

CULINARY HISTORIANS

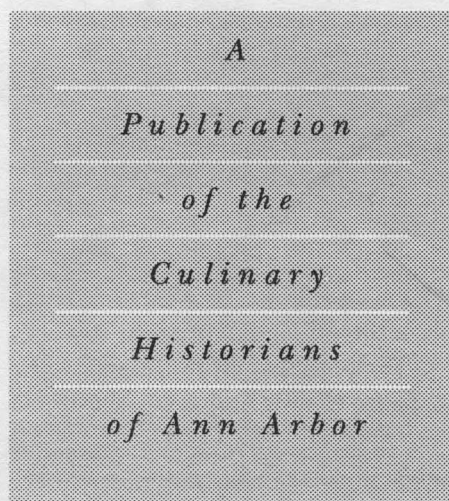
MIDDLE ENGLISH CULINARY TERMS

III. Tarte and Tartlet, Tourte and Tourtelet



The author is a member of CHAA and Editor-in-Chief of the Middle English Dictionary, a comprehensive record of the vocabulary of English between 1100 and 1500, in progress now at the University of Michigan.

Middle English had a great variety of terms for the dish that usually goes by the modern English name of pie or tart, that is, a pastry shell, covered or uncovered, filled with a mixture, frequently sweet with fruit or savory with meat or fish. Most of the Middle English terms are from Old French, as one would expect: a *cheuet* is a small meat or fruit pie, a *crustade* is any dish baked in a crust, a *dariol* is a tart or pasty, a *doucet* is a sweet custard pie or sweet-



ened meat pie, a *flaum-point* is a sort of pork pie, a *leche fris* is a tart of cheese or of dates, apples, pears, and prunes (but neither sliced nor fried, as its respective semantic elements would suggest), a *paste* or *pasté* is a meat pie or pasty, a *peti pernaunt* (or *pernel*, or *pernol*) is a sweet pie containing powdered ginger, currants, and usually dates, a *raston* is a kind of twice-baked pie filled with pastry crumbs and clarified butter. The Middle English word *pie* is probably not from Old French (unless, as has been suggested, it is related to *pie* meaning 'magpie'), but rather from an Anglo-Latin word; like its modern English descendant, it is a baked dish of pastry filled with meat, spices, fruit, etc., usually covered. A good old native English term, *bake-mete*, was also in use in the Middle Ages for any dish baked in a shell or pastry, such as a meat pie or a sweet or savory tart.

Among the Middle English T-words, which we are now in the process of printing in the *Middle English Dictionary*, are two sets of terms for this dish: *tarte*,

tartlet and *tourte*, *tourtelet*. A *tarte* is a baked dish consisting of a pastry crust or shell and a filling of meat, cheese, fruit, etc., usually baked uncovered or open, as in this recipe from a cookbook of 1381 (this and the following quotations have been slightly modernized):

For to make tartys in applis, tak gode applys & gode spycis & figys & reysons & perys, & wan they arn wel ybrayd [chopped], colour wyth safroun wel & do yt in a cofyn [pastry shell], & do yt forth to bake wel.

Of all the recipes for *tarte*, this one is closest to the American sense of tart as an open pastry shell with a sweet fruit filling, but in Middle English the filling is usually a combination of sweet and savory, or fruit and meat or fish, as in this recipe for a fish tart from a cookbook of circa 1425:

Tart for Lenton: Take figges and raisinges, and wassh hom in wyne, and grinde hom, and appuls and peres clene pared, and the corke tane out; then take fresh samon or codlynge or hadok, and grinde hit, and medel hit al togedur, and do hit in a coffyn, and do therto powder of ginger, and of canelle [cinnamon], and clowes and maces; and plaunte [decorate] hit above with pyne [pine nuts], or almondes, and prunes, and dates quartert; then cover thi coffyn, and bake hit, and serve hit forthe.

This recipe is closer to the British savory pie or to the American pot pie. Note also that it calls for a pastry top, but

one last recipe, from a cookbook of circa 1450, reveals that for Middle English *tarte* the top is not necessarily part of the definition, but rather optional:

Auter Tartus: Take faire nessh [soft] chese that is buttry, and par hit, grynde hit in a mortar; caste therto faire creme and grinde hit togidre; temper hit with goode mylke, that hit be no thikker then rawe creme, and cast therto a litul salt if nede be . . . colour hit with saffron; then make a large coffyn of faire paste, & lete the brinkes be rered [raised] more then an enche of hegh; lete the coffyn harden in the oven; then take it oute, put gobettes of butter in the bothom thereof, And caste the stuffe [filling] there-to, and caste peces of buttur there-uppon, and sette in the oven with-oute lydde, and lete bake ynowe, and then cast sugur thereon, and serve it forth. And if thou wilt, lete him have a lydde, but then thi stuff most be as thikke as Mortrewes [a thick dish made of pounded and boiled chicken, pork, or fish].

A *tartlet*, like its modern English descendant, is a small tart, as in this recipe for a veal tartlet from the best known cookbook of the period, the late-fourteenth-century *Forme of Cury*:

Tartletes: Take veel ysode [boiled or stewed] and grinde it smale. Take harde eyren [eggs] isode and yground, & do therto with prunes hoole, dates icorve, pyne and raisouns coraunce [currants], hoole spices & powdour, sugur & salt; and make a litell coffyn and do this fars [filling] therinne. Cover it & bake it & serve it forth.

But the interesting thing about a *tartlet*—and it probably has something to do with its small size—is that not only can it be baked, as with a *tarte*, but it can also be boiled (and thus become a kind of dumpling or ravioli) or fried (and



thus become a kind of fritter or rissole), as in these recipes from, respectively, the *Forme of Cury* and a cookbook of circa 1450:

Tartlettes: Take pork ysode and grynde it small with saffron; medle it with ayren, and raisouns of coraunce, and powdour fort [strong] and salt, and make a foile of dowh and close the fars therinne. Cast the tartletes in a panne with faire water boillyng and salt. Take of the clene flessch with oute ayren & boile it in gode broth. Cast ther powdour douce and salt, and messe [serve] the tartletes in disshes & helde [pour] the sewe [sauce or broth] theronne.

Tartelets: Make small cofynys . . . make thy stuf of boylyd fyges & spycys, what thu wilt, or, yf thu wilt, fisch or flesch, & sesyn hit up . . . & fyll youre cofyns therewith. Ye may fry hem, bake hem—whethir ye will.

To the modern eye (and palate) these recipes for *tarte* and *tartlet* will seem to contain a surprising mixture of ingredients and tastes, especially the sweet and the savory together, or fruit with meat and fish. Veal is mixed with prunes, dates, currants, pine nuts, and sugar, pork with eggs, currants, and a sweet

seasoning; fish is mixed with figs and other fruit, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves; a cheese tart is sprinkled with sugar. This mixing is typical of medieval recipes, and as a general rule, the later the recipe, the more fruit is contained in it and the sweeter and spicier it is. There is much less segregation of sweet and savory in the medieval meal than in the modern. In sample Middle English menus *tartes* are always served as part of the second course (of three), probably because they are richer than what follows in the third course.

The immediate origin of *tarte* and *tartlet* is Old French, but the ultimate origin is uncertain. The Old French variant *tartre* as well as the older Italian *tartara* (meaning 'a sort of tart made of soaked bread, almonds, and sugar') may connect it with Medieval Latin *tartarum* 'tartar' (that is, the hard crust formed on the sides of casks during winemaking from the juice of grapes), but the consensus is that in origin it is probably from a Medieval Latin spelling *tarta* (frequently attested) of Latin *torta* 'a loaf of bread', which first appears in the Vulgate Bible.

In Middle English the word *tourte* has the meaning (from Latin as well as Old French) of a loaf of bread, probably coarse brown bread, but there is also one quotation in which it appears to be similar to a *tarte*, from a menu of circa 1400 for a meat-day (as opposed to a fast-day) in Pentecost:

At the i cours, bores hedes enarmyd [larded] . . . capons, beefe, & pestell [leg] of porke isode, & torte, therewith fesauntes & bytores [bittern] irosted.

In this sense it is derived from the other meaning of Old French *to(u)rte*, 'a pie or tart', which is the primary meaning that has survived into modern French.

Middle English *tourtelet* does have the expected sense of a little loaf of bread (though only in one very late quotation), but usually it functions as a variant



of *tartlet* and has the same meanings: the standard one of a small baked tart, but also the less common ones of a ravioli and of a rissole, as in these two recipes from a variant manuscript of *Forme of Cury* written circa 1400:

Raucoles [Raviolis]: Take wete chese & grynde hit smal, & medle hit wyt eyren & saffron & a god quantite of buttur. Make a thin foile of dowe & close hem therin as turteletes, & cast hem in boylyng watur & sethe hem therin . . . ley thi raviholes in dissches, & ley thi hote buttur wyt gratede chese binethe & above, & cast thereon powdur douce.

Tourteletes in fryture: Take figus & grynde hem smal; do therin saffron & powdur fort. Close hem in foyles of dowe, & frye hem in oyle. Claryfye hony & flamme [baste] hem therwyt; ete hem hote or colde.

The modern English counterpart of *tourte* is best known as the second element of *Sachertorte* (that is, a rich cake) or as the root of *tortilla*, but the pie or tart sense can be seen, somewhat masked, in *Linzertorte*, and the dumpling or ravioli sense can be seen in *tortellini*, borrowed from Italian.

With so many terms in Middle English for the dish that consists of a pastry shell or crust filled with a mixture, so many variations in the recipes, and so many other languages coming into play, is it any wonder that there are so many terms in modern English for the same dish—pie, tart, flan, quiche, not to mention the related turnover, pasty, dumpling, ravioli, cobbler, pandowdy, and clafouti—and so much variation in their meanings and their realizations among cooks and cookbooks?

Robert E. Lewis
Executive Director, Middle English Dictionary
University of Michigan

Editor: Ann Woodward

Graphic Design: Rhonda DeMason

Contributors: Robert E. Lewis and Evelyn J. Thompson

CHAA President: Julie Lewis

1994-95 Program Chair: Muriel Seligman

CHAA Founder and Honorary Chair:
Jan Longone

For more information about anything in this publication, contact: Ann Woodward

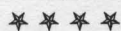
2222 Fuller Road, #801, Ann Arbor, MI 48105

313-665-7345.

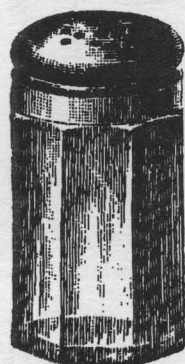
M AND M'S, CHICAGO CABBIE HAVEN



Driving west on Division Street, a 1900's Chicago two-flat caught my eye. This past-its-prime example of practical enterprise had a restaurant on the first floor and an apartment above. The steps and the posts planted in the middle of the compact and utilitarian front section were made of steel, gracefully designed and stamped from a mold. The building stood like an isolated soldier caught between the nerve-snapping stores of the elite east and the desolate wasteland of Cabrini Green. A hand-lettered sign on white shirt cardboard stated that this was an East meets West restaurant, open twenty-four hours a day and named M and M's. Tacky and very dishevelled from the outside, it seemed to be the same inside, and looked like the headquarters for all the yellow cabs in Chicago. I had hit the jackpot—a Pakistani taxicab hangout, an urban truck stop restaurant, a Southeast Asian field of yellow. Like a handful of dropped toothpicks, taxis were parked randomly. Illegal parking gained new meaning here and the parking lot beside and behind the building was so rutted it rivaled the Grand Canyon. The drivers going and coming were dressed in all manner of attire—Gap sport clothes, the traditional garb (sherwani), New York "grubby," suits, jeans, sandals, Addidas. On their way to the restaurant, some stood and talked to friends, others ambled as if enjoying the movement of legs and feet, others propelled themselves with cab-related quickness toward a hot, fast, home-cooked, gravy-laden meal.



I decided to go in and see what was what. There was a definite ambience here, though not in the popular sense of that word. The air was smoke-filled to the point of permanent fog; the floors had been walked on till only grey streaks of the wood were visible; and the tin ceiling was stained yellow orange. Men lounged at four small tables, sitting on wooden chairs dredged from some aged school system. Behind them was a table with a large coffee pot (set at perpetually stale) surrounded by styrofoam cups,



spilled sugar and cans of condensed milk. A corridor led into a pool room where excited shouts and grunts burst through the eternal haze and almost drowned the noise of thwacked cue balls. The small kitchen was surrounded by a hand-fashioned L-shaped counter and six red swivel stools patched with silver duct tape. This kitchen could have been taken directly from the pages of a *House and Dhaba Magazine*. There was a steam table cradling four covered pans, under that a big kettledrum of a pot filled with rice, holding a large paddle and covered with a battered flat aluminum lid. The rice pot actually assumed the role of tympany because of the constant lifting and closing of the lid, the banging of the rice paddle to remove the sticky grains, and the tap-

ping of the paddle on the plates. At one end of the counter was an altar-like area covered with a white towel and holding four sacred condiments: sliced onions, chopped cilantro, quartered limes and yogurt raita laced with chilies, ginger and cilantro. Cloudy blue-gray plastic glasses were stacked so high they formed a leaning tower over matching pitchers of water. The drivers helped themselves constantly, gulping in great swallows.



A small indented cubicle housed two Mexican women whose motions resembled those of a perpetual chapati machine as they made rotis—kneading, shaping, patting, grilling and turning again and again. A wrap-around shelf attached to the wall above the women held plastic gallon containers of cumin, chili, cinnamon, black salt and other secrets of the trade. Outside the cubicle was the grill, positioned so close to the women that they had only to extend their arms to turn the rotis. Very few of the patrons used silverware so the need for this edible utensil was persistent and continuous. Three gas rings, hunkered on the floor, held giant pots in which food was prepared in huge amounts. First, oil was brought to breath-robbed hotness, then massive handfuls of chopped onions, garlic and spices were thrown in to dance around until meats, vegetables or pulses were added, calming this magnificent concoction into a gently bubbling essence of heaven.

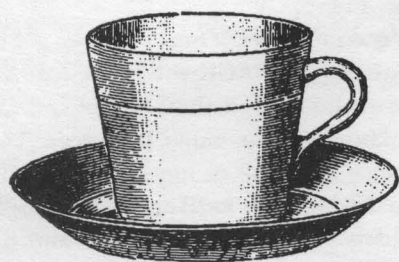


The twenty-four hour menu had two cycles. Breakfast lasted till about eleven and usually consisted of a potato curry, rotis, dal, farina halwa, scrambled eggs and brains, or eggs with any combination of requested spices and herbs (the contrast in colors could be glorious).

Lunch and dinner usually included a vegetable curry, dal (the variety was endless: chick peas, torva, lentils, mung— all enlivened with a vargar of mustard, cumin seeds and chilies); kormas and gohsts of goat, lamb, mutton, brain, or lamb and beef neck bones;

could finish the last bite of his roti. This serious appeal was met with complete understanding and gentleness because everyone knows there is nothing worse than to be left holding one last piece of a curry scooper and have nothing to scoop.

★ ★ ★ ★



rice; all the condiments as needed; endless rotis; and coffee with condensed milk poured from the can. For five dollars the cabbies could eat as much as they wanted. Even though there was a small chalk board with specialties for each day, it seemed to me that this announcement was of no consequence since the cabbies always got whatever they pointed to. Plates were capriciously handed about for refills of rice, meat, onions, dals or whatever was important to each particular taste and desire. A wall-mounted TV, tuned to CNN, blared constantly. This completed the homey palace of exciting smells, piquant tastes and wonderfully rich sauces.

★ ★ ★ ★

M and M's seemed to be a substitute for mother's kitchen, always with plenty of food being dished up and no questions asked. Conversations were limited to food requests spoken hurriedly like a secret code. I have seen a cabby point to a curry for "just a tablespoon" so he

The man who ran the restaurant was short, stocky, darkly dusky and had a tummy the size of one of his cooking pots. He was also the main cook who concocted the blinding hot curries and kormas. His eyes were luminously black and never missed a thing. Nothing happened in these chaotic, cramped rooms that he didn't see. The chief waiter was a kindly uncle, in his sixties, stooped, with white hair and blue eyes. He passed out water, napkins, spoons, plates, and cleaned up amidst the clusters of clattering men in various stages of walking, sitting, standing, reaching, smoking, talking and eating. He was like a calm saint. The counter person was a youngish man with a quizzically open look. Very slight, gracefully straight and with a quiet demeanor, he alone spoke English. Signs and posters were all over the walls announcing meetings and festivals, and usually a can or jar sat at the end of the counter in front of a letter requesting money to send the body of a cabby home for burial.

★ ★ ★ ★

I first found M and M's two years ago and I'm sure I was the only woman who frequented this bastion of culinary nirvana. All I needed to gain entry was my aluminum stacked food carrier from Thailand. While the individual sections were being filled for "take out", men sitting at the counter would invariably tell me they always used one back home to take their lunch to work or that their mother had one just like it. This favorite

haunt of mine has now vanished as quickly and spontaneously as it appeared— PERMIT REVOKED. I'm searching for its new location by questioning every taxi driver I meet. Nowhere else have I tasted such sauces and melding of flavors and aromas as in this secret haven of the cabbies.

Evelyn J. Thompson
Culinary Historian, Chicago
Author copyright 1995

MONKEY AND MANICOU



Exposure to culinary history through this group has added a new dimension to my travels. Though I by no means qualify as a historian, culinary or otherwise, I find myself curious about cuisine and food customs whenever I visit another country or even another distinct region of the U. S. like the Southwest or Louisiana, where, though southern, the food is quite different from that of my native Virginia. I eat well this way. People are delighted to help me in my research. I make contacts.

Most recent contact of this kind was with three native men on a beach of the island of Grenada (that's Gre-NAY-da, don't forget, legacy of the English insistence on their own peculiar and blatantly British pronunciation of any foreign word) on this past Christmas Day. We had been landed here from our three-masted cruise ship to enjoy the sea before beginning our sail north among the Windward Islands. Even though my husband and I had been in the Caribbean already for three days, we wore hats and long sleeves and I was swathed in a pareo, keeping our northern skin safe. In other words, we were a sight, TOURISTS, and every Grenadian

greeted us with "Hoppy Chrissmahs!" and we responded the same, trying for the beautiful West Indian accent.

As these three passed and we continued our walk in the same direction behind them, the old culinary curiosity stirred and I called, "Wait, wait I want to ask you—"

Now they became individuals: the one with the little beard, the young one, the one who was serious.

"It's Christmas," I said. "You'll have a big dinner tonight? Your wives are home cooking?"

"Yes, yes. Hoppy Chrissmahs!"

"What will you have for dinner?"

"Turkey. Ham. Pork, roasted, you know?" They all spoke at once.

"Turkey?" I said.

"Yes, yes. Imported. You know, they say we eat chicken, chicken. But we hahv also roast beef." They recited it all again, with energy but also dissatisfaction, seeming to feel they were not being sufficiently interesting. Or was it that I appeared let down, expected more exotic offerings? Here lies a pitfall for the amateur researcher.

"Macou!" said the one with the beard, triumphant, and he excited the young man. The one with the direct eyes looked a little doubtful.

"What is macou?" Now they had me.

"Like a lizard, a large lizard."

"Ah, macou," I said, hoping I could remember, wondering how large a large lizard would be.

"And monkey! You know, we hahv many wild monkeys, yes."

Should I believe them?

We parted then. I thanked them and said we liked Grenada but that we must go on, that the ship would leave in an hour.

"Go then, yes. Hoppy Chrissmahs! Macou! Monkey!" and they continued on their way, laughing, walking with active knees and elbows, as if the steel drums of Christmas Day already played for them, rhythm in the bones.

Christmas dinner on the ship was ham and turkey.

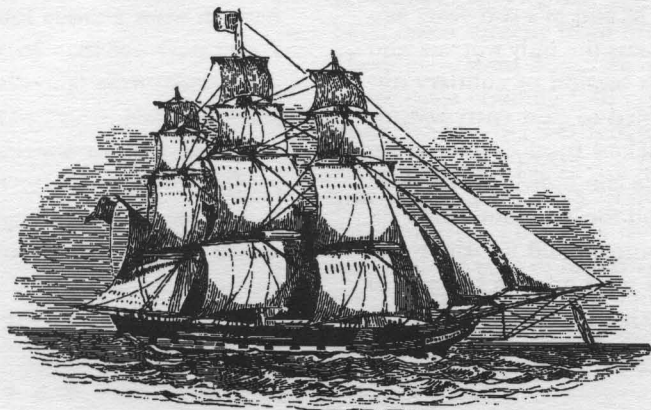
I tried to check it out. When we got to Bequia (say BECK-wih, and I don't know who started that) we looked for cookbooks in the island bookstore. The recipes were full of ingredients identified only by their local names and not at all described, but no macou and no description of how to . . . do anything with monkeys.

Jan, from the incredible resources of the Wine and Food Library, came up, after we got home, with a few references to macou in Cristine Mackie's *LIFE AND FOOD IN THE CARIBBEAN*. It is called here a wild rodent and is said to be "gamy" and I must leave it at that.

There was one further and much tamer curiosity during the trip: a pale vegetable served on the ship, cut in wedge-shaped slices, veined and translucent like turnips, of mild flavor, and tender. It was christofina and they showed us one—hard, green, shaped like an avocado and how in the world does one peel it? I don't know. But it is to be boiled and is good with the local hot pepper sauce that is orange with habaneros.

We brought back a jar of kuchela, a hot relish made in Trinidad from green mangos and spices, strangely black and of unidentifiable flavor. I've never seen it here but if you can find it, know that just a little sparks a sandwich, a teaspoon mixed with cream makes a sauce for meat. You can take it from there. It takes me straight back to open decks and sea breezes.

Ann Woodward



Lucy Seligman

Lucy's Kitchen has expanded its range of services to include:

- custom designed meals with private catering
- kitchen reorganizing
- event and menu planning
- cooking demonstrations for special events and fundraisers

A regular schedule of cooking classes continues. Lucy can be reached by phone: 313-662-5572; by fax: 313-662-4212; by mail: 631 Watersedge Dr., Ann Arbor, Mi. 48105.

Jan Longone

The December 1994 issue of FOOD ARTS included an article about the latest catalog issued by the Wine and Food Library, Jan's antiquarian bookshop. The services and resources of the library

are described and Jan tells us that the article has generated catalog requests from every corner of the globe.

Jan herself was the subject of a lead article in the March 8th issue of the Detroit Free Press, focusing on community cookbooks and her experience as a judge of such books for the McIlhenny Company's Tabasco Community Cookbook Awards.

Jan and her husband Dan will give a joint talk at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C. on April 20. The topic for Dan will be Madeira Traditions in America and for Jan Wine in American Cooking.

In June, at the third annual Southern Food Symposium sponsored by the Society for the Revival and Preservation of Southern Food, Jan will participate in

a panel on Native American, European and African Influences on Pre-Civil War American Cookery. This meeting will be in Atlanta.

Ann Woodward

A story titled "Seven Art Soups" and published under this writer's other name, Stringfellow Forbes, is included in an anthology of mystery stories concerning food. The book is titled CRIME A LA CARTE and was edited by Cynthia Manson, published by Signet.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Food Related Travel

April 7-9— San Antonio, Texas. International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) annual conference. Special feature is the Julia Child Cookbook Award Gala on Saturday, April 8, at which all the nominees for the Julia Child Cookbook Awards are to be introduced. For information: IACP 304 West Liberty Street Suite 201, Louisville, Kentucky 40202 Tel (502) 581-9786, Fax (502) 589-3602. (need not be a member)

June 16-18— Atlanta, Georgia. Symposium: "Savoring the South: Diversity and Bounty." For information contact Anne Logan, Director, Society for the Revival and Preservation of



Southern Food, 873 Ponce de Leon Place NE, Atlanta, GA 30306 [(404) 607-1427]

September 14-17— The American Institute of Wine & Food's Twelfth International Conference on Gastronomy: "Who's Cooking? The Ins of Eating Out." Boston, Massachusetts. For information call: 415-255-3000.

April 23 (*date is changed*): The Road to Battle Creek
Speaker - Patricia Cornett

May 21: Culinary Herbs and Edible Plants:
A Guided Tour at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens
Speaker - Rodger Kellor
(*Time to be annouced*)

July 16: Annual Picnic. Theme: All American Picnic. Independence Lake County Park.
(*Time to be announced*)

Washtenaw County Extension Service Building, 4133 Washtenaw Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Time 7:00 - 9:00 pm (*unless otherwise noted*)



CHAA Newsletter
2222 Fuller Road #801
Ann Arbor MI 48105

Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

Vol X1 Number I, Spring, 1995

First Class