

Fru Cristina Stolte

(Anna Gustafsson)

Shire of Juneborg, Principality of Nordmark

Item entered:

Spice mixture / Powder forte (Central Europe and England 1300 – 1450)

Entered in the *Culinary Arts* Category, subcategory: *Cooking, Single Dish*

Introduction

When one ventures into the medieval kitchen it soon becomes clear that a medieval cook didn't use spices in the same way as we do today. The medieval cook rarely bought spices separately, instead spices was bought in ready-made mixtures called spice powder. Recipes may contain a list of the individual spices used in a dish but it is more common that the recipe simple states, for example, white powder, one pound or fine powder, half a pound. The cook will then know what type of mixture is proposed and he might even have his own variant. I have gradually become more and more interested in medieval cooking and spices are of course a big part of that. Making my own spice mixture is something that has been on my mind for a while and hopefully in the future I'll be able to have my own spice mixtures that I can use for different dishes.

This documentation consists of sources where I try to document both the spices used and the use of spice mixtures in medieval cookbooks. The making of the spice mixture is relatively easy and that part will therefore be considerably smaller. An interesting project for the future is a comparison of different spice mixtures in different dishes. That, I feel, is a very big project and I will not mention those aspects in this paper.

Sources

I have looked at several medieval cookbooks available online. This is my only source for medieval cookbooks and although this limits my research I feel that the number of cookbooks available gives a width to my work. Medieval Cookery is an excellent website that links to several cookbooks online. I have limited myself to the years between 1300 and 1450 since that is my field of interest. I have only used cookbooks from England, France and Germany since that area was similar in cooking tradition during my period of interest. The following cookbooks were used.

Forme of Cury (1390, England)

This cookbook was compiled by chief master cooks at the court of Richard II. This edition of the manuscript is printed in 1780 and edited by Samuel Pegge in an effort to both compile the recipes and offer an understanding of medieval cookery and its connection to medicine. The cookbook contains 196 recipes and is considered the oldest practical work in England.

Liber cure cocorum (1430, England)

This text, from the manuscript Sloane MS 1986, is a cookery book written in verse. The manuscript is not primarily used as a cookbook because of that. Still it contains recipes that can be found in other contemporary cookbooks such as *Two Fifteenth Century Cookery Books* and the *Forme of Cury*. *Liber cure cocorum* can not be considered to be an original cookbook with many unusual recipes not found in other books but more as a complement to other sources.

Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books (1440, England)

This is a compilation of two manuscripts, Harleian MS 279 and Harleian MS 4016 edited by Thomas Austin, today found in the British Museum. These two manuscripts contain almost the same recipes in nearly the same words suggesting that it may be two copies from the same original manuscript.

Enseignements (1300, France)

From the French manuscript Latin 7131 at the BNF in Paris. Its full name is *Enseignements qui enseignent a appareillier toutes manieres de viands* but it is also, in French, referred to as *Les Enseignemens*. It is the oldest French culinary text and it is divided into two chapters, according to everyday usage and days with lent. The recipes are very short with just the ingredients and the order in which they are added, without mentioning the proportions or the time of cooking.

Le Viandier de Taillevent (1350, France)

This text was revised in the late 1300s and attributed to the royal cook Guillaume Tirel, known as Taillevent. The earliest extant collection of these recipes was written circa 1250 – 1300. This edition was probably written for Charles V and quickly became the authority on culinary matters. *Le Viandier* means “The Food Provider”.

Le Ménagier de Paris (1393, France)

This cookbook was written by an elderly Parisian merchant for his new, and much younger, wife. The food and cookery part is just one chapter in this large manuscript. Besides cooking it is also a statement on the writer's ideal of a marriage. Along with recipes there is also, in the food and cookery chapter, instructions on such matters as serving, arrangements for weddings and what to serve people that are ill. This text is known in English as *The Goodman of Paris*.

Du fait de cuisine (1420, France)

This is a collection of recipes by Master Chiquart, cook for the duke of Savoy, written down by the clerk Jehan de Dudens. Chiquart writes that the book was commissioned by the duke *as the memory of men is short-lived and feeble and there is no remembrance or certainty of things if they are not written down.*¹

As well as recipes there is also an instruction on how to prepare and cook a feast. Chiquart speaks about all the preparations from how much cattle and sheep that is needed, the importance of the cooks visiting the kitchen well in advance and how much wood and coal that is needed for the cooking.

Ein Buch von guter spise (1354, Germany)

This is a collection of 96 recipes from a household manual compiled by Michael de Leone, proto-notary to the archbishop of Wurzburg. Translated to English the title means *The Book of Good Food*. This cookbook is thought to be the oldest in Germany.

Das Kochbuch des Meisters Eberhard (1400, Germany)

This cookbook contains a collection of 24 recipes from a manuscript at the University Library in Augsburg.

Spices in recipes

Medieval Cookery has a compiled a list of spices mentioned in several cookbooks. I have used that list for the cookbooks in my period of time and made a more detailed list. Figure 1 shows all the spices that are mentioned in the books more than 10 times. It is almost impossible to tell if the author of the recipes refers to Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) or Cassia (*Cinnamomum cassia*). Therefore these two spices have been listed as one, called

¹ Du fait de cuisine, page 1. Translated from French by Elizabeth Cook.

Cinnamon. The most common spices are Cinnamon, Cloves, Ginger, Pepper, Saffron and Salt. Galingale, Grains of Paradise, Mace and Sage are also common in recipes.

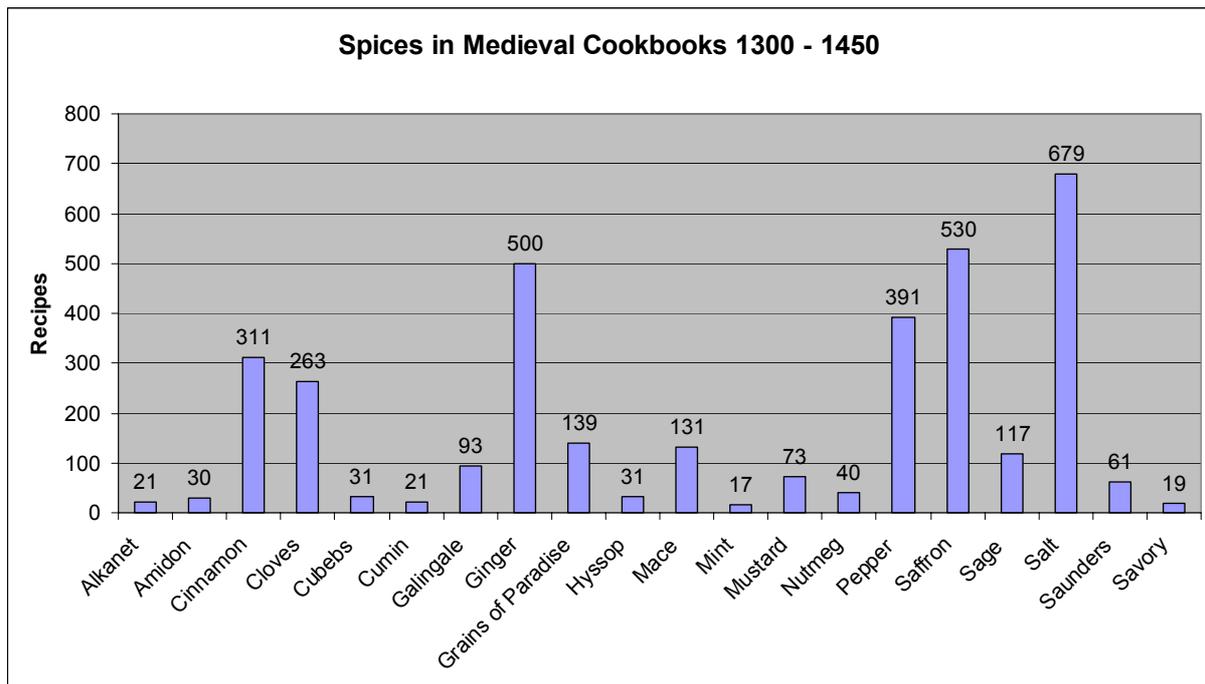


Figure 1 A list of spices and the number of recipes they are mentioned in.

In *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books* the recipes are very clear on which spices that are used in a particular dish. The book offers the following recipe for roasted lamb.

Stwed Mutton

Take faire Mutton that hath ben roste, or elles Capons, or suche o er flesh, and mynce it faire; put hit into a possenet, or elles bitwen ii siluer disshes; caste thereto faire parcely, And oynons small mynced; then caste there-to wyn, and a litull vynegre or vergeous, poudere of peper, Canel, salt and saffron, and lete it stue on e faire coles, And en serue hit forthe; if he have no wyne ne vynegre, take Ale, Mustard, and A quantite of vergeous, and do is in e stede of vyne or vinegre.²

The recipe calls for a powder of pepper, cinnamon, salt and saffron. As we can see in figure 1 these are all common spices. Other cookbooks that offer specific instructions on which spices that are used are *Liber cure Cocorum*. The following recipe is translated to modern English by Cindy Renfrow.

² *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books* page 72.

20. *Broth of almonds.*

*Take good almond milk anon,
And look you mix it with amidon,
Or with flour that is baked;
Color it with saffron, I undertake;
Season it with powder of your meal
Of ginger, cinnamon, and galingale.
Take partridges and chickens and seethe them well;
Hew them in quarters fair and smooth;
Put that milk over the fire that time,
And boil and set it down to one side,
And garnish it with [spice] powder, as I teach you, [so that]
You may have more honor among all men.³*

In this recipe the spice powder contains ginger, cinnamon and galingale.

Other cookbooks are less forthcoming concerning the sort of spices used. *Le Menagier de Paris* gives instructions on the arrangements for the Hautecourte wedding for twenty bowls. At the grocer the following kitchen spices should be bought: white powder (one pound), fine powder (half a pound), cinnamon (half a pound) and small spices (two ounces). At the end of the cookbook an instruction for a fine powder of spices are given.

FINE POWDER of spices. Take an ounce and a drachma of white ginger, a quarter-ounce of hand-picked cinnamon, half a quarter-ounce each of grains and cloves, and a quarter-ounce of rock sugar, and grind to powder.⁴

According to *Le Menagier de Paris* a fine powder consists of ginger, cinnamon, grains of paradise, cloves and sugar. The cookbook also mentions a “duke’s powder” that consists of powdered hippocras and sugar.

³ Liber cure Cocorum, a modern English translation with notes, page 12.

⁴ Le Menagier de Paris, no page index available.

Four types of spice powders seems to be mentioned in cookbooks,

- powder forte
- powder douce
- powder fine
- powder blanche

Powder douce (meaning sweet) is by some argued as being the same as powder fine but I feel there is no way of telling without looking at a wider perspective of cookbooks. A powder forte should be strong as the name suggests and powder blanche should be white for the same reason. *Forme of Cury* mentions powdour douce as well as powdour fort in several recipes. In many examples the powder, douce or fort, is mentioned together with saffron and/or salt suggesting that these two spices where not part of the spice mixtures.

TREDURE . XV.

*Take Brede and grate it. make a lyre of rawe ayrenn and do þerto
Safroun and powdour douce. and lye it up with gode broth. and
make it as a Cawdel. and do þerto a lytel verious.*

CAPOUNS IN COUNCYs. XXII.

*Take Capons and rost hem right hoot þat þey be not half y nouhz and
hewe hem to gobettes and cast hem in a pot, do þerto clene broth,
seep hem þat þey be tendre. take brede and þe self broth and drawe it
up yferer, take strong Powdour and Safroun and Salt and cast þer
to. take ayrenn and seep hem harde. take out the zolkes and hewe the
whyte þerinne, take the Pot fro þe fyre and cast the whyte þerinne.
messe the disshes þerwith and lay the zolkes hool and flour it with
clowes.⁵*

Conclusions

There can be no argument against the use of spice mixtures in medieval recipes. There seems to be three common types of mixtures; powder fort, powder douce and powder blanche. As the names suggest these powders should be respectively strong, sweet and white to its taste and appearance.

⁵ Two examples of recipes from *Forme of Cury*. Page 17 and 20.

Looking through several cookbooks there are ten spices that are mentioned more often than others, these are; cinnamon, cloves, galingale, ginger, grains of paradise, mace, pepper, saffron, sage and salt. Saffron and salt are mentioned separately together with powder fort and douce in *Forme of Cury*. This suggests that those spices were not a part of the spice mixtures. Among these remaining eight spices cloves, grains of paradise, mace and pepper is often experienced as strong and should therefore be prominent in a powder fort. Cinnamon and ginger, being sweeter, should be prominent in powder douce and for a powder blanche one should use “white” spices such as white ginger and sugar.

Making a powder forte

For this project I have decided to make a powder forte. I have not been able to get any grains of paradise so the base of my mixture consists of pepper and cloves, both strong spices. *Le Menagier de Paris* mentions several recipes with ginger, cinnamon, clove, nutmeg and some sort of pepper such as grains of paradise regular pepper. Since I’m very fond of nutmeg I’ll be using these examples as a base for my mixture.

I’m using pepper, cloves and nutmeg as a strong base and ginger and cinnamon to add a sweeter touch.

The recipe for my mixture is:

- 1 part pepper
- 1 part cloves
- 1 part nutmeg
- 3 parts of ginger
- 3 parts of cinnamon

I am able to get all the spices except ginger without being previously grinded. That way I can grind almost all the spices as much as I want to for a fine appearance such as one might expect in a spice mixture. Since my local shops only offer grinded ginger I will have to use that.

Conscious Compromises

I am limited at the moment to what my local shops offer. That means I am not able to use any of the lesser common spices. This is of course a disadvantage but I still feel I get a proper spice mixture with the spices that I have used. I try grind as many of the spices as possible but the variety of the shops doesn’t give me much choice here either. Ginger is only sold fresh or already grinded and I don’t feel I have the time to dry the ginger and grind it myself.

References

All these references are Internet websites that were visited last on November 8th.

Du fait de cuisine

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Du_Fait_de_Cuisine/du_fait_de_c_co
ntents.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Du_Fait_de_Cuisine/du_fait_de_c_co
ntents.html)

Forme de Cury <http://www.pbm.com/%7Elindahl/foc/>

[http://www.uwm.edu/%7Ecarlin/#MEDIEVAL%20CULINARY%20TEXTS%20%28500-
1500%29](http://www.uwm.edu/%7Ecarlin/#MEDIEVAL%20CULINARY%20TEXTS%20%28500-
1500%29)

Le Menagier de Paris

http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Menagier/Menagier_Content.html

Liber cure Cocorum

Medieval Cookery <http://www.medievalcookery.com/>

Professor Martha Carlin's Home Page - Medieval Culinary Texts (500-1500)

[http://www.uwm.edu/%7Ecarlin/#MEDIEVAL%20CULINARY%20TEXTS%20%28500-
1500%29](http://www.uwm.edu/%7Ecarlin/#MEDIEVAL%20CULINARY%20TEXTS%20%28500-
1500%29)

Recreational Medievalism <http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Medieval.html>

Stefan's Florilegium Eberhard-art [http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-
MANUSCRIPTS/Eberhard-art.html](http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-
MANUSCRIPTS/Eberhard-art.html)

Two Fifteen Century Cookbooks [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-
idx?c=cme;cc=cme;rgn=main;view=text;idno=CookBk](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-
idx?c=cme;cc=cme;rgn=main;view=text;idno=CookBk)