VOLUME XVIII, NUMBER 2 SPRING 2002

Repast

Quarterly Newsletter of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor

SNACK ON THE HISTORY OF CHINESE SNACKS

by Jacqueline M. Newman

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May is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

Foods from China: Part One

To the Chinese, if you do not 'eat rice' or have a regular meal, you are having a snack. Chinese snacks, of which there is an enormous variety, are eaten in the morning, between meals, at banquets, and at any other time one is not having a regular meal.

The antiquity of snacking in Chinese foodways is reflected in the classic food literature, which indicates that the people ate only two meals a day. How could this be? Because the three main eating times are referred to by phrases— *zaodian, wufan* and *wanfan*— that mean eating a morning snack, a noon meal and an evening meal, respectively.

So, snacks are not a new phenomena to the Chinese. The Chinese have the most highly developed and diversified roster of breakfast and snack foods in the world. What is new is that more and more ordinary Chinese people are eating many more of them, and doing so many more times each day.

Imperial Origins

Thousands of years ago, around the time of the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1122-770 BCE), pastries were prepared on hot stones. Other snack foods were made in a variety of ways: *cheng* (steaming), *pheng* (boiling small dishes), *chih* (skewering meats), *phao* (wrapping savories), *chou* (poaching packets of food), *tzu* (steeping of soups or other decoctions), and *hsi* (pickling). Since then, and in some cases perhaps even earlier, such as during the Xia Dynasty (2205-1776 BCE), there have been many snacks made in these ways. Some of them came into and went out of fashion, others remained popular but only in one or another locale, and a few remained popular continuously since these early times. Today, almost all snacks are gaining in popularity.

Perhaps it is only the word 'snack' that is new, not the snacking phenomena. 'Light refreshments' is one translation seen over time, another is 'treats.' No matter what they were called, they seem to have had a long history.

To put things in perspective, in the north of China snacking has a shorter history— less than 2,000 years, and really only since noodles and noodle soup snacks became popular there. It is believed that when snacks came into being in the north, they began as dumplings made in every manner and shape. The literature indicates that snacks began in the south of China as variations of *shou mai, wonton,* and *zongzi* (these are open-shaped dumplings, close-shaped items, and triangle-shaped items, most often wrapped and in leaves, respectively). In southern China, and wherever the capital was, the variety and consumption of snacks greatly expanded, especially during dynastic times.

Imperial leaders, their consorts, military staff, and those that managed their affairs had lots of time to enjoy these small food bites. They also had greater access to foods, and a culinary staff dedicated to making new and enticing snacks to titillate their palates. Ordinary people had neither the time nor the wealth to indulge in savory delicacies, so snacks were effectively restricted to members of Imperial households. However, over time, the names of and the snacks themselves made their way into the dietary and culinary repertory of peasants and ordinary citizens, and eventually into the hands of street vendors who sold them to the non-royals.

The first confectionery snack foods appeared some time before Western Han times (202 BCE - 8 CE). They were

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candied fruits with a pit and called a *guo,* or without one and called a *lo*. For reasons not known, some of these early confections were called "preserved meats." The most popular among them was *mei* (poorly translated as a "plum," being closer to a small apricot); the Chinese adored, as they still do today, its taste and its supposed health attributes, believing it to remove body fat. They also love the peach because Taoists considered them immortal fruits, mangoes because they are the fruit of hope, kumquats to nourish lungs and kill pain, and the Chinese olive because it is said to relieve sore throats. Other items, popular since Han times, are young boiled soy bean pods, dried sweet or plain lotus seeds, a variety of nuts and seeds mixed with honey then cooked in sweet syrup, glazed chestnuts and hazelnuts, rock candy, and sugar cane, the latter for chewing. Sweet dishes such as these had origins as snacks, but now are often served between courses during and after fancy meals in restaurants.

Regional and Local Preferences

Not all snack foods are available or desired in all parts of China, just as main meals are not alike throughout the large country. This is especially true of the grain-based foods. Rice is the staple for those whose heritage is southern and below the Yangzi River, while wheat is more common for those north of it. That means that for the morning breakfast snack, people in southern China eat a steamed rice porridge or gruel called *congee* or *juk.* Those from the north prefer wheat products, so steamed breads and noodle soup dishes are popular. Another popular northern breakfast item is a long, fried wheat cruller dipped in hot soy milk called a *yao tai.*

Repast

Published quarterly by the
Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor (CHAA)

Editor.....Randy K. Schwartz

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Northern Chinese have a preference for savory snacks, while southern Chinese prefer theirs sweet and/or savory. For generations, southerners have also favored fried dried fish snacks of every description, and they are partial, as are the Chinese in Hawaii, to "crack seed," made of small fruits or Chinese olives whose pits have been cracked. These fruits are preserved or "pickled" in a process somewhat akin to Western stewing and candying of fruit, except that the result is both sweet and savory.

Ancient regional specialties abound today in Nanjing and Shanghai. In Shanghai, three beloved snacks are shredded turnip, date-paste cakes, and steamed soup buns made with jellied soup. They also like pigeon-egg dumplings and New Year cakes with spare-ribs on their tops. Dried bean curd snacks originated in Fujian and are now popular in Nanjing. Some snacks are even more local, like those you find near the Temple of Kungfu (Confucius). There, sesame seed cakes and dried but reconstituted noodle dishes and lightly fried beef dumplings are the rage.

How Snacks Serve as Meals

Soups or gruels are an important part of breakfast in China, both north and south, and are served with other snack-type foods such as salted peanuts, pickles, salted eggs, fried shredded meat or fish, and/or spiced or dried bean curd. On working days, these morning snack meals are not leisurely experiences. They are consumed quickly and informally, and can be eaten standing up at a street vendor. Students can be seen eating theirs while walking to school, and working people have their first bite in the office before starting their day. Farmers might sit on their haunches after they walk to their fields, and there grab their own soup and small bites they brought with them.

Long before westerners were told to eat smaller meals and healthier snacks, the Chinese were feasting on daily doses of tasty small dishes we now refer to as *dim sum*. They did so at home, at their favorite street-vendors, at temple courtyards, town squares or market places.

The Chinese term *dim sum* has variously been translated into English as items to 'dot the heart,' 'eating items for pleasure,' and more recently as items to 'order what you fancy.' Although the phrase has become the most popular world-wide nomenclature for such a snack meal, in China not everyone uses these two words. In northern China, snack meals are referred to as *dian xin*, and in the south as *yum cha,* which really means to 'drink tea.' (Tea is the beverage of choice at a snack meal, especially in restaurants, whereas soup is generally preferred during a main meal.)

One hundred years ago, eating while standing on a street corner was a commonplace in Shanghai and other big cities. In Shanghai alone, more than 1,800 snack houses and portable stalls served hundreds of pastries, dumplings, and noodle delights. Exactly how many types of snacks they served is not known, but in Guangzhou, known then as Canton, there were reputed to be 1,000 different kinds of *dim sum* and other snack foods. Among these were roasted horn nuts (*Trapa bicornis*, an aquatic fruit closely related to

The March 3 *New York Times Magazine* carried a photostory on the "Night Markets of Beijing and Xian," with photos by Les Stone and text by Mimi Sheraton. At left, a vendor can pedal his food stall around the Muslim market of Xian, a provincial city in central China that is home to many Hui (Muslim) people. At right, a young woman samples a dessert skewer of fruit and fried dough at a night market in the capital, Beijing.

the water chestnut); popped grains of amaranth, rice, or sorghum; dried sweet or plain lotus seeds; yam beans (closely related to *jicama*) dipped in chili sauce; roasted or boiled sweet potatoes; and exotica such as pickled silkworms and ant eggs. Some of these are still available, others not.

The Rise of the *Dim Sum* Parlor

Nowadays, snacks are not quite so readily available on city streets as they once were in China, since many people prefer to sit indoors. Snacks are served at sit-down restaurants, in bus and railway stations, at movie, opera, and regular theaters, as well as in food courts and a myriad of other fast-food places in and outside of China. It was not until the end of the 19th Century that restaurants in and around Guangzhou (Canton) really became masters of these small items which were called *dim sum*. Having them readily available and having people ready and able to purchase them, *dim sum* really took off, so much so that snacks and snacking became a way of life for the majority of urban people. In China today, they are so popular that there are more than 300,000 registered snack/fast-food restaurants. There are many more of them in Chinatowns around the world.

Because of the considerable time and labor involved in making home-made snack foods, and because more and more women are working, and certainly because snacks taste a lot better freshly made than purchased frozen, it is now commonplace for Chinese families and individuals to go out to eat their snack foods, particularly early in the day on weekends and holidays. Over time, going out for *dim sum* began to be popular between mid-morning and late afternoon, i.e. from about seven in the morning to three or four in the afternoon. But eating *dim sum* is not restricted to those hours, since many eateries serve these small bites around the clock, every hour of every day and night.

At a large *dim sum* parlor, everyone in a big family or group can choose their own favorite snacks. They can do this because *dim sum* comes wheeled around on a cart, and most carts are filled with several different selections. Furthermore, there are usually several different carts or wagons with different snacks forever circulating around a *dim sum* restaurant. Frequenters know that some of these eateries pride themselves on having 60-100 different kinds of snacks on any given day. Some of these snacks are so-called regulars available every day, some are daily specials, some are only served in a particular season, and still others only on a specific holiday.

In the West, the phrase "snack" brings to mind a food that is fixed rapidly, and eaten rapidly. By contrast, most Chinese snack foods take a long time to prepare, as they are quite labor intensive. And although they generally can be and often are eaten quickly, they do not have to be consumed in that manner. In fact, modern *dim sum* parlors encourage their clientele to meet friends and chat, read newspapers, carry out business, and linger while enjoying their particular favorite snacks. Before health laws disallowed, elderly men used snack restaurants as places to show off their pet birds, meet friends, and chat. Nowadays, they might still bring their birds in cages, but if so, they hang them on hooks outside.

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CHINESE SNACK FOODS *continued from page 3*

A Catalog of Snack Foods

How do the Chinese categorize their snack foods? Some group them by main ingredient or mode of preparation, i.e. they speak of them as a rice snack, a noodle snack, a *congee* or soup snack, a steamed food snack, a fried or a baked one, etc. Others group them as an item that is either a single ingredient, a mixed food, a processed food, etc. Still others group them according to their region of origin or their current regional flavor.

Snacks can also be classed according to whether they mark a particular festival or event, as opposed to being eaten daily. Not all snacks are everyday foods. For instance, there are special banquet snacks, each one suited either to launching a banquet meal, subdividing the meal into courses, or completing the banquet. These banquet snacks are not normally found in most *dim sum* restaurants, nor are they usually made at home. In addition, there are even snacks that have spawned their own holidays. One that comes to mind is a Taoist festival called *Taiping Qingjiao*. This festival is neither old nor universal, having been practiced for only 300 years— but it originally revolved around a snack bun!

No matter the category, nowadays every Chinese knows that the snacks served in restaurants and those eaten at home are not quite the same. This should be kept in mind.

Among the most popular snack foods are marinated peanuts, shrimp crackers, shrimp toast, onion pancakes, turnip cakes, egg rolls, spring rolls, bean-curd rolls, steamed or barbecued spareribs, *hargau* (shrimp dumplings surrounded by the translucent outer skins known as *pi*), *jiaotze* (dumplings with the dough folded over and crimped), *shou mai* (dumplings filled with pork and shrimp and open at the top), and other dumplings of every description. There is the whole category of *mantou* (steamed buns) and other steamed breads; *charsiubau*, one of the most popular of these, in the U.S. at least, is steamed bread filled with barbecued pork, somewhat sweet. Popular among Chinese are steamed glutinous rice in lotus leaves, braised chicken or duck wings, tea eggs, crispy pig's ear, steamed rice noodle rolls, salt and pepper shrimp, barbecued duck and roast goose, almond jelly, egg tarts, the rice gruels *congee* or *juk*, and sesame seed buns, just to name a few.

In the noodle category, most snack dishes are soups. These can include roast pork noodles, dried fried bean noodles, noodles with spicy bean sauce, *wonton* filled with meat and vegetables, or a myriad of others. Most health soups are called "decoctions" and they, too, are considered snacks. Popular ones include turnip and brisket soup, apple-pear soup with pork shank, field frog and pumpkin soup, braised pigeon and shark's fin soup, and quail soup with monkey head mushrooms. These health or tonic soups can be sweet or bitter, most are only served for a medical condition, all are usually long-cooked, and almost every one includes a variety of different foods and herbs deemed medically useful.

"To the people, food is heaven."

– ancient Chinese proverb

Over the course of many years, some snack foods have fluctuated in popularity. Throughout China and among overseas Chinese, jellied bean curd and scallion pancakes are two examples of snacks now gaining in popularity, while *yuanxiou* (small cakes stuffed with osmanthus flowers) and five-flavor eggs are examples of those whose popularity is waning.

You can go to any city in China or Taiwan, or to any Chinatown no matter the country, and find lots of good foods to snack on. There are noodle and *congee* shops, hot-pot places (particularly popular late at night and in the winter), bean-curd bastions, glutinous-rice gardens, roast-meat markets, fruit-ice palaces, red-bean-soup stands, ginger-sliced-tomato trucks, and *dim sum* parlors.

Try taking in some *dim sum* and eating Chinese-style, relishing small delicacies or soup-and-noodle snacks. Enjoy and imagine this as a feast, and nibble many dishes. You can do this without knowing the language, by simply pointing out the ones you want to try. They provide unique eating experiences, pleasure, and special tastes. They will whet your appetite for more as you savor and track as many different kinds as you can. And, as with New Year dumplings, may they bring you good fortune! ■

CHINESE RAMEN IN JAPAN

by Lucy Seligman

Lucy Seligman lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is Associate Director of the Impact Fund, which provides assistance for class-action and other public-interest lawsuits. Lucy attended college in Tokyo, and from 1988-92 she edited Gochiso-sama!, *a quarterly English-language culinary newsletter from Nagoya, Japan. She then moved to Ann Arbor, where she was active as a food teacher, caterer and writer and as a CHAA member before relocating to the West Coast. She carries on her food-related activities, and in Winter 2001 she adopted a Chinese baby girl, Remy. This article is adapted from her piece on "The Art of Ramen" from* Gochiso-sama! *4:2 (Spring 1992).*

The art of making *ramen*, or Chinese noodles in soup, is an example of a food tradition successfully transplanted to Japan. These filament-like noodles are traditionally made from wheat flour, eggs, salt, and *kansui*, a special mineral water from China.

A messenger from China brought the flour food culture to Japan in the 8th Century CE. That is when the first form of noodles was seen in Japan. By the Edo period (1603-1867), there was a noodle boom in the country. In the years 1854-9 there were 3,700 noodle shops in Edo (old Tokyo) alone, with its population of one million people.

Reportedly, the first person on the islands to eat a form of *ramen* itself was Mitsukuni Mito (1628-1700), a relative of the *shogun*. The evolution of *ramen* as a dish and its many different names reflect the changing Japanese image and attitudes toward China, and the increasing popularity of Chinese food. By 1872, the year of the Friendship Treaty between China and Japan, there were over 1,100 Chinese people living in Nanking-machi (Yokohama's Chinatown), and over the next decade the number would triple. At that time, authentic Chinese restaurants were too expensive for most Japanese, but all of that would change following the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). More Chinese exchange students came to Japan, and smaller, one-dish specialty restaurants such as noodle shops opened up in Nanking-machi. The Japanese name of the noodles changed from *Nankingsoba* to *shinasoba* (used in Nanking-machi from about 1912), then to *chukasoba*, and finally, for the past 80 years, *ramen*.

The first *shinasoba* shop was opened in Nanking-machi by a Chinese. It wasn't cheap, but many people tried it because it was new. As a comparison, a *sho* (nearly 2 quarts) of rice cost 20 *sen*, while a single bowl of *shinasoba* cost 10 *sen*. There were no fancy garnishes, just noodles and a pork-based broth with a little *shoyu* (soy sauce). *Menma* (Manchurian wild rice stems, mistakenly thought to be preserved or boiled Chinese bamboo shoots) were added around 1908, and then barbecued pork. These helped to satisfy the craving of Japanese customers for little culinary embellishments, but it wasn't until after the great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 that more ornate garnishes were added.

Kansui, the mineral water that the Japanese have borrowed from China for years, is another element involved in making good *ramen* noodles. The use of *kansui* in Chinese flour products goes back over a hundred years. A Chinese farmer had found that if he used this ingredient, made from the water of Kan Lake in Northern China, then the noodles were easier to extend by hand, with a more elastic consistency and a smoother surface. The mineral water also affects the natural color of the wheat flour, giving *ramen* its distinctive yellow hue. The Chinese believed *kansui* had magical or mystical qualities.

Rairaiken, the first Chinese noodle shop in the Asakusa district of Tokyo, opened by 1911. The shop made its *ramen* noodles by the traditional method from China, including the use of *kansui* for elasticity and a technique of stretching the dough by hand. Besides *ramen*, the shop also specialized in *wonton* and *shou mai* noodles, also from China. Rairaiken quickly became popular, and *ramen* noodles spread throughout Japan.

As the popularity of *ramen* increased, more efficient methods of making the noodles were devised so as to meet burgeoning demand. In the *teuchi* method, the handmade noodles are rolled out with a rolling pin and cut with a knife. In the most common and popular method used today, the noodles are cut by machine. Machine-cut noodles have an uneven surface that absorbs more water, so that after one eats a bowl of such *ramen*, most of the soup is gone. In 1958, instant *ramen* first appeared in Japan, and in the following year baking soda was found to have chemical properties similar to *kansui*.

In Japan today, there are three main flavor variations—*shoyu* (soy sauce), *miso* (fermented soybean paste), or salt—along with dozens of regional modifications. An example of the latter is tomato *yumen*, which reflects the enduring Chinese influence on *ramen* noodles. This dish was first developed by a chef at the Taiwanese Consulate in Tokyo. The tomatoes (called "red eggplants" in Chinese) are half-boiled and then crushed with chopsticks. These are eaten with the noodles in a pork-based soup that has a special fragrance due to the use of celery leaves.

Ramen has acquired the reputation of being something of a low-class noodle dish. But ask any Japanese what food they want to eat as a late-night snack— the answer will almost invariably be *ramen*, preferably at a late-night noodle stall or shop. *Ramen* etiquette is pretty loose, but everyone agrees on one thing: the noisier the slurping, the more enjoyable the eating experience! ■

Coming in the next issue of Repast

Foods from China: Part Two

- Etta Wong on congee
- Bill Shurtleff on tofu

TAPAS REPORT

SMALL BITES, BIG FLAVORS

It might possibly have been the largest convocation of home-made *tapas* ever assembled at one time in North America! Spanish *tapas* were the theme as over 40 members of our organization gathered for our annual participatory feast on December 16. Big thank-you's are owed to lead organizer Gwen Nystuen, to hosts Carroll and John Thomson, and to post-feast quizmaster Dan Longone (the champion quiz-ee was Barbara Zaret).

And here's a little quiz of our own: after reading the summary below, you should be able to answer the two questions that were heard careening back and forth across the *tapas* tables that evening:

(1) Aren't real *tapas* always finger foods?
(2) What does the word *tapas* mean, anyway?

A prior question— why snack? why nibble?– is easily disposed of: in brief, *tapas* fill a gap between mealtimes. In Spain, the daily routine includes a morning breakfast, a large family meal (*la comida*) at 2:00, and an evening supper (*la cena*) around 10:00. This rural holdover, the custom of a main mid-day and a late evening meal, has continued even in big cities, perhaps due in part to the persistence of a farm-based economy in Iberia as a whole.

Filling a Gap in Men's Stomachs

In towns and villages, a tradition evolved for men to fraternize at the end of their workday, lingering in taverns in the early evening to while away the hours before supper. There they could converse, drink, and snack on appetizing bits of food, generically called *tapas* and provided free of charge by the bar itself. This also became a strong habit on Sundays and other religious days, in the morning hours after Catholic mass, when men did not work but women were laboring at home to prepare the midday meal. The roots of the *tapas* tradition can even be traced back as far as medieval times, when various forms of what we might today call "appetizers" first became popular.

The connection between eating and drinking was also important. Spaniards virtually never consume alcohol without eating something. This was further solidified, apparently, by an 18th-Century edict that bars and roadhouses serve some food with their wine, a bid to shore up the sobriety of coach drivers.

In large cities, a tavern could gain fame for offering many dozens of varieties of *tapas*, or for devising its own special variety. Growing rivalry among *tapas* providers helped create an urban bar-hopping scene, especially visible today among the *tascas* (beachfront bars) and *xampanyerías* (champagne bars) of Barcelona. The latter sparkling wines of Spain, which are called *cavas* but are produced in the champagne method, mostly in the Cataluña region that surrounds Barcelona, were introduced in 1872 by a venerable wine-making family. In the summer, a popular accompaniment to *tapas* is *sangría*, an iced, sweetened punch of red wine with fruit juice or bobbing morsels of fruit (lemon slices, in the version made for us by Dan Longone). The most classic drink of all among *tapeadors* is a dry, chilled *fino* or other sherry, the amber-hued fortified wine produced since ancient times around Jerez in southern Andalucía, the historic heartland of the *tapas* tradition.

Kay Oldstrom's *canapés* and Diana Warshay's Galician-style salmon with garlic and paprika. (Photos: John Nystuen)

All three major categories of *tapas* were well represented at our gathering: *cosas de picar*, *pinchos*, and *cazuelas*.

Grabbed with a Pair of Fingers

Cosas de picar, or finger foods (literally "things to bite"), represent the original and simplest form of *tapas*, such as cheese, olives and nuts. Via Zingerman's Deli, the

Nystuens brought us an imported *queso cabrales* (a creamy, blue-veined cow's-milk cheese aged in the mountain caves of Asturias) suitable for spreading on a dry crust, as well as two varieties of pickled green olive (the small, delicate *manzanilla* typical of Andalucía, and the large, firm *arbequina* of Cataluña). Barbara DeWolfe stuffed halves of grape tomatoes with some olive *tapenade*, while Eleanor Hoag stuffed halves of hard-boiled eggs with a tomato-based sauce of flaked salmon. We nibbled on toasted blanched almonds as well; in Spain, fried *garbanzos* are also quite popular.

Kay Oldstrom made some strikingly handsome *canapés* of bread rounds with blue and other cheeses, variously topped with *pimientos*, baby shrimps and sliced green olives, toasted walnut halves, cucumber slices with dill, and segments of Clementine oranges (the latter, so popular around Valencia, are named for Father Clément, a priest/gardener of Messerghine, Algeria who originated them in the late 1800s). Marcie Holtzman-Wax prepared *tostadas* (bread toasts akin to Italian *bruschetti*), some topped with creamed avocado and cumin, others with olive oil and crushed tomatoes.

The popularity of *canapés* and *tostadas* must have helped inspire an old theory as to the origin of *tapas*. Since *tapa* is a Castillian word for "lid," some have guessed that the term arose from a practice of Andalusian innkeepers rushing a glass of wine to coach-borne travelers when their horses were changed, the wineglass being covered with a slice of bread against the swirling debris of the courtyard. Similarly, others have speculated that inside bars, it became the practice to place a morsel of food on a saucer covering a glass of wine when served, or that bread slices or other food scraps, used as makeshift lids for the jugs of wine themselves, came to be offered free to customers.

While some of these practices conceivably did occur, the word *tapas* and the tradition behind it seem to go back much further. *Tapáshúr* was a medieval Andalucían term meaning "tidbit, delicacy," from an Arabic verb meaning "to be prosperous, to live in luxury" (for more details see Randy Schwartz, "Searching for the Pre-Expulsion Foods of Spain," *Repast* Winter 2001). Wealthy Moorish notables would regale their house guests with a sumptuous array of olives, cheeses, sausages and the like, presented as appetizers on small plates. As the peninsula was gradually conquered for Christianity between 1000 and 1500, the new noblemen seem to have adopted, among others of the Moors' customs, their fondness for appetizers. In the 1600s, the *aperitivo* was still such a singular Iberian phenomenon that it was remarked upon with great surprise by French travelers.

Speared with a Cocktail Stick

Bob Lusardi made us a platter of classic *tapas* called *banderillas*, arranging them nicely to contrast their red color beside the green of pickled olives and *cornichons*. To assemble them, he sautéed morsels of garlic, then wrapped each one with a filleted anchovy and a strip of roasted red pepper, skewering these with little plastic swords. It's the red pepper that makes *banderillas* resemble their namesake, the decorated darts used in bullfighting.

Clearly, *banderillas* represent a species of *tapas* more ambitious than the primeval form. They belong to the second category, called *pinchos*: those that are eaten not from the fingers, but from cocktail sticks or tiny forks.

It's an even bigger step up if cooking-heat is needed in preparing a *tapa*, as that calls for a tavern equipped with a kitchen. Morsels of seafood or vegetable that are dusted with flour or coated in light batter can then be fried in oil, for example. In Portugal, these latter came to be called *tempuras*, a foodway transplanted by 17th-Century missionaries to Japan. The southern and eastern coasts of Spain are similarly famous for their *fritura andaluza* (fried anchovies and sardines) and *verdura frita* (fried vegetables). These fries are all served with *all-i-oli* (literally "garlic and oil"), the classic "garlic mayonnaise." White, creamy and thick, traditionally it's made by emulsifying crushed garlic in olive oil using a mortar and pestle, or nowadays often with a blender and with the addition of raw egg and lemon juice or vinegar.

John Thomson made such *verdura frita* of potato, cabbage and cauliflower in an unusual "pancake" form, using a recipe in Joanne Weir's *From Tapas to Meze*. To accompany it, he whisked together olive oil, Spanish *cava* vinegar and Egg Beaters to make *all-i-oli negat*, an intentionally "separated" version of *all-i-oli* that is also often added to fish stews and sauces.

Julie Lewis, who dreamed up this idea of a *tapas* feast, assembled a pretty platter of *mejillones en vinagreta* (marinated mussels). The fjord-like *rias bajas* of the northwest Galician coast abound with high-quality mussels, making Spain the world's leading producer. In this recipe, after the bivalves are steamed or boiled open, their meat is pulled out and marinated overnight in vinegar with other ingredients— in Julie's version, tomatoes, smoked ham, red and green peppers, onion, garlic, and saffron. (Eleanor Hoag also contributed some marinated mussels, using a simpler recipe that calls for capers, pepper, onion and parsley.) The meat and marinade are spooned back into the half-shells. In a *tapas* bar, these mussels are usually eaten with tiny appetizer forks.

Sherry Sundling cooked us a *tortilla* incorporating tomatoes and onions, spiced with cumin and cilantro, while Gwen Nystuen made us two, including the now-classic version with potatoes. The Spanish *tortilla* (not to be confused with the Mexican *tortilla*), is a dense but moist egg cake. It's one of many examples of dishes that were well-established long before they took the stage as *tapas*. The *tortilla* was devised in the dry central plains of Castilla La Mancha as a simple but filling peasant meal, although something approaching it appeared in Ruperto de Nola's aristocratic cookbook *El Libre del Coch* (Cataluña, c. 1520). It's cooked in olive oil or lard, in a skillet that gives it a disk shape 2-3 inches thick, and it's flipped once to have a golden crust on both sides. Today, it's the most common and versa-

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TAPAS REPORT *continued from previous page*

tile dish in Spain. As *tapa*, a *tortilla* will be sliced into wedges or squares and served warm or at room temperature, either with toothpicks or *montadito*, i.e. "mounted" on a slice of bread and topped with a strip of red pepper.

The white potato made an earlier impact on Spain than other parts of Europe. It arrived from the Andes about 1570, and its cultivation became a specialty in the cool climate of Galicia. There, potatoes are often teamed up with the local mussels in *tortillas*, salads and other dishes. New member Phil Zaret took a bolder tack with his potatoes, making us a delicious batch of *patatas bravas*, a *tapa* particularly beloved in Madrid. The chunks of peeled potato are browned in oil, then lightly coated with a tomato sauce spiced with red pepper (paprika and/or chilies), and eaten with toothpicks. What a neat way to blend three ingredients from the New World!

Forked from a Little Bowl

If a *tapa* has a sauce serious enough to call for a fork and/or a hunk of bread for sopping, it's reached the third and highest stage: the *cazuela*, named after the little earthenware bowl often used to cook and serve it.

(Lest anyone get *too* ambitious, we note in passing that no concoction that requires a spoon to eat, nor still less a knife, can possibly be called a *tapa*. It's also considered bad form to pass off as *tapa* anything that requires a largish plate, since the latter would imply disrespect for the women who are traditionally toiling at home to prepare a full meal.)

Richard McDonald, who's done a cooking show or two on *tapas*, brought us *garbanzos* simmered in water and enriched with tomato, sautéed onions and garlic, a recipe from Penelope Casas' *Tapas: The Little Dishes of Spain*. The dish is a relative of the old *olla morisca* ("Moorish Pot"), a chickpea stew sweetened with honey or pomegranate, especially well-appreciated in Andalucía and Castilla. Toni Hopping prepared us another *cazuela* very popular in Spain, particularly on the southern coast: *gambas al ajillo* or shrimp with garlic, fried in olive oil with other herbs, red pepper flakes, and slices of red and yellow bell peppers.

Mary Lou Unterburger made us *champiñones en escabeche* (marinated mushrooms), a *tapa* recipe that appears in Ann and Larry Walker's *A Season in Spain*. *Escabeche* (from the Arabic *as-sikbaj*, "vinegar stew") is a marinating technique bequeathed to Spain by the Moors. Arabs and Jews would fry fish in olive oil, then stew this in vinegar with other ingredients before allowing it to cool and set as a preserving jelly. In its early form, as recorded in de Nola's cookbook and in the *Libre de Sent Sovi* (Cataluña, 1324), the pickling juices were often sweetened with sugar, honey, raisins or dates, whereas the modern Spanish form of *escabeche*, used for fish, fowl and game, tends to be sour rather than sweet-and-sour.

We were able to sample three different renditions of the little meatballs called *albóndigas* (from the Arabic *al-bunduq*, "hazelnut"), so named because of their size and shape. In Moorish times they were most closely associated with the Jews, who often used them as a way to add a bit of precious meat to their Sabbath stew (for more information, see the aforementioned article in our Winter 2001 issue). Randy Schwartz made such a stew using a recipe in Gitlitz and Davidson's *A Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain's Secret Jews*. The meatballs are mixed from ground beef, egg, matzo meal, cumin and other spices, fried in olive oil and vinegar, then stewed in a vinegary broth along with *garbanzos* and chopped red chard. All three steps— mixing, frying and stewing— also incorporate a mock version of *almorí*, a Moorish fermented sauce. The *albóndigas* made by Marjorie Reade were of ground lamb instead, using a recipe from a restaurant in Cataluña compiled by Penelope Casas in *The Foods and Wines of Spain*. The lamb is mixed with egg, breadcrumbs, garlic and other herbs, then fried in olive oil with chopped onion. Brandy is added to this and ignited, followed by tomato sauce and meat broth for simmering. A similar lamb version, made by Doris Miller using a recipe from a friend, included nutmeg among the spices, and a tomato-based sauce incor-

Part of our buffet of *tapas*, including (from foreground) *banderillas*, *champiñones en escabeche*, *gambas al ajillo*, bread, *mejillones en vinagreta* and *huevos rellenos de salmón*.

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JOAN NATHAN ON SEPHARDIC CUISINE

&

FROM ANCIENT BIBLICAL LANDS TO MODERN ISRAEL

by Pat Cornett

Dr. Cornett is a writer in Beverly Hills, MI. She is a longtime member of our group, and a past editor of this newsletter.

Joan Nathan, the well-known cookbook author and expert on Jewish food, gave a talk "History and Culture of Sephardic Cooking" on Sunday, March 10 in the sanctuary at Temple Beth Emeth in Ann Arbor. Sephardic cuisine, she informed us, is an amalgam of the foods and traditions of Jews who were driven out of Iberia ("Sepharadh" in Hebrew) in the 14th and 15th Centuries and settled in countries as far-flung as Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, Morocco, Holland, and Brazil. Ms. Nathan, a University of Michigan alumna with bachelor and master degrees from UM, emphasized two major themes in her talk: the basis of Jewish cooking in ancient Israel and the Bible, and the adaptability of Jewish cuisine to new lands and cultures.

She began her talk by stressing the ancient roots of Jewish culinary practices. The foundation is the culinary references and dietary laws of Deuteronomy and other books of the Old Testament, which describe the use of such foods as figs, dates, pomegranates, olives, grapes, barley, wheat, milk, meat and fish. The "land of milk and honey" likely referred not to fresh cow's milk and bee's honey, as we might suppose today, but to *laban* (a drink of thinned yogurt from cows, goats or sheep) and *dibis* (date syrup).

The arid agriculture of ancient Israel also influenced Jewish culinary traditions. Ms. Nathan noted that Spring is the only season when many plants grow in the desert. She described her visits to a Bedouin village in the Negev desert, where families still live much as people did in ancient times. These visits were filmed for Ms. Nathan's 1992 TV documentary "Passover: Traditions of Freedom." The women still prepare flatbread grilled over an open fire and still collect wild greens, such as dandelions, for salads and fillings. Although the Israeli Bedouins no longer live in tents, their way of life gives us a glimpse into Israel's ancient past and its culinary traditions.

After arising in the arid lands of ancient Israel amid strict dietary laws, Jewish cuisine became notable for its ability to adapt to the other lands where Jews settled after their Diaspora, or dispersion. As Jews wandered, they collected food customs and recipes along the way. Thus, the grilled flatbread of the desert Bedouin became transformed over the centuries into the *matzah* served at Passover, into *pita* bread, and even into modern pizza. Ms. Nathan drew the parallel between the flatbread that Sarah might have baked on an open stone oven in Biblical times and the modern Jewish pizza that Wolfgang Puck created for his gourmet California restaurant.

As an example of Sephardic cuisine, Ms. Nathan focused on Moroccan foods and cooking, although she also mentioned Yemenite and Syrian culinary traditions. Moroccan Jewish cooking is similar to Spanish, partly because of the geographic proximity of the two countries and their interchange of peoples and cultures. Typical Moroccan foods include *couscous*, lamb *tajines* (stews), preserved lemons, and spicy fish balls.

Throughout her talk, Ms. Nathan enlivened her descriptions with telling anecdotes. In ancient times, for example, Middle Eastern Jews rarely ate fava beans, in part because, like many other Mediterranean peoples, they were genetically predisposed to *favism*, an enzymatic disorder in which exposure to these beans can lead to severe anemia. In place of fava beans, they made lentils or chickpeas their staple legume.

Because her talk coincided with the Spring season of Passover, Ms. Nathan drew examples from many of the foods traditionally served during that holiday. Passover, she emphasized, which marks the liberation of the Jews from Egypt and their exodus or "passing over" to the promised land, is the oldest holiday still celebrated by Jews all over the world. It is the one time of the year when Jews can happily return to their roots. Through the special foods served at Passover, Jews renew their connection with their Jewishness, or as Ms. Nathan put it, "Passover recipes can recall us to Aunt Sadie."

She also made the connection between the desert foods of the Bedouins and the foods traditionally served at the Seder ceremony marking Passover: Spring lamb, unleavened flatbread or *matzah*, and Spring greens or *maror* ("bitter herbs"). Sephardic foods for Passover differ in many ways from those in the Ashkenazic, or German and eastern European, traditions. Among the Ashkenazim, for example, the dish *haroset*, which symbolizes the mortar trowelled by the Jewish slaves building pyramids for the Pharaoh, is a relish of chopped fruits, nuts, and honey. In contrast, the *haroset* of Syrian and Iraqi Jews is date syrup boiled down and sprinkled with nuts, and the *haroset* of Moroccan Jews is a sticky sweet mixture of dates and nuts, rolled into balls the size of hazelnuts.

Ms. Nathan also described several unusual Sephardic traditions at Seder. Moroccan Jews don't eat olives during Passover, for example, because they believe that they induce forgetfulness. Among Ashkenazim, hiding a piece of *matzah* for the youngest child to find is a Seder custom (called *afikomen*), whereas Syrian Jews at Seder place *matzah* in a

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MORSELS & TIDBITS

CHAA member **Marjorie Reade** recently contributed as writer and associate editor for a collection of reminiscences from Helen Hill, ed., *The Man Who Eats Snakes and Other Tales: Reminiscences of the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Turner Geriatric Ctr., 2001; 399pp., $14.95 paper). The anthology, a project of the Turner Center's Learning in Retirement Collective, compiles stories from more than a dozen participants in a memoir-writing class taught there by Hill. Marjorie's own memoir in the book describes what it was like growing up in the 1920s on her maternal grandparents' homestead, a wheat and dairy farm in the prairie country near Voss, South Dakota. She recounts exploring with her siblings the granary, forge, potato cellar and other buildings, and helping out in the kitchen and with other chores— laundry, canning, tending the chickens, weeding the wheat fields. Marjorie co-authored an earlier book, *Historic Buildings: Ann Arbor, Michigan* (1992, 1998).

Member **Ari Weinzweig**, co-owner of Zingerman's in Ann Arbor, called us recently to note that the deli now offers Carolina golden rice, both in its rice pudding and packaged for retail. As **Karen Hess** documented in her *The Carolina Rice Kitchen: The African Connection* (Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1998), this variety of rice was being cultivated by Africans in the tidal swamps around Cape Fear by the 1690s, and it flourished there until about 1900, succumbing to competition from Arkansas producers of more conventional strains of rice. The deli also sells an old rice varietal imported from southeastern Spain called La Bomba ("the pump"), a hyper-absorbent, short-grained rice considered ideal for *paella*. Tests show that its grains absorb 3.7 times their weight in cooking broth!

In this column in our last issue, we mentioned two recent books on the history of chocolate. Now we have word of a museum exhibit on chocolate, and two additional books. **The Field Museum**, the natural history museum in Chicago, has mounted an exhibit entitled "Chocolate," exploring the botany, economy and anthropology of this food. On display are Aztec and Mayan ceramics and ritual objects, European chocolate services of porcelain and silver, as well as harvesting tools, packaging and advertisements from around the world. The exhibit, which continues through Dec. 31 before a four-year tour, is open daily; the $14 admission includes the general museum fee. Two books were issued by the New York publishing house Harry N. Abrams this winter to accompany the show. First, for the more serious reader, there is **Ruth Lopez**, *Chocolate: The Nature of Indulgence* (143pp., $29.95 cloth) which documents cacao plantations and workers, chocolate's role in the slave trade, its manufacturing process, medicinal uses, role in wartime, corporate history and rivalry, the evolution of candy ads, etc. with the help of 130 photos and illustrations. Also visually stunning, directed mostly at younger readers, is **Robert Burleigh**'s *Chocolate: Riches from the Rainforest* (40pp., $16.95 cloth).

The **University of Pennsylvania** library system has inaugurated an online digital archives accessible at www.library.upenn.edu. In addition to historical books and manuscripts, including culinarily significant ones, the archives will include full-text access to all new history books published each year by Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, more than 300 titles annually.

Mark Kurlansky, whose history of cod was noted in this column in Fall 1999, has followed up with *Salt: A World History* (New York: Walker and Co., 2002; 484pp., $28 cloth). Arranged chronologically, the book covers such topics as salt's place in ancient belief, the use of salt throughout history as a preservative, the evolution of production methods and trade routes, its role in politics, taxation and war, and our understanding of the health status of salt. There is also now an American edition of French organic chemist **Pierre Laszlo**'s multidisciplinary *Salt: Grain of Life* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001; 256pp., $22.95 cloth), which is organized thematically to treat everything from the history of salt harvesting, salt-cured foods and various sauces, to the chemistry and biology of salt as well as its place in myth and literature.

In this space in our Spring 2000 issue, we heralded the long-awaited appearance of *The Oxford Companion to Food* edited by **Alan Davidson**, a former British diplomat and co-founder of the annual Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery. Among hundreds of other achievements large and small, the *Companion* succeeded in bringing to light a previously forgotten book first published in London in 1859, Peter Lund Simmonds' *The Curiosities of Food, or the Dainties and Delicacies of Different Nations Obtained from the Animal Kingdom*. Since then, in 2001, a facsimile edition of this treasure was put into print by Berkeley's Ten Speed Press (372pp., $16.95 cloth). Its title is appropriate: anyone who is curious about the carnivorous habits of the world's peoples will have a lot to chew on from this book, which sinks its teeth into such questions as the authenticity of hippophagy ("Is wholesome horse-flesh agreeable enough to tempt men, not starving, to eat it?") and how to roast an elephant ("They relieve one another in quick succession, each man running in and raking the ashes for a few seconds, and then pitching the pole to his comrade, and retreating, since the heat is so intense that it is scarcely to be endured.")

Also recently brought out with Alan Davidson's guidance is *Medieval Arab Cookery* (Devon, UK: Prospect Books, 2001; 527pp., cloth), a valuable collection of previously hard-to-find or untranslated materials. The volume includes the Englishman A. J. Arberry's 1939 translation of al-Baghdádí's cookery manuscript from 13th-Century Iraq, as well as translated versions of writings by the French Arabist Maxime Rodinson, viz. his 1949 article "Studies in Arabic Manuscripts Relating to Cookery" and three of his essays exploring Arab influence on European cuisine by way of Venetian and Ottoman trade. The scholar

MORSELS & TIDBITS *continued from previous page*

Charles Perry has added two translations of his own: Ibn al-Mubarrad's text from 15th-Century Damascus, and "The Description of Familiar Foods," a manuscript collection in the Topkapi Palace. There are also 11 brief essays by Perry on selected topics, many of which appeared first in Davidson's journal *Petits Propos Culinaires*. Perry is quite possibly the world's leading authority on Arab cuisine in the Middle Ages, although our own readers are more likely to know him as the author of brief food-history columns under the heading "Fork Lore" in the *Ann Arbor News*, syndicated from the *L.A. Times*. The book is distributed in the U.S. by Food Heritage Press (Ipswich, MA and online) for $55.

Contact the *Repast* editor for more information about these European conferences:

Sep. 7-8, 2002: Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, on the theme of Fat, "both as a quality of the individual and as a cooking medium." St. Antony's College, Oxford, UK. (The theme for 2003 will be Food and Children.)

Dec. 2002: Colloquium on Food, Body, and Health. Hosted by the European Institute of Food History (IEHA), Strasbourg, France.

Dec. 2002: Colloquium on the History of Culinary Innovation from the Second Half of the 19th Century to Today. Organized by the Research Center on the History of Innovation (CRHI), Université Paris-IV Sorbonne, Paris, France. ■

JOAN NATHAN *continued from page 9*

sack over their shoulders in memory of the hurried departure from Egypt, which is the symbolism of the omission of leavening from the bread. As the sack is passed from one guest to the next, each one recites in turn: Where have we come from? Answer: Israel. Where are we going? Answer: Jerusalem. Among Moroccan Jews, a very large Seder plate is passed over the heads of the guests while songs of freedom are sung.

Many more examples like these can be found in Ms. Nathan's latest book, *The Foods of Israel Today*, an encyclopedic culinary history, cookbook, and travel guide to the multi-cultural melting pot of modern Israel. She decided to write the book, she said, on the night Israel's Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1995, because she realized the timeliness of such a book and the need to capture Rabin's spirit before it was too late. As she writes in the introduction to her book, Rabin was "an emblem of the vibrant, dynamic spirit of Israel, a blending of many cultures and ethnic and religious diversity." Sadly, the awful events of the last 18 months in Israel have made her insights prophetic. "I couldn't write the book today," she commented.

After her talk, Ms. Nathan met with members of the audience at a reception and signed copies of her books. She has produced several television series and documentaries as well as six cookbooks, of which *Jewish Cooking in America* is perhaps the best known. ■

TAPAS REPORT *continued from page 8*

porating sautéed onions, green pepper and wine.

In modern Spain, *albóndigas* presented as *tapas* are usually made partly or wholly from pork. They might be served with the tomato sauce in which they were stewed, in which case they are eaten with a fork. Or they might simply be fried and served "nude" in *pincho* form, with a cocktail stick and a dollop of *all-i-oli*.

Jean Kluge made us a dish of *chorizos*. She browned slices of this smoky, tangy pork sausage and added bits of garlic and bell pepper, followed by wine. *Chorizos* are by far the most popular sausages in Spain. They're cured from minced pork shoulder, with lots of garlic and one or another grade of *pimenton* paprika, which gives them a rusty-red color. Castilla and Extremadura, in the center of the peninsula, are especially renowned for their *chorizos*, as the western Pyrenees are for the miniature *choricitos*. At *tapas* bars, *chorizos* are most often served simply as *pinchos* (with toothpicks and bread), either sliced and cold, or cut into little tidbits and fried, but *cazuelas* like the one Jean made are also popular.

The Surprise of Little Pies

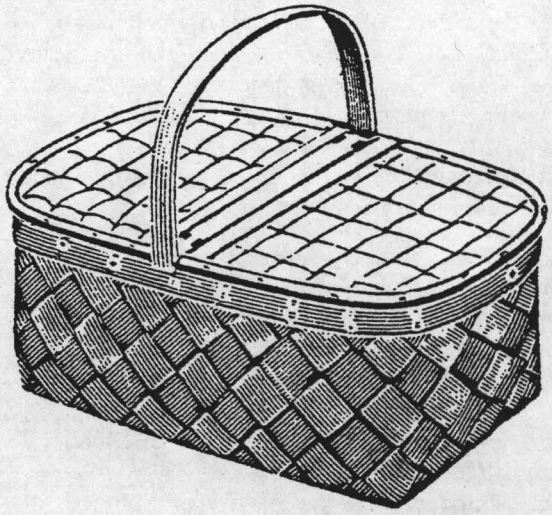
Having discussed the three major groups of *tapas*, it's only proper to admit that there are exceptions. One dish that defies categories is the *empanadilla*, a downsized version of the older *empanada*, a savory baked pie of meat or fish in a double crust. Being about 3 inches in diameter, the *empanadilla* is small enough to qualify as *tapa*. In Spain, it would generally be eaten from a plate with a fork; yet, being self-contained in its crust, it doesn't really qualify as a *cazuela*.

Marjorie Cripps made her *empanadillas* with a filling of anchovies, caramelized onions, garlic and capers. She rolled out a pastry dough relatively thick, and cut out circles to line individual tartlet shells. She baked these "blind" first for firmness, then spooned in the filling before their final turn in the oven. This one-crust miniature pie can be called by the more specialized name *tartaleta*. There's also a second form of *empanadilla*, in which the pastry circles are simply filled, folded over and sealed to make a "turnover" that's either baked or fried.

Empanadas and *empanadillas* are a specialty of Galicia and seem to have originated there, as evidenced by a document from way back in 7th-Century Visigothic Spain. The *empanada* became popular as travelers' fare, preserving meats that would otherwise spoil by encasing them in bread (in fact, *empanada* means "breaded"). On the downside, it wasn't uncommon for a traveler to buy a pie from some merchant, only to be surprised later by the unsavory— if not downright putrid— excuse for a filling that had been hidden inside. A 17th-Century satirist, Francisco de Quevedo, jested about an *empanada de ajusticiado*— a pie stuffed with the flesh of a man condemned by the royal courts. And wouldn't that be a dainty dish to set before the King!

Now, go back and answer the pair of quiz questions that we posed at the top of this report! ■

CHAA CALENDAR



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Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor Volume XVIII Number 2, Spring 2002

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