

Sources and Services in The Research Libraries of NYPL

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Research Libraries

Notes

- 2 **A Lecture on the Electronic Librarian Opens the Cam Lecture Season** *Anne Skillion*
- 2 **Library Demonstrates Its Use of Technology to National Information Infrastructure Task Force Advisory Group** *Heike Kordish*

FOCUS ON SPRING/SUMMER CONFERENCES

- 3 **Three Days at the Center for the Book: The Second Annual Conference of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP)** *Steve Crook, Debbi Friedman, Alison Ryley, Anne Skillion*
- 9 **Medievalists on Food** *Alison Ryley*
- 11 **American Printing History Association (APHA) Conference in October**
- 11 **Call for Papers: The Third Annual SHARP Conference in Edinburgh**

PROFILE

- 12 **Susan T. Sommer** *John Shepard*

FOCUS ON THE COLLECTIONS

- 16 **Dick and Jane Come to the Library** *Sibylle Fraser*

- 18 **Food, Glorious Food: Exhibiting "The Raw and the Cooked"** *Nancy Finlay*
- 18 **Robert Giard's "Particular Voices: Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers"** *Julia Van Haften*

SOURCES AND SERVICES

- 20 **Black Studies on Disc Scheduled for Fall Publication** *Bob Kenselaar*
- 21 **The Theatre Library Association Honors Best New Books in Theatre and Film** *Anne Skillion*
- 22 **We Get Letters: Corresponding with Researchers**

STAFF NOTES

- 24 **Arrivederci, April!** *Alice Hudson*
- 24 **Arrivals and Departures** *Karen Purtell*

DIVERSIONS

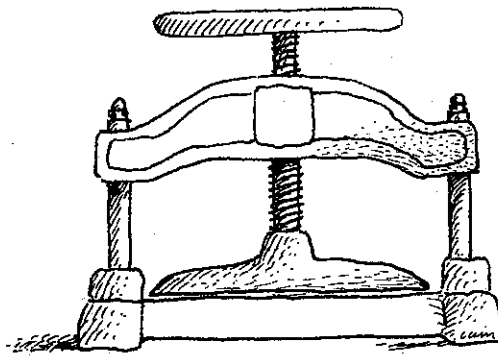
- 25 **Selections from Favorite Recipes of the "Best Reference Librarians in the World"** *Alison Ryley*

from her forthcoming book, *Imaging Aristotle*, about how translation into the vernacular affected the representation of Aristotle's texts during the fourteenth-century reign of Charles V. A noted bibliophile and lover of learning, Charles V commissioned translations of classic sources into French by his intellectual mentor, Oresme. Ms. Sherman showed how his translation constituted a complete system of communication, made up of text, glosses, and illustrations which served as way-finding guides.

In her "Textual Insertions in Late Fifteenth-century Narrative Wall Paintings: Questions of Authorship and Readership," Véronica Plesch talked about the presence of the written word, in captions and on depicted scrolls, in medieval paintings, using the example of the extensive murals in Notre Dame des Fontaines in Brigue, near Ventimiglia.

And finally, in "Publishing Pompeii, 1738-1840: A Study in Cultural Censorships," Alison Shell described how the dissemination through printed word and image, and ultimately through painting and architecture, of the finds at Pompeii and Herculaneum was inhibited by political, cultural, and moral forces. In her paper (of which I happen to have a copy) she examined "how the Sicilian monarchy used its monopoly over the antiquities as a tool of political power, discouraging all distribution of published information except that which it controlled; how contemporary aesthetic standards dictated what was preserved, causing many books to be called into being in order to record the rest of the information before it vanished; and how reception of archaeological evidence was often hindered by considerations of decency."

These fascinating papers--original, jargon free, intelligently written works of genuine scholarship--exemplified this conference at its best, and provided a fine ending to three rewarding days.



Medievalists on Food: A Recent Conference

Alison Ryley
General Research Division

What do medievalists talk about when they talk about food? At the Twenty-first Annual ACTA Conference held at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Binghamton University, April 22-23, the talk ranged far and wide within loosely defined, mostly overlapping categories: Food in Art, Literature, and Society; Recipes; Foodstuffs and Methods; and Food on Paper, with a roundtable discussion at midpoint. (By the way, ACTA is not an acronym and refers to nothing but the conference itself.)

Literary texts were frequently subjected to socioeconomic glosses. In "Apples Beyond the Pale: The Irish Costermonger in the English Garden of Eden," Jonathan Gil Harris considered the connection in the English mind between apples (with their unwholesome biblical and Galenic associations) and the dangerous, seductive Irish. This fascination, reflected in slang, satire, and dramatic and other literature, represented not only a "phobic fantasy of desire for the Irish Other," but a political agenda as well, the "colonial project" of an Irish Paradise regained.

Diane Marks likewise turned to literary sources in her paper on "Banquets in Dante and Charles d'Orleans." Evidence in Dante's *Convivio*, and in Charles's verse imitative of Dante, points to the significance of the medieval banquet in ratifying the mutual obligations and allegiances of guests and hosts. The banquet served *par excellence* to validate the "unspoken contract of the gift economy."

Rouben Cholakian called attention to the numerous scenes, both marginal and central, of "Eating and Drinking in the Bayeux Tapestry." The

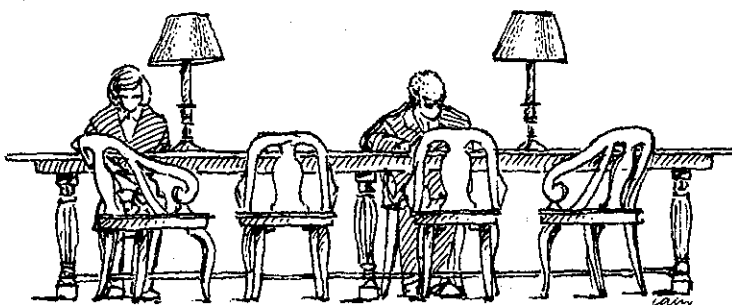


illustration of the elaborate banquet which served to send off "soldiers of Christ about to engage in a just war" was analyzed closely for its class as well as its historical context. A spirited discussion, during which Cholakian defended a deconstructionist view of the tapestry's narrative, followed.

Nadine Bordessoule's "*De poil or De plumes: The Taste of the Game in Medieval French Treatises of Hunting*" grew out of her doctoral research on French *livres de la chasse*, which led her to wonder what recipes were doing in hunting books. She concluded that the presence of recipes in these technical treatises, with their literary as well as utilitarian aspects, reflected a growing interest in gastronomy as a subject worthy of courtly attention.

In the session on recipes and foodstuffs, Barbara Evans compared "Two [or more] Versions of a Fourteenth-century Court Recipe" for the Easter dish *cretoyne* or *crytanes* or *cretonnees*: that which appears in Taillevent's *Le Viandier* (compiled in the later fourteenth century), a second from the *Forme of Cury* (compiled ca. 1390), and a third, much more detailed version, from *Le Ménagier de Paris* (compiled 1392-3). She described her several efforts at reconstructing this dish in its variant forms, and the surprising subtlety--contrary to our expectations regarding medieval cuisine's mashes and mushes--of the results.

Marianne Hansen gave two papers, the first of which, "And Thus You Have a Lordly Dish," analyzed the contents of a German cookery manuscript of the mid-sixteenth century. Of some 205 recipes in this manuscript of a bourgeois housewife, about twenty were characterized as "fancy" show-pieces. Hansen's second paper, "Brewing Practice in a Fourteenth-century German Mead Recipe," detailed her trials and errors in attempting (successfully, as it turned out) to recreate the fermented honey beverage from the recipe in the published text of *Das Buch von Guter Spise: aus dem Wurzburg-Muencher Handschrift*.

Mary-Ann Stadtler-Chester, a beekeeper herself, considered "Medieval Honey: From the Hive to the Table." Such books on beekeeping as existed in the Middle Ages derived their information from sources in classical antiquity. Evidence of the activity itself, however, is abundant in sources as diverse as *Domesday Book* and illustrations in manuscripts. (The "skep" or dome-shaped hive is a familiar image in manuscript illumination.) Medieval cooks used honey much less than their

Roman counterparts, but made extensive use of it in preserving and medicine. Stadtler-Chester had some enchanting bee facts and folklore to impart, such as the medieval association of bees with virginity, and the tradition of "telling the bees."

"A Manual of Health, indicating things which should be done, by illustrating the positive side of various foods, drinks and clothing, as well as their dangerous aspects and the neutralization of these dangers through the advice of the best among ancient authorities." Thus begins the Vienna codex (1380-1400) of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, that most basic reference work on the medico-chemical theory of humors which in the Middle Ages constituted the universal approach to problems of health and medicine. (The interested reader will find several examples in our collections, catalogued under the name of the Arabic compiler, Ibn Butlan.)

The overriding importance of the *tacuina* in medieval cookery was the subject of Terence Scully's fascinating plenary session paper, "Mixing It Up in the Medieval Kitchen." To a considerable extent the medieval cook's job was the learned application of humoral theory to the preparation of foodstuffs, so as to arrive at an ideally "tempered" combination. Food was made safe for human consumption by being made appropriate for human consumption. Mixing, therefore, was the art and science of medieval cookery--its successful outcome a wholesome, beneficial, and appetizing meal.

Mary Ella Milham talked about her current work on a ca. 1465 copy (in private hands) of Martino's *De Re Coquinaria*, the manuscript from which Platina famously lifted most of the recipes in *De Honesta Voluptate* (acknowledged as the first printed cookbook). Little is known of Martino's life except that he was chef to Cardinal Trevisan, whose opulent lifestyle was so well known as to occasion the nickname "Cardinal Lucullus." Milham mentioned points where Martino's and Platina's lives are known to have intersected and others where they might have. Martino's 270 recipes include many Italian dishes and recipes for fish varieties local to Italy. A Catalan influence, however, is apparent, allowing speculation that Martino might have been at the Neapolitan Court at the same time as the Catalan chef, Ruperto da Nola. tantalizing questions remain about the elusive figure of Martino, whose role in Western culinary history has always been obscured by the shadow of his illustrious borrower.