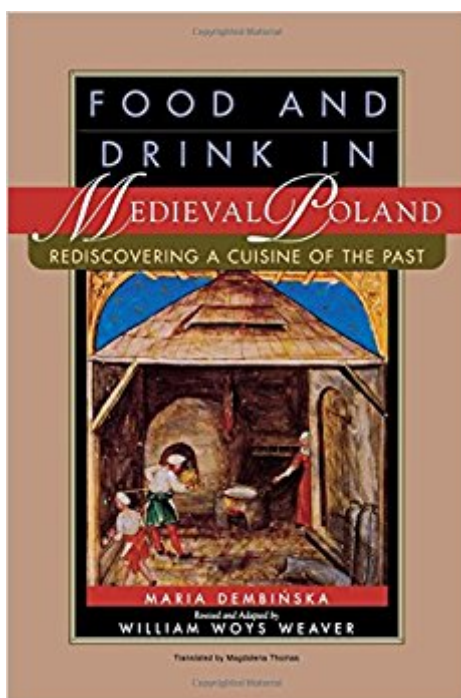


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Food And Drink In Medieval Poland: Rediscovering A Cuisine Of The Past



Synopsis

Lavender vinegar, saffron wafers, chicken baked with prunes, pears stewed with cucumbers and figs . . . there is something wonderfully inviting about the unusual and exotic flavors that came to the medieval Polish table. By turns robust and refined, and capturing all the richness and complexity of Poland in the Middle Ages, this is cookery that flourished at the crossroads of Western and Oriental foodways. This is the first book of its kind in English to explore the fascinating culinary history of medieval Poland. It represents the fruits of a twenty-year collaboration between two distinguished food historians, William Woys Weaver and the late Maria Dembinska. Freely adapted from a pioneering work first published by Dembinska in 1963, this new edition explores the subject of Polish medieval cuisine through archaeology, material culture, and ethnography, along with other perspectives and techniques. Topics examined include not just the personal eating habits of kings, queens, and nobles but also those of the peasants, monks, and other social groups not generally considered in medieval food studies. To appreciate the tastes and textures of medieval Polish cookery, there is simply no better way than to experience the food firsthand. Weaver has included thirty-five carefully reconstructed recipes, from courtier's pottage, a one-pot dinner popular with rich peasants and petty nobles, to game stewed with sauerkraut, to a court dish of baked fruit, to Polish hydromel, an easily made drink flavored with honey and fennel. With ingredients such as rosewater, cucumbers, saffron, and honey, these recipes will intrigue anyone who loves the art of cooking.

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Customer Reviews

You could start with Chicken Baked with Prunes, prepared in the 14th century for the Bishop of

Zeit. The ingredients include sliced onion, shredded white cabbage, large prunes with their pits, chopped parsley, juniper berries, a large roasting hen cut in half, bay leaf, bacon, ginger, cinnamon, a red Hungarian wine, and a little dill seed. This bakes, covered, in an earthenware pan, and is served on boiled millet refried in oil or butter and accompanied by green mustard sauce. What you would taste, according to William Woys Weaver, the editor and coauthor of *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland*, is the spirit of 14th-century Polish cuisine. Not French, mind you. Not Italian, or German even. But Polish. First published in a much more academic form in 1963 (not to mention in academic Polish), Maria Dembinska's groundbreaking study of the foods and eating habits of the Polish in the Middle Ages took until now to find its way into English. The text remains true to its scholarly spirit, for perhaps no one admired Dembinska more for her academic rigor than Weaver, author of the recent *Heirloom Vegetable Gardening*. And it was Weaver who brought Dembinska's book to life, took it on as a personal challenge and mission, all of his considerable work done gratis. To read his introduction, which properly places Dembinska in a scholarly pantheon, is to read a spy novel, for all that is in this book was gathered under police-state scrutiny. Dembinska has an interdisciplinary approach, including the all-important ethnographic perspective and historic archaeology. One discipline was used to confront and/or confirm the theories of the other, because much of what might have been a written record was lost to warfare, both modern and historic. Dembinska's challenge was not only to chronicle the food ways of medieval Poland, but to try to define what in fact was Polish. Who were the Poles? Where were the Poles? What unfolds in chapters such as "Toward a Definition of Polish National Cookery," "Poland in the Middle Ages," "The Dramatis Personae of the Old Polish Table," and "Food and Drink in Medieval Poland" is a document of how people lived in a land caught between Europe and Asia, with influences pouring in from Cyprus and Byzantium, Russia, Germany, Italy, and France. In a sense, Dembinska's greatest gift has been to give a real Polish history back to a living Poland. And William Woys Weaver gives us Maria Dembinska, a wonderful scholar who died before this long, long project could be completed. The recipes Weaver researched and included with the text combine to make this a history, ethnography, archaeology, and a powerful friendship you can sit down and taste. It's a rare taste, and one to be savored. --Schuyler Ingle

Maria Dembinska conducted her research on food consumption in medieval Poland at Warsaw University and at the Institute of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences. A noted food historian, she authored nearly two hundred articles and papers on medieval foods and foodways. William Woys Weaver is an internationally known food historian and author of numerous books,

including America Eats, The Christmas Cook, Pennsylvania Dutch Country Cooking, and Heirloom Vegetable Gardening. He began his collaboration with Maria Dembinska on the publication of Food and Drink in Medieval Poland in 1977.

This book is filled with a wealth of educational material. This book is comprised of mostly history regarding the culture, the food, and the people. The recipes are well written with measurements in english and metric, temperatures are also given in standard and celcius degrees. Most recipes are from the peasant folk with a few meat dishes sprinkled in. Some recipes are common to today's standards while a few of the others would not typically be seen served in today's kitchen. There are approximately 30 recipes or so in this book. Each recipe has its history in terms of how it was served, to whom it was served, and when it was served. The book is a worthwhile read.

This is really more of a history book, to my reading. It has wonderful little known facts that I would never have learned otherwise. There is a lot of research that went into this book, and she obviously worked long and hard to get this book and the history into order. This is a wonderful book for anyone who is interested in Poland or Slavic areas, and the recipies, to me, almost seemed as an afterthought, though I do not doubt they are correct and proper for Poland. Enjoy!!!

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