

Medieval Manuscripts: Bread in the 15th-century

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The Bibliothèque nationale de France is a trove of hidden treasures, for, although researchers visit this unique library time and time again, its contents are seemingly endless. Manuscript Latin 9333 has a very special story. It apparently went missing in 1848 for unknown reasons, only to appear a hundred years later in 1948 for the first time in the hands of a researcher in the reading room. This researcher, none other than Otto Pächt, recognised its outstanding artistic worth and announced his find as a “rediscovery”. Another fifty years were to pass, however, before the particular appeal of this remarkable manuscript was once again remembered. Now, at last, a facsimile edition acknowledges the book’s true importance.



Photo courtesy Moleiro Editor

We now move on to the bakery where a woman next to the counter can be seen watching a young baker removing several large, round, white loaves from the oven (f. 61). The basket on the counter is already full and several more loaves lie on the table. Whereas the back door in the Italian image leads into a dark room, the German artist depicts it opening onto a magnificent landscape in the small inset with shapes of hills or perhaps mountains vaguely suggested in the distance, and a blue sky. One remarkable detail in this miniature is that, as we know, a bakery requires a chimney, hence the one on the roof.



Photo courtesy Moleiro Editor

The situation in the miniature of brown bread (f. 61v) is completely different: the setting is the public bakery, the sort that used to exist in towns and villages. Several balls of dough can be seen on boards mounted on trestles. A group of women has gone to bake their bread; one of them uses a pallet to put the two loaves into the oven. The baked bread, easily distinguished from the white dough on the boards, is put into a large basket.

Original description of the miniature f. 61:

Panis opus. Complexio: calida in 2°. Electio: qui minus habet furfuris et steterit per noctem ante coctionem. Iuuamentum: optemperat uentrem. Nocumentum: inducit pruritem et scabiem. Remotio nocumenti: cum copanagio unctuoso. Quid generat: nutrimentum bonum. Conuenit omnibus complexionibus etatibus temperatibus et regionibus habitatis.

Brown bread. Nature: hot in the second degree. Optimum: with little crust and risen overnight before baking. Benefit: it moves the bowels. Harm: it causes itching and scabies. Remedy for harm: with fatty food. Effects: good food. Advisable for all temperaments, ages, seasons and inhabited regions.



Photo courtesy Moleiro Editor

The illustration of unleavened bread (f. 62), referred to in the German translation as “peasants’ bread without yeast”, focuses on a different world. A few woodcutters taking a break from their work have cut slices from a large loaf. The youngest is eating whilst the oldest gives him something to drink: obviously red wine in the Italian version, a drink probably unthinkable for the German miniaturist.

Original description of the miniature f. 62:

Panis azimus Complectio temperate frigida in 2^o Electio salitus et bene coctus luuamentum corporibus lapsis et exercctatis Nocumentum generat inflationem et uentositatem et opilationem Remotio nocumenticum vino ueteri bono Quid generat flegma viscosum et multum Conuenit calidis exercitantibus iuuenibus yeme frigidis regionibus.

Unleavened bread. Nature: moderately dry in the second degree. Optimum: salted and well baked. Benefit: for untuned and exercised bodies. Harm: it causes bloating, flatulence and obstructions. Remedy for harm: with good, mature wine. Effects: much thick phlegm. Advisable for hot [temperaments], those who take exercise, youth, in winter and in cold regions.

This was an excerpt from the Tacuinum Sanitatis commentary volume by Eberhard König (Freie Universität Berlin) and Carlos Miranda García-Tejedor (Doctor in Historia). Our thanks to Moleiro Editor for this text and images. You can learn more about the Tacuinum Sanitatis by visiting their website: www.moleiro.com