get rid of extra fat.

Fry onion in one tablespoon oil, until nicely browned. In a small bowl, combine the spices and salt. In another bowl, whip together tahini, vinegar, water, and saffron or turmeric. Add contents of both bowls to the fried onion, and bring the mix to a boil while stirring.

Place the fried fish pieces on a platter, pour the prepared tahini sauce all over them, and serve.

were treated with counterbalancing foodstuffs. For instance, a feverish person might be comforted with foods containing gourd because it has “cold” humoral properties.

Other recipes in the *Kanz* were preserved foods designed for travelers, such as the ‘Kool-Aid’-like beverage *sukkar wa laymūn* (sugar and lemon). According to the recipe, lemon juice is added in drops to crushed sugar spread on a marble slab until it is saturated, and then the sugar is left to dry. This is to be repeated three more times, and in this dry form, it is carried by travelers. To use it, the flavored sugar is dissolved in water and imbibed as a refreshing drink—and there you have it, the first documented lemon-flavored ‘Kool-Aid’ in the history of beverages!

There are also in the *Kanz* some repeated claims of dishes to promote and invigorate coitus (*bāh*). This should also be expected, since one of the tenets of the Galenic theory mentioned above was that the well-being of this aspect of the bodily functions was deemed essential for the welfare of the entire body. At any rate, whether motivated by health concerns or otherwise, aphrodisiac recipes were in great demand, and the *Kanz* offered them amply. For instance, an omelet recipe, which promises to enhance coitus, uses salt obtained from the small reptile scincus (*saqanqūr*), which was believed to be the equivalent of today’s Viagra. In medieval Egypt, the best was said to come from Fayyūm, about 60 miles southwest of Cairo. The scincus were cured: after slaughtering them and cutting off their heads, limbs, and tails, their bellies were cut open lengthwise and cleaned and stuffed with salt. These were left in shaded places to dry before being stored in baskets. The salt inside them was the stuff used, of which only a small amount was recommended; otherwise, it was said to cause death due to prolonged erection.

In addition, an essential regimen required for the maintenance of one’s well-being was personal hygiene. In the *Kanz* there are recipes and recommendations for good-quality toothpicks (*khilāl*) and for cleansing, aromatic handwashing preparations of potash compounds (*ushnān*) and soap. Alongside these are numerous other aromatic preparations ranging from perfumed oils and fumigating incense, to deodorants, pills to sweeten the breath, distilled waters, and perfumed powders. Perfumes were valued not merely for their pleasant scents, but also for their therapeutic and cleansing properties, such as for purging the air, clearing the head, or improving one’s mood, sometimes with clever tricks. One recipe, for instance, instructs its user to prepare at home a piece of cotton saturated with musk and rosewater, and then, it continues,

When you go to the bath with whomever you wish, once you get there, put this piece of cotton in the way of the water pouring into the tub. Put a piece of wood crosswise to keep the cotton from falling. The entire water [in the tub] will smell as if it were pure rosewater, and whoever takes water from this tub for his bath will not doubt that it is rosewater.

The *Kanz al-Fawā'id* cookbook looms large, not only in its enormous gastronomic riches but also in its capacity to bridge from the ancient past to the present, enriching our knowledge of material culture during this most prosperous medieval period. In my capacity as a translator, I did my best to connect text to

context meaningfully by supplementing the text with a comprehensive introduction and an extended glossary and illustrations. It is to be hoped that building reliably solid knowledge of historical Arab cuisine may well lead to better understanding of Arab culture and its complex role in global issues, past and present. ■

ANN ARBOR EVENTS *continued from p. 3*

The bean pie was an “ideological weapon”. Its promotion was part of the NOI’s repudiation of what it considered the slave diet, including sweet potatoes and reliance on meat, especially pork. Elijah Muhammad had written that purifying the body through healthy eating was analogous to purifying the mind through faith, and the bean pies were seen as healthier than “soul food”. For similar reasons, the NOI promoted the consumption of navy bean soup (without pork but with lots of turmeric, seen as a “non-Western” spice), candied carrots, whiting, and lamb. Of course, the wholesale rejection of soul foods was an overreaction—not least because some of them are nutritious. Doris Witt, in her book on soul food, *Black Hunger* (1999), argued that the NOI’s regulation of food customs was part of its ideological regulation of women, but others counter that the policies actually gave women a greater degree of agency.

The bean pie was also an “economic weapon”. The NOI viewed itself as an incipient nation and promoted the idea of Black people’s economic and political independence. Young people who made the bean pies were also taught how to advertise and sell them. The pie sales became a key source of funds for the group, taking in an average of \$18,000/month at Mosque #7 (Harlem, NY) alone in the 1980s. The canning firm Hanover placed ads promoting its navy beans as ideal for the pies. Making bean pies even began to be popular among white people in the 1970s and 1980s. Readers might be interested in an 8-minute video on this topic, freely available via Facebook, “How a Pie Tells an Essential Story about Muslims in America”, part of the series “Who’s Afraid of Aymann Ismail” from Slate.com.

EXOTIC SEAPORTS: A CULINARY JOURNEY

In our 30 years of theme meals, this might have been our most ambitious one yet. The Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor turned into gastronomers last December 9 with a feast featuring “Exotic Seaports” all over the world.

Thirty adventurous members and friends of the CHAA participated in the event, selecting and preparing dishes from distant ports such as St. Petersburg, Casablanca, and Bangkok. Then we assembled them in the late afternoon at the Ladies’ Literary Club of Ypsilanti, taking turns speaking briefly about what we’d made before “having at it” like hungry sailors. We’re grateful to CHAA member Phil Zaret and facility caretaker Jennie Taylor for “charting” and “piloting” the journey.

Below, we summarize the “pirates’ booty” of information that we learned from this voyage. Our single most striking discovery was to realize the key role that seaports played in history by cross-pollinating the people, foods, and foodways of diverse regions and cultures. Sea travelers have indeed labored like honeybees, spreading culinary customs from one continent to another.

Consider what follows as a periplus, the maritime log that records the main features that one will see along the coast in circumnavigating the planet. Come with us, then, O Reader, as we recount our mariner’s tale of derring-do last December, when we set sail for the seven seas and went around the world in— far less than 80 dishes!

The Pacific Ocean

If not for the sea trade across the Pacific, much of the Asian influence on the cuisine of the Western Hemisphere might have been delayed for centuries. But already in the 1500s, Spanish vessels were carrying trade goods between Japan, the Philippines, and what is now Mexico and California, especially through the port of Acapulco. This helps explain the importance of rice in Mexican cuisine and, in the other direction, the arrival of ingredients such as chili peppers, corn, potato, and tomato in East Asia.

CHAA member Howard Ando, a retired pharmaceutical chemist and a wonderful cook, is of Japanese heritage and is originally from California. He made us his own version of *chirashi-zushi* (literally “scattered sushi”), which is a salad-like home dish in Japan that nowadays is also seen there at parties and in restaurants and take-out shops. Howard’s version was without *sashimi* (raw fish), but it did have sushi rice (i.e., rice preserved with rice vinegar and a touch of sugar), *beni shōga* (thin strips of ginger, pickled in brine and food-colored red), thin strips of *usuyaki tamago* (egg crêpe), and two ingredients rich in *umami*: *shiitake* mushrooms and *wakame*, a green seaweed. (Incidentally, U.S. consumption of seaweed, or more properly “sea vegetables”, is now surging at a rate of 7% annually.)

Howard’s wife, Jane Wilkinson, a native of Devon, England, is also a master at Asian and other international cuisines. She prepared a Thai dish of beef *kaeng phet* (red curry, or literally, “spicy soup”). To make this, the red curry paste is cooked in coconut milk before the meat is added. These days, commercial Thai red curry paste can be purchased at a market, but traditionally the paste is ground by hand in a mortar and pestle using dried red spur chili peppers, garlic, shallots, shrimp paste, galangal, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, coriander root and seeds, cumin seeds, salt, and peppercorns.

In Western desserts, the routine use of ingredients such as cane sugar, orange, lime, ginger, cinnamon, and nutmeg shows the historical legacy of the trade with Asia:

- Fruit compote in a lime-honey dressing [prepared by Sherry Sundling] used chunks of banana, pineapple, kiwi fruit, cantaloupe, honeydew, grape, and strawberry. The dressing recipe— which calls for lime juice and zest, lemon juice, honey, and the orange-flavored liqueur known as triple sec— came from a Frenchman whom Sherry knew, Chef Schreurs at the Singapore Hilton. (Incidentally, Singapore is now the second-leading seaport in the world, after Shanghai.)
- Apple upside-down gingerbread [Marion and Nick Holt] was made using a recipe from Avanelle S. Day and Lillie Stuckey, *The Spice Cookbook* (New York, 1964).
- Gingerbread cake [Valerie Sobczak and James Annand] used ground and crystallized ginger, cinnamon, mace, cloves, and orange zest.
- Macadamia nut pie [Sherry Sundling] is a Hawai’ian dessert similar to pecan pie. Sherry used a recipe from *Remembering Diamond Head, Remembering Hawai’i* (Ann Arbor, 1999), a cookbook memoir by former CHAA member Lisa Parola Gaynier and her mother, Shirley Tong Parola. In explaining the deep Asian influence on Hawai’ian cuisine, Shirley Parola once noted: “Sugar planters were forced to rely on the labor of Asians, and waves of immigrants from China, Japan, Korea and the Philippines were brought to the Islands” (Shirley T. Parola, “Why Hawaiians Eat Spam: The Americanization of Island Food”, *Repast*, Spring 2000). The macadamia tree, native to Australia, was introduced to Hawai’i by sugar planter William H. Purvis in 1882 as a windbreak for the cane fields; commercial production of the nuts began there in 1922.

The Indian Ocean

The most famous Indian Ocean navigator of the Middle Ages was the Omani-born Ahmad ibn Majid (1400s), who harnessed new technology from Arabs and Chinese in order to deal with monsoons, reefs, and the other hazards of sailing a *dhow* in the open sea. Since the Omani port of Muscat sits at the crossroads of Arabia, Persia, East Africa, and South Asia, Oman has had a long, cosmopolitan history of maritime contact with these lands.

Exemplifying this contact is *samak bi’n-narjīl* (fish in coconut sauce) [Randy Schwartz and Mariam Breed], an Omani dish that originated in Zanzibar, a group of “spice islands” now part of Tanzania. Randy and Mariam followed a recipe from *A Taste of Oman: Traditional Omani Food* (Oman, 2005), a small



Anique Newaz's *morog polao* (Bangladeshi chicken *biryani*), left, and Sherry Sundling's Hawai'ian Macadamia nut pie, below.

Photos: Mariam Breed



book written by Marcia Stegath Dorr, a Michigan native who's a leading authority on the culture of Oman. The fish is stewed in coconut milk flavored with garlic, fresh ginger, green chilies, lime juice, and cardamom, and served over white rice. The couple used *mahi mahi*, but in Oman the Indo-Pacific king mackerel (kingfish) is often used for this dish.

- *keema diye aloo chop*, palm-sized croquettes of mashed potato. They are filled with *keema* (a mixture of ground beef, onion, ginger, garlic, and coriander), then coated with beaten eggs and bread crumbs and pan-fried in oil.

The Mediterranean Sea

The nautical and commercial advances in places like Oman helped to bring Islamic cultural and culinary influences thousands of miles eastward to South and Southeast Asia. CHAA members Anique and Golam Newaz are originally from Dhaka, Bangladesh, which is today overwhelmingly Muslim. With help from their friend, meal guest Joshi Hawlader (another Ann Arbor resident of Bangladeshi heritage, but who grew up mostly in Singapore), Anique prepared a pair of dishes from her own book, *The Best of Bangladeshi Cuisine: Selected Recipes from Tayyeba Huq's Shasthya, Khadya o' Ranna* (Dhaka, 2010), an adaptation of the earliest Bangla cookbook, written by her aunt in 1965. The two dishes were:

- *morog polao* (chicken *biryani*), an elaborate and justly celebrated rice-pilaf dish. Readers will recall Anique's article, "Memories of Making *Biryani* with My Grandmother", in *Repast* (Winter 2017), which gives much background on the history of this dish and also includes a mid-1800s lithograph of the Dhaka riverfront.

The Mediterranean basin is fairly compact, and it would be difficult to study the culinary history of one country there in isolation from all of the others. Much of that is due to the relative ease of sailing across the sea. In ancient times there were Greek and Roman colonies all around the coast, shipping foodstuffs in amphorae and other containers. In later centuries there were developments that bound together Spain with Morocco, Greece with Turkey, etc.

What the Greeks call *soutzoukakia* ("spicy little sausages"), the Turks call *İzmir köfte* ("meatballs of Izmir"): Joanne Nesbit made us this dish of homemade lamb sausages, using a recipe from the collectively-written *Perfect Greek: A Collection of Over 100 Essential Recipes* (Bath, UK, 2006). The sausages are freshly formed from ground lamb, bread crumbs, beaten eggs, fresh herbs, and spices such as cumin, cinnamon, cloves, and pepper; they are fried in oil before being placed in a tomato

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EXOTIC SEAPORTS *continued from page 13*

sauce, and the dish is usually served with either rice pilaf or mashed potato. This dish was introduced to Greece by Greek Orthodox refugees who fled, wholesale, from violent persecution in Turkey during 1914-22. It's most associated with the port city of Smyrna (called Izmir in Turkish), where until then the Greeks had formed the majority. The role of Smyrna as a major seaport goes all the way back to antiquity, when the Ionian League of Greek settlements occupied the central coast of what is now western Turkey; among them, Smyrna commanded the trade route between Anatolia and the Aegean Sea.

Other Mediterranean dishes at our meal:

- *champignons provençaux* [Mae and Len Sander], a southern French side-dish of mushrooms sautéed with parsley and garlic, found in Mireille Johnston's *The Cuisine of the Sun: Classical French Cooking from Nice and Provence* (New York, 1976). Like many other coastal Mediterranean cities, Marseille and Nice were once ancient Greek colonial outposts and they continue to be great seaports.
- Venetian apple cake [Cristina Lorenzetti] from Paola Bacchia, *Adriatico: Recipes and Stories from Italy's Adriatic Coast* (Collingwood, Australia, 2018). Slices of tart apple are mixed into the batter and also used to decorate the top of this cake before baking. The Republic of Venice, strategically situated at the head of the Adriatic Sea, dominated Mediterranean trade from the 1200s to the 1500s. It served as commercial middleman between Western Europe and lands to the east (especially the Byzantine Empire and Asia), controlling the lucrative trade in spices, sugar, and other Asian goods. By 1300 Venice was the most prosperous city in Europe, wielding a fleet of 3300 ships and 36,000 sailors.

The Baltic and North Seas

The Hanseatic League (from German *hanse*, "trade convoy") was a trading confederation that organized Baltic maritime commerce from the late 1100s to the mid-1800s. Thanks to this trade, commodities such as herring, honey, wine, wheat, and rye criss-crossed the region, and important New World products such as the potato were spread via such cultural

contacts (interestingly, the Russian word for potato, *kartofel'*, is borrowed from German).

As the League receded in influence, enlightened rulers of countries on the periphery of Europe sought to restore ties by rejuvenating maritime trade. King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden granted a royal charter in 1621 for the founding of Göteborg (Gothenburg) as a heavily fortified, mainly Dutch trading colony on Sweden's west coast, facing the North Sea near the Göta älv river; today it is the largest port in the Nordic countries. In 1703, Russian Tsar Peter the Great founded Sankt-Peterburg (St. Petersburg) on the Neva River, at the head of the Gulf of Finland on the Baltic Sea, in order to facilitate trade with Europe and its westernizing effects. Such ports helped to bring French, British, Dutch, and German culinary influences northward and eastward.

Kulebiaka (couloubiac) [Laura and Dan Gillis] is a grand, layered fish pie of Russia, which the chef Escoffier later introduced to France around 1900. Following a "simplified" recipe in Anya von Bremzen's *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking* (New York, 2003), Laura made a filling of salmon and cod (sturgeon and whitefish are also traditional), rice, onion, mushrooms, chopped hard-cooked eggs, dill, butter, sour cream, and several other ingredients, and encased this in a pastry of yeasted dough enriched with additional eggs and sour cream. She served the baked, egg-glazed pie in a gorgeous oval dish that the Gillises purchased at a flea market in St. Petersburg during their 2010 visit (see *Repast*, Winter 2011, for their engaging report on this trip). A local character once commented:

The *kulebiaka* must make your mouth water; it must lie there before you, a shameless temptation! You cut off a sizeable slice and let your fingers play over it. When you bite into it, the butter drips from it like tears, and the filling is fat, juicy, rich, with eggs, giblets, onions....

— from Anton Chekhov's short story, "The Siren" (*St. Petersburg Gazette*, 1887)

Salat Olivier [Phil and Barbara Zaret] is an opulent Russian salad of diced potato, ham, peas, pickle, and other ingredients, bound together with a mayonnaise-based dressing. Sharon

Laura Gillis's *kulebiaka*. Photo: Mariam Breed





Jane Wilkinson's
salāṭat al-burtuqāl
(Moroccan orange
salad).

Photo:
Mae and Len Sander

Hudgins's article about this seminal dish (*Repast*, again Winter 2011) notes that it is thought to have been invented in the 1860s by Lucien Olivier, the Belgian-born chef of the famous Moscow restaurant The Hermitage. Its popularity quickly spread throughout Russia and, later, during the Soviet era, far into Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. The salad is still a fixture of the *zakuski* table; Anna Netrebko, a Russian-immigrant soprano with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, recently commented: "Without Olivier, you cannot have a Russian party" (*New York Times*, Dec. 26, 2018). Phil used a recipe from Lynn Visson's *The Russian Heritage Cookbook* (New York, 1998).

Phil also made us *limpa*, a special-occasion rye bread from Sweden, using a recipe in Bernard Clayton, Jr., *The Complete Book of Breads* (New York, 1973). *Limpa* simply means "loaf", but this loaf of rye is sweetened with molasses, orange peel, and spices such as anise, fennel, or cardamom, and is especially traditional at Christmas time.

The Atlantic Ocean

The good supper is known by its odor.

— Moroccan proverb

The Atlantic is the ocean where European explorers set forth to reach Asia for the first time, and later, the ocean that they crossed to first encounter a New World. The Atlantic was also the ocean of terror that formed a Middle Passage for millions of Africans in chains, and the ocean of yearning for millions of immigrants dreaming of a better life. All of these were also momentous events in the culinary history of the planet.

Morocco, Spain, and France can boast of having busy ports on both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Over the centuries,

Morocco's coasts have invited major trade activities, and sometimes colonial plunder, by Spain, Portugal, France, and England. Its major Atlantic seaports have been Agadir, Essaouiura, and Casablanca; almost none of the contemporary foods of Morocco have been left untouched by this Atlantic trade. We tasted two Moroccan dishes at our meal:

- *salāṭat al-burtuqāl*, or orange salad [Jane Wilkinson and Howard Ando]. The word for sweet orange, *burtuqāl*, records a historical deed: it was navigators from Portugal around 1500 who introduced the sweet orange of Asia to this region, where it largely displaced the bitter or Seville orange (*nāranj*). Jane peeled and sliced her sweet oranges into half-disks, combined them with pitted black olives and slivered red onion, and made a dressing of olive oil, paprika, and other spices. She served the salad in a big bowl lined with baby lettuce leaves, and decorated the top with orange zest and flat-leaf parsley.
- *ṭājīn bi'l-hūt*, or fish stew [Larry and Miriam Imerman]. Larry stewed the chunks of white fish with chopped tomatoes, caramelized slivers of onion, and spices such as cumin and turmeric, and topped the dish with golden raisins and sliced almonds.

New Orleans, which sits on the Mississippi River near its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico, is another good example of the rich mixture of peoples and cultures that can be drawn— or in the case of enslaved Africans, brought forcibly— to the docks and wharves of a major port city. You can pretty much taste this truth in jambalaya [Rita Goss and Greg Shuraleff], the famous Creole stew of meats and vegetables flavored with garlic, thyme, and spices. Rita used an Emeril Lagasse recipe that she found on foodtv.com. Although the exact origins of jambalaya are still disputed, there is general agreement that the dish is rooted in Mediterranean traditions from southern France, Spain, and Italy

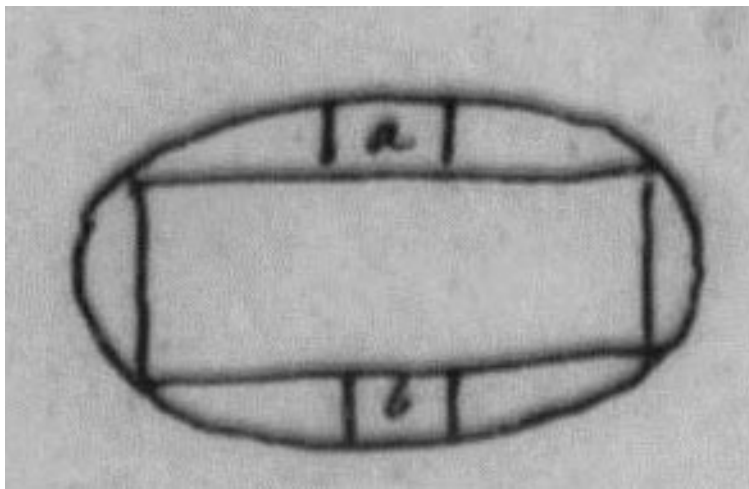
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A SPREAD ABOUT BUTTER

There's no doubt about it— butter has become “hot” lately, with U.S. consumption per person up by 33% compared to 2001! But the biggest leap hasn't been in the quantity consumed— it's been in the quality of butters and compound butters that can now be purchased, the prices that people are willing to pay for them, and the discourse surrounding them. A few examples:

- At her Animal Farm dairy in Orwell, VT, Diane St. Clair discovered that there's a demand for her very expensive clabbered butter, which is much stronger-tasting than the standard, culture-free butters (we explain why on the next page).
- At Houseman restaurant in Manhattan, chef Ned Baldwin infuses unsalted butter with dulse, a dried seaweed; he smears this dulse butter on bluefish before baking.
- At a creamery in St. Malo, Brittany, artisan Jean-Yves Bordier churns butters and then kneads them with ingredients such as Madagascar vanilla or toasted buckwheat seeds, for use by fine restaurants on both sides of the Atlantic.
- In the Fall 2016 issue of *Lucky Peach*, Walter Green reviewed two dozen world varieties of fine commercial butters with the same level of discrimination as if they were fine wines.
- The exhibit “Butter” will be running here in Ann Arbor from Apr. 6 to Aug. 25, 2019 (see page 19), with an associated CHAA talk on May 12 (see page 20).

And while butter is a trendy item today, it also has “a rich history”, to use a pun from the title of a 2016 book by Elaine Khosrova of the Culinary Historians of New York. Here, on these three pages, we present a small gallery of historical implements used in the production of butter in the home and at the commercial dairy farm.

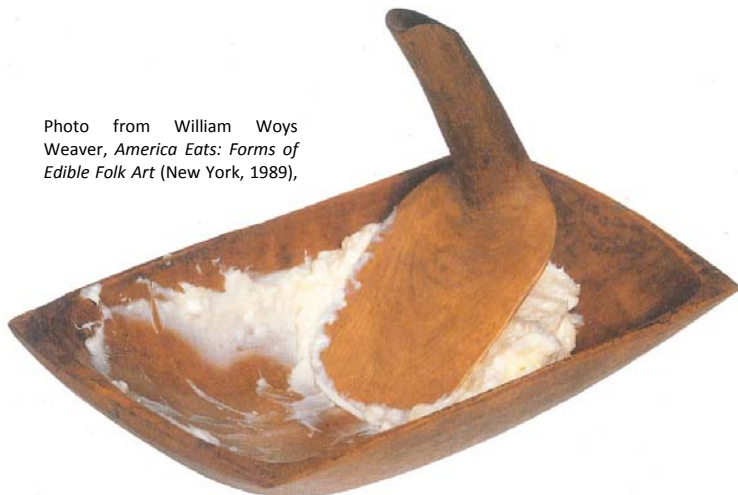


This is President Thomas Jefferson's 1802 schematic sketch of a very early icebox invented by Quaker farmer Thomas Moore in Montgomery Co., MD, so that Moore could cart his butter 20 miles south to markets in Washington without fear of it melting. Consisting of a 6 × 14 × 12-inch tin box set inside an oval wooden box, with ice in between, it was patented that year and was the first icebox called a “refrigerator”. Moore could pack in as many as 22 one-pound bricks of butter, each wrapped in linen; the first layer of bricks “became so hard in a few minutes,” he wrote, “that the remainder might be built upon it without injuring the shape.” In this way, he could make the trip in broad daylight instead of at night, and get a higher price for the firmer bricks. Pres. Jefferson purchased one of Moore's refrigerators in 1804, and used it for more than 15 years.

This information and image are from Patricia Bixler Reber's
May 23, 2016 blog entry about butter making,
<http://researchingfoodhistory.blogspot.com/2016/05/making-butter.html>

Of Clabbers, Clashers, and Dashers

Photo from William Woys Weaver, *America Eats: Forms of Edible Folk Art* (New York, 1989),



Above, this type of wooden lap-trough for working butter was modeled after the lap troughs that Cherokee women used in making bread. This specimen was made about 1840 in eastern Tennessee. In the Appalachian region the adze-shaped hand tool, also seen above, was called a “clasher”, a term derived from the Scots language. Fresh milk or cream was first poured into a churn and kept there to “clabber” (slightly ferment) overnight or for up to three days before churning. After 30-40 minutes of churning, clumps of soft, fluffy butter were lifted out of the buttermilk that remained in the churn, and were placed in the lap trough. Working the butter there with the clasher was a way to press out more buttermilk; failure to remove all of it would sour the taste. When chilled, salted, and molded, this butter was rich, dense, deep yellow, and delicious. Decades later, when U.S. milk began to be routinely pasteurized, clabbering was no longer possible, and butter lost the nutty, tangy flavor that results from that step.

Right, this 5-gallon upright butter churn was made of white ash by the Standard Churn Co. of Wapakoneta, OH, around 1900. The craftsmanship involved in the manufacture is similar to that of a cooper, or barrel maker. The tall wooden plunger used to agitate the cream is called a “dasher”, and this type of churn is often called a dash churn. In this particular design, the lid has been sunken below the upper ends of the wood-plank staves so that when liquid inevitably splashes through the dasher’s hole at the top, it collects on the lid instead of running down the side of the churn. The dash churn is only one of many types and shapes of butter hand-churn; in fact, some of them have no moving part inside but instead are suspended from a frame and are rocked back and forth. Information and image from the now-defunct Doug & Linda’s Dairy Antique website in northern CA.



A wooden butter trough and several butter molds and stamps from the Caledon, Ontario, family farm of Carolyn Crawford, Executive Board President of the Culinary Historians of Canada. “Printing” butter with a hand-carved mold or stamp was the means by which a dairy could brand its butter for market, a sign of quality that commanded a higher price.

Photo by CH-Canada Editor Sarah Hood, from *Digestible Bits and Bites*, 29 (Sep. 2015).

BUTTER

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Photo by Randy K. Schwartz,
from the Sep. 2007 CHAA farm tour

An old butter beater in the Rentschler family farmhouse near Saline, MI. The farm and apple orchard were established by German Lutheran immigrants well over 100 years ago and remained in the Rentschler family for generations. They are now operated by the Saline Area Historical Society and interpreted as those of a 1930s Depression-era homestead. Churncraft.com produces and sells a similar butter beater, upgrading a 1920s model; it takes 2 quarts of heavy cream and 15

minutes of hand-cranking to produce 1½ - 1¾ pounds of butter plus the liquid by-product, buttermilk.



Photo by Randy K. Schwartz. Jun. 2016

An old mechanical butter churn on display, minus its crank-handle on the left. This is the Reid No. 4 Original Philadelphia Butter Worker, patented Mar. 23, 1875, manufactured by Chester Dairy Supply Co. (Chester, PA), and widely used at commercial dairies across the U.S. Reid

also had a patent on its LaFayette Butter Printer, which could stamp 350 lbs. of butter per hour and won an award at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. This churn is part of a display at the Bellaire [Michigan] Historical Museum that predominantly features butter molds, butter stamps, and other kitchen utensils and dinnerware manufactured from native woods by the Bellaire firm Richardi and Bechtold, many of which were displayed at that firm's own exhibit at the 1893 fair.

EXOTIC SEAPORTS

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that were transplanted across the Atlantic after the Age of Discovery, and were combined there with Afro-Caribbean contributions:

- Early on, in 1762, control of the Louisiana territory switched from the French to the Spanish crown, which held it until 1801. By some accounts, the Spanish colonists wanted to replicate their Old World stews of rice, chicken, and shrimp (the prototype for Valencian *paella*). Saffron wasn't available, but the tomato— first encountered by the Spanish in Mexico— made an interesting substitute.
- There was a new influx of French inhabitants following the British expulsion of Acadians from maritime Canada in 1755-64. Many of them fled to the French West Indies or across the Atlantic to their ancestral homeland, and in both cases a good number of them later sailed to Louisiana to resettle. The French contribution to jambalaya includes *andouille* (a smoked sausage made with pork) and the classic *mirepoix* of onion, celery, and carrot— except that the carrot was displaced by a New World ingredient, bell pepper, thus forming the “holy trinity” of Creole cooking!
- A year after the U.S. purchased Louisiana from France in 1803, a massive slave uprising in Haiti sparked an additional influx of thousands of Francophone refugees, both African (some enslaved, others free) and white. They brought culinary influences of their own to Louisiana, such as the use of cayenne pepper and other spices.

We in America might not think of New York harbor as an “exotic seaport”, but the Statue of Liberty and all that it represents was alluring to massive waves of humanity a century or more ago. The immigrants and refugees who stepped off the boats at Ellis Island have profoundly shaped American cuisine. One small example is a baked casserole called shrimp de Jonghe [Margaret Carney and Bill Walker], the most popular entrée at the highly-regarded De Jonghe's Hotel and restaurant in the heart of Chicago's Loop. The original recipe was a carefully-guarded secret; Margaret used a reconstruction that she found in the *Chicago Tribune* (Mar. 15, 2017). The whole peeled shrimp are sautéed in butter and dry sherry before being coated with bread crumbs, garlic, and other herbs and spices, then piled into an oven-proof dish for baking. Brothers Henri, Pierre, and Charles de Jonghe and their large family had emigrated from Belgium in 1891 and settled in Chicago. The following year, in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition, they opened a successful restaurant there featuring chef Emil Zehr. They soon upgraded the establishment, and it flourished as an “in” place to dine until Prohibition put a damper on things and it closed down. Nevertheless, shrimp de Jonghe is still very popular in Chicago.

Having launched this tour with Japanese immigrants in California, we have circumnavigated the world all the way to the American Midwest, dropping anchor in all of the major oceans and seas in between. So it seems that our periplus is now complete, and we invite others to make use of it in creating their own culinary itinerary of exotic seaports! ■

MORSELS & TIDBITS

CHAA member **Margaret Carney**, Director of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design, announces “Butter”, an invitational and juried exhibition of butter dishes, butter-themed sculpture, and related butter items by 58 contemporary artists, as well as vintage and historical objects. The exhibit is open on weekends at 12-4 pm during Apr. 6 – Aug. 25, 2019, at The Museum on Main Street (500 North Main St., Ann Arbor, MI), with an opening reception, artist awards, and gallery talk on Apr. 6 at 1-4 pm.

Maria Trumpler, a Senior Lecturer in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Yale Univ., will be presenting two programs on historical bread baking at the Zingerman’s BAKE! and ZingTrain facilities in Ann Arbor:

- May 15, 2019 at 6-8 pm: “Why Women Stopped Baking”. Learn about women’s baking of bread at home (with ancient Egypt and colonial America as examples), why this has waned in the modern world, and why that matters. Accompanied by a light meal.
- May 16, 2019 at 6-8:30 pm: “American Breads Pre-1850”. Learn about four varieties of early American bread and their economic and cultural context while you watch them being made and sample them out of the oven.

For details and reservations, visit <https://www.bakewithzing.com/>.

At Rabelais Books in Biddeford, ME, which sells fine books about food and drink, **Don Lindgren**, the proprietor, and **Mark Germer**, the rare materials cataloguer, are engaged in a project to compile and publish a comprehensive annotated bibliography of American community cookbooks—over 1200 books between roughly 1865 and 1950. The work is titled *UnXld: American Cookbooks of Community & Place* (the title was apparently inspired by *The UnXld Cook Book*, a 1901 church fundraiser in Derby, CT). With entries organized alphabetically by state, the first volume, which covers Alabama to D.C. in 173 pages, was published in late 2018. CHAA friend Darra Goldstein reports to us, “It’s really impressive! Each entry is thoroughly annotated and constitutes a small social history in itself, offering copious information about American organizations, institutions, and eras. It conveys the richness of a genre of books that are often overlooked, with attention paid to details of binding, design, etc.” The print version can be purchased for \$50 (<https://www.rabelaisbooks.com/pages/books/6846>), while the digital PDF version is free of charge (<https://www.rabelaisbooks.com/catalogs.php>).

A recent issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (142:3, Oct. 2018), published by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, focuses on the theme, “Food and Foodways in Pennsylvania History”. Edited by **Christina Larocco**, it explores the state’s unique histories of food and drink, uncovering connections not just from kitchen to dining room but from Pennsylvania’s food history to imperialism, international labor and human rights, abolitionism, and environmental concerns, to name a few. For the Table of Contents and other information, visit <https://hsp.org/publications/pmhb-october-2018>.

In 1903, the *Minneapolis Journal* ran an article with the headline, “Chinese Cooking is a Fine Art”. The well-meaning writer praised the popular category of “sweet and sour” dishes, and approvingly mentioned one called Pineapple Fish with the comment, “No one possibly, tasting it, would imagine it contained fish.” When **Anne Mendelson** examines the long history of America’s misunderstanding of China’s food and culinary culture, colorful details such as that one burst out everywhere. But more importantly, her book *Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2016) places the subject within a broader saga of the Chinese experience in the U.S. She describes the forces that brought workers and cooks from Toisan and other areas to our West Coast, how and why Chinatowns arose, and how Americans began to get past their hatred and fear of “Orientals” to the point that Chinese dishes seemed alluring instead of disgusting. Later chapters analyze the appearance, after World War 2, of the first “truly insightful” Chinese cookbooks in the U.S. and the growing appreciation for more authentic renditions of the cuisine. Like Mendelson’s earlier books, this one is a pleasure to read, well documented, authoritative, and penetrating in its insights.

In 1917, the Dept. of Agriculture commissioned U.S.-born doctor and dietician Yamei Kin to travel to China to research potential culinary uses of the soybean, especially as an alternative protein source for soldiers in World War 1. She returned to her lab, carried out extensive tests, and began to evangelize the benefits of soy products as an example of the Chinese talent for living well with little means, in this case by deriving substantial protein from plants. In Fall 1918 she told a suburban Washington reporter that “soybean cheese” (tofu) tastes “a little like brains and a little like sweetbreads” (p. 60). This is one of the many fascinating episodes reported by historian **Matthew Roth** in his new book, *Magic Bean: The Rise of Soy in America* (Lawrence, KS: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2018). As it turned out, Dr. Kin was many years ahead of her time, but Roth goes on to describe the roles of other forces—including Asian-American communities, the industrialist Henry Ford, farmers and agribusiness, Seventh Day Adventist vegetarians, and the 1970s U.S. counterculture—in bringing soybeans and soyfoods into the mainstream of our economy.

Upcoming conferences in Europe:

- Apr. 13, 2019: 34th annual Leeds Symposium on Food History and Traditions, at Friends’ Meeting House, Friargate, York, England, with the theme “Flavours, Savours, and Sauces”
- Jun. 6-7, 2019: Fifth annual International Convention on Food History and Food Studies, at François-Rabelais Univ., Tours, France, organized by the European Institute for Food History and Cultures (IEHCA) with a multi-disciplinary focus covering all time periods
- Jul. 12-14, 2019: Annual Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, at St. Catherine’s College, Oxford, England, with the theme “Food and Power”.

CHAA CALENDAR

(Except where noted, programs are scheduled for 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. and are held at the Ann Arbor District Library – Malletts Creek Branch, 3090 E. Eisenhower Parkway.)

Sunday, March 17, 2019

Ann Folino White, Assoc. Prof. of Theatre Studies and Directing, Michigan State Univ., discusses her book, *Plowed Under: Food Policy Protests and Performance in New Deal America*

Sunday, April 14, 2019

(Ann Arbor District Library—
Traverwood Branch, 3333 Traverwood Drive)
Local history writer Laura Bien,
“Arsenical Candy and Copper Peas:
Food Adulteration in 19th-Century Michigan”

Sunday, May 12, 2019

(Ann Arbor District Library—
Traverwood Branch, 3333 Traverwood Drive)
Margaret Carney, Director of the International Museum of Dinnerware Design, “Butter Extravaganza”,
a celebration of all things butter-related

Sunday, July 14, 2019

(4-7 p.m., Ladies’ Literary Club of Ypsilanti
218 N. Washington St., Ypsilanti),
“The Regional Cuisines of France”,
a participatory theme meal
for members and guests of CHAA

On the Back Burner: We welcome ideas and submissions from all readers of *Repast*, including for the following planned future issues. Suggestions for future themes are also welcome.

- Spring 2019: The Food Industry: Pages from History (Part 4)
- Summer 2019: Immigrant Foods of Steel Country (Part 1)
- Fall 2019: Culinary Excursions (Part 2)
- Winter 2020: Immigrant Foods of Steel Country (Part 2)

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First Class