



that his work was studied at the court of Charlemagne, proving that *De re coquinaria* was more than a passing fad.⁴

As the Roman Empire declined, asceticism took over. Feasting lost favor and with it any intellectual investigation of gastronomy. Curbed by Christianity, good eating was permissible to maintain health, but only when punctuated by fast days. Here entered Joannes Cassianus, or John the Hermit, who was the first to set the scene for clean living at the start of the fifth century c.e. His writings inspired Dante and Thomas Aquinas, and his *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium viliorum remediis* (On the Management of Monastic Communities, and on Eight Ways of Curing Their Main Defects) established principles for community life that strongly influenced the monastic orders established in later centuries. Christians were preoccupied, not to say obsessed, with right and wrong, with sin and sanctity. And one of the deadly sins was gluttony. Since ecclesiastical institutions often took the lead in educating the surrounding population, and also offered open hospitality to travelers, Cassianus's rules have had immense influence down the centuries.

Cassianus's manuscript opens with four books on the appropriate garb for the secluded life, then launches into an analysis of eight principal vices, of which gourmandise is the first. The book

has no recipes but plenty of very modern advice. Cassianus identifies three dangers: eating earlier than the customary time (in effect, snacking), eating too much of any food, and overenjoyment of rare and succulent dishes. Following the ascetic principle, he recommends periods of fasting, but like a modern diet guru, he recognizes that one's diet should be varied to suit the human body and the willpower of the spirit.

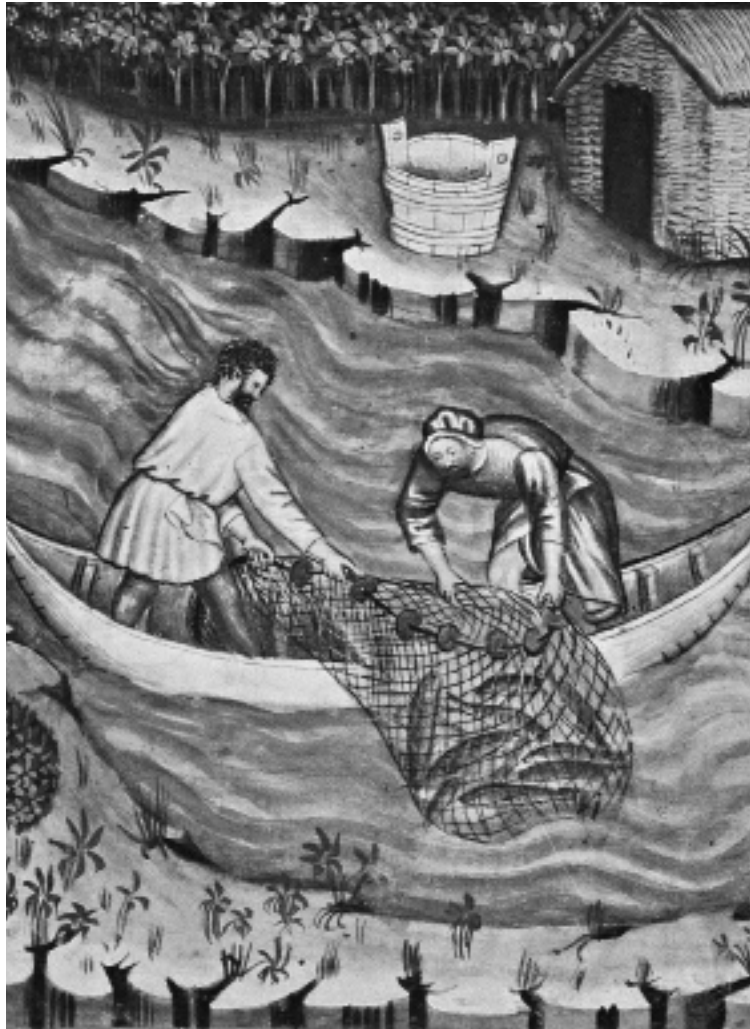
ABOVE In the early sixteenth century, the austerity of the Reformation had not yet reached monastic communities like that of these Benedictine monks, pictured in a fresco by Sodoma from 1505–8 at the Monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore. Members of religious orders often lived as comfortably as their secular counterparts did.

OPPOSITE The oldest book in our collection is Cassianus's *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium viliorum remediis*, printed in Venice in 1491 and therefore one of the coveted band of incunabula that appeared before 1501. The book, of almost quarto size, is bound in vellum that probably dates from the sixteenth century. It lacks a title page; indeed, like many books of the period, it may never have had one. Early printed books looked very much like manuscripts, with wide margins for the insertion of comments. Gaps at the heads of chapters or paragraphs invited the addition of brightly colored capital letters or illuminations, though none have been inserted here. The crisp black Gothic type of *De institutis coenobiorum* is eminently legible, in keeping with the author's down-to-earth, albeit pious, style. No one, admonishes Cassianus, should eat to satiety lest heaviness of body and spirit kindle the fires of vice. The author, trained in the hard monastic life of lower Egypt as well as the more pliant approach of Palestine, Constantinople, and Rome, founded the celebrated monastic Abbey of Saint-Victor (which still exists) as well as a convent for nuns.

mon; and finally blowing out the contents of a real egg, washing the shell, and stuffing the almond mixture inside. The whole was roasted in ashes and, triumphantly, served as a hard-boiled egg! Another ruse was to buy a dispensation from church authorities. One of the splendid fifteenth-century towers of the gothic cathedral in Rouen is known as the “Butter Tower” because it was paid for with butter dispensations during Lent. Those who could not afford butter had to eat oil—of such poor quality, complained Martin Luther, that “people in Rome would not use [it] to grease their shoes.”⁴

With the Reformation in the sixteenth century, fasting took another turn. People were fed up with the corruption of the Catholic Church, which had found ways to turn fasting into profit. Reformer John Calvin remarked, “It would be much more satisfactory if fasting were not practiced at all, than diligently observed and at the same time corrupted with false and pernicious habits.”⁵ The practice remained strongest in Catholic countries, reflected in cookbooks such as *Le cuisinier françois* (1651), which still divided recipes according to fast days and meat days, with specific sections for Lent. But even in France, fasting was increasingly questioned. Voltaire attacked it in the eighteenth century, asking, “Why does the Roman church consider it a crime to eat terrestrial animals during the days of abstinence, and a good action to be served soles and salmon? The rich papist who has five hundred francs’ worth of fish on his table will be saved; and the poor man dying of hunger who ate four sous’ worth of pork, will be damned.”⁶

By the nineteenth century, the observance of fast days was just a memory for all but the dedicated few. In America, the tradition of



fasts and feasts never became established. Yet with the decline of fasting, something has been lost: feasting without fasting lacks the sybaritic edge. Eggs were beloved at Easter precisely because they had been forbidden during Lent. Feasting is far more fun to contemplate than fasting, but one reason that any banquet is such a treat is the abstinence that precedes it. ♦

1 Ken Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 196.

2 Thomas Tusser, *His Good Points of Husbandry*, ed. Dorothy Hartley (London: Country Life Limited, 1931), 29.

3 William Nelson, *A Fifteenth Century Schoolbook* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 8.

4 Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe*, 200.

5 Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2:1245.

6 Voltaire, quoted in Albala, *Food in Early Modern Europe*, 207.

dients of the time. Every cookbook includes at least one jance, and consistency would have been thick, like hummus, as fluid sauces were a problem in the days before the dinner plate. *Saupiquet* is equally classic, a sauce colored with saffron and piquant with black pepper and grains of paradise. The recipe in this chapter comes from *Du fait de cuisine*, a manuscript dating from 1420 and inscribed for Duke Amadeus of Savoy. Together these five recipes provide a brief glimpse of the complexities of medieval cooking, set against the backdrop of the demanding world of the kitchen with its smoky open fires and hard, muscular work.



From the master cook to Richard II of England, *Forme of Cury* (England, 1390; recipe from 1780 edition): *Take Colyandre [coriander], Caraway, smale groñden, Powdō of Pep, and garlic ygroñde ī rede wyne, medle [mingle] alle fise [this] togyd, and salt it, take loyne of pork rawe and fle [free] of the skyn, and pryk it wel with a knyf, and lay it in the sawse, roost þof [thereof] what þ [thou] wilt, & keep fat, þ [that that] fallith þfrom [therefrom] ī the rosting, and seep [seethe] it in a poffynet [pipkin] with faire broth, & serve it forþ [forth] with þ [the] roost anoon [immediately].*

THIS SUCCULENT PORK RECIPE is easier to decipher than most. The meat is seasoned with a lively mixture of spices (all native to Europe except for black pepper), crushed garlic, and red wine, then cooked twice, first roasted on a spit to caramelize some of the juices for flavor, and then simmered in broth until meltingly tender. I've modified the method slightly so one pot serves for both stages of cooking. The peppery sauce marries perfectly with a side dish of roasted root vegetables.

Spicy Roast Pork *Serves 4*

- 2 teaspoons coriander seeds
- 2 teaspoons caraway seeds
- 2 teaspoons pepper
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 10 to 12 garlic cloves, cut into pieces
- 2 to 3 tablespoons red wine
- One 2-pound (900-g) boneless pork loin roast
- 2 cups (500 ml) veal broth
- Kitchen string

Heat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Finely grind together the spices and salt in a mortar with a pestle. Add the garlic and crush it also. Work in enough wine to form a paste.

Slash deep, lengthwise cuts in the meat, about 1 inch (2.5 cm) apart, and insert some of the spiced garlic paste. Roll and tie the roast with the string. Put the meat in a flameproof casserole and spread the remaining garlic paste on top. Roast the pork,

Cormarye
