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The souring agents were commonly vinegar and verjuice, more rarely lemon or bitter orange, the sweeteners molasses, sugar, and honey, all luxury items. Another contrast is between dry and wet dishes, a chapter being devoted to dry and fried dishes. Yet another category is oven (*tannour*)-cooked dishes, often porridges of meat and wheat. Fish, fresh and salted, form another chapter, as do sweets, relishes, and breads. Poultry does not feature as a category, but chickens are optionally added to some of the meat stews.

What are the historical and social contexts of these dishes? They are clearly part of an opulent lifestyle and the aesthetics of a social notability. But we do have, incidentally, other accounts of the simple, common versions of some of these dishes. Al-Jahiz, a remarkable essayist from ninth-century Basra, cites in his *The Book of Misers* many dishes eaten by the common people in his tales of miserly acts. He describes one dish, *sikbaj*, as fatty meat and various vegetables cooked in vinegar, which sustained a miserly household for a whole week as they ate one vegetable every day and feasted on the meat on Friday. The recipe for this dish in the Baghdadi book, as one would expect, is much more complex, with spices and sweeteners. The presence of these dishes at different levels of society does show that social stratification, at least in the urban environment, did not lead to a radical break in culinary cultures. We do find references in the literature, however, to much poorer meatless dishes, notably fava or broad beans, a staple then as now. In the biography of Ibn Hanbal, an austere ninth-century fundamentalist divine of Baghdad, we are told that he ate his bread without vinegar, which would suggest that the combination constituted a meal for the common people.

Perry's new translation is an important addition to the scholarly literature. To the modern cook, it is mostly a collection of curiosities that may suggest culinary ideas. Traces of these historical recipes can be found in some Middle Eastern cookery: "sour" dishes survive as a category, though they comprise only a few rare recipes. The porridge of meat and wheat, now known as *harissa* or *halim*, is still to be found, particularly as an item for breaking the fast during Ramadan, but typically, it is cooked in a cauldron, not a *tannour*. New World foods, especially tomatoes, revolutionized food throughout the Old World, including the Middle East.

—Sami Zubaida, Birkbeck College, London

Bookends

Concordance of English Recipes: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries

Constance B. Heiatt and Terry Nutter
with Johnna H. Holloway

Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006
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Food scholars will be delighted with the appearance of the first comprehensive concordance to all major cookbooks of the Middle Ages in English. This is a body of literature that is often studied but little understood as a whole, so this book will open up many new and interesting areas of research. Constance Heiatt, the world's leading authority on English medieval cookbooks, was the ideal person to pick up work begun by Terry Nutter, and her assistant, Johnna Holloway, is among a rising group of scholars in this field. Needless to say, interest in food history has been growing steadily for some time and shows no signs of abating. Scholars from many different disciplines now write about food, and research is becoming far more sophisticated. Not content with the stereotypical assertions of past generations of food writers or with their many outright mistakes, the authors of this concordance have provided an essential reference work in the field.

The concordance is very useful in several ways. The cross-referencing of terms that have never had standard orthography—many of which have confused scholars for years—is absolutely invaluable. So is the glossary, which alone is worth the price of the book. Most dictionaries stumble with the bizarre spellings found in medieval manuscripts, and even for those few scholars who have access to Middle English dictionaries, this volume is much easier to use. The authors have also wisely decided to lemmatize terms for easy reference. Therefore, even if one does not know the specific name of a dish as used in a particular manuscript, it can be found under a broader glossed heading. Most importantly, however, the same recipe can be compared among many different texts.

Eventually, this resource will be used to write a more concise and complete history of the development of medieval English cuisine, as it allows scholars to trace the use of specific ingredients and techniques in ways that were not possible before. The authors were wise to date the texts cautiously; even so, a natural evolution of English cuisine is discernable, which would previously have been impossible without painstaking labor. This work will prove indispensable to everyone working on medieval English food.

—Ken Albala, University of the Pacific