

Pies and Tarts in the German Renaissance Tradition

Pies, tarts, and pastries show up early on in the German recipe corpus and by the sixteenth century represent a varied and rich class of foods. The grand *New Kochbuch* by Marx Rumpolt (1581) lists 46 recipes for meat pastries, 20 for fish, and 46 more for *Durten*, various pies based on fruit or dairy. Meanwhile, the recipe book of Philippine Welser (probably from the 1550s) gives us a glimpse of the variety that existed within a given category, offering many ways of turning apples or almonds into tarts and pies. It is likely there was a great deal of local variety in recipes by this time, and while the artistic display of grand, decorated pastries does not seem to have featured largely, they were prestigious dishes often involving expensive ingredients. Here, I mainly hope to lay out a number of recipes to use as exemplars, but before we go there, we should look at the beginning of the tradition, its (possible) evolution, and the ragged edges of what constitutes a *Pastete* or *Turte*.

Analysing the recipes faces a problem of language: The German words used are not always clear or applied consistently. References to a *Pastete* are clearest. This always means a filling baked in a crust, though, as we will see, even this is sometimes applied to open-topped pies. The category also includes fish and meat baked *en crouete*, so it shades over into areas we would not consider pie. *Torte*, more often *Durten*, usually refers to what we would think of as a pie, a round dough container filled with just about anything and baked either with or without a top crust. However, much the same thing can be described as a *Fladen*, with the proviso that a *Fladen* is never enclosed. It seems that a *Fladen* was typically of leavened dough and baked in an oven while a *Torte* had an unleavened crust and was baked in a pan, but we find recipes that violate both rules. Finally, there is the problem of *Krapfen*. Those typically are filled fritters, but they can also be baked, which would make them something we would today refer to as a pastry. Recipes need careful reading, and often enough we do not necessarily know where on the pie/pastry spectrum they fit. I do not think that would have presented a problem to contemporary cooks who were happy to use any filling with a variety of dishes, but it sometimes makes it hard to draw the lines for a more systematic modern approach.

With that out of the way, let us dive in. A pie or pastry is defined by its crust, and we have some interesting sources on those.

Of Crusts

The earliest German recipe for a pie we know of shows up in the very earliest German recipebook, the *Buoch von guoter Spise*, and it uses the word *Pasteden*:

15 Of Pies

If you want to make a fish pie, scale the fish and remove the skin when they start to boil. Chop them in little pieces, add chopped parsley, sage, pepper, ginger, cinnamon, and saffron. Temper it all with wine. Make a thin, coarse dough, put the fish on it, then pour the wine over it. Cover it with a thin layer of dough and seal it all around. Make a hole on the top, cover it with a pie cover of dough, and bake it. In the same way, you can make pies of chicken, also meat or game or eels or birds.

(Transl. M.W. Adamson)

This kind of pastry, involving fish or meat, spices, and wine, shows up again and again in the sources and seems to be the basic type. It is not easy to reconstruct because we lack a good deal of information. What proportion of wine was added to the filling? When was this done (we have several recipes where the wine is poured in when the pastry has already been cooking for a while)? And what kind of crust was used? We cannot say what was considered a “coarse dough” in the late 14th century, but it suggests a certain sturdiness. The usual interpretation is that these were firm pastry coffins made of water paste, probably inedible and meant mainly to preserve the content and make it portable. French romances frequently mention meat pies carried by travellers.

The question of the crust is controversial, and I do not believe in the traditional story of inedible water crusts being used exclusively until someone invented short crust at the beginning of the Renaissance. There very likely was more variety earlier. Not least, we should consider leavened doughs could have been used. They very likely were in the type of dish called *fladen*, a flat dough base with a meat topping that to us seems reminiscent of pizza. These also show up from the beginning, as here in the *Buoch von Guoter Spise*:

86 A fladen.

If you want to prepare a fladen of meat, take meat that comes from the loin or the belly and take bone (marrow). See that it is boiled well and chop it small. Grate half as much cheese into it and mix it with eggs so it becomes thick. Season it with pepper and spread (slahe) it on a sheet made of dough. Slide it into an oven and let it bake, and serve it hot.

Technically, this could be done with a water crust, but I suspect it would be inedible. We will see later recipes describe leavened doughs used in both closed and open pies, and there is no reason to assume this was an innovation.

It is by the end of the fifteenth century that we are on firmer ground with our sources. The 1485 *Kuchenmaistrey* has several very interesting entries on pastries that bear looking at in detail:

To make dough for Krapfen. Boil honey in wine, as much as you need, take a wide bowl and stir the wine with white flour until it is the consistency of porridge. Break an egg yolk that is red with saffron into another bowl and stir it with the honey wine. Add that to the other bowl and mix it well. Add flour, little by little, until you get a stiff (?) dough. Turn that out on a clean cloth and roll it out to the proper thickness. Cut out the shapes you want the Krapfen in, large or small, depending on the filling you want to use. But the doughs that are made with yeast or beer or hop water need to rise first and then be kneaded with lukewarm water or honey wine. Heed this advice.

This is for small pastries called *krapfen* that could be either fried or baked, and the instructions are not entirely clear, but they point to variety; A dough could be made with honey, wine, and egg, but they could also, probably instead, be prepared with yeast or with beer, which may also have acted as a leavening if there were live yeast cultures left in it. The leavened dough would have served much better for baking while the honey-wine crust is improved by deep-frying. Many unleavened doughs, including plain water paste, get better when they are fried. The fat makes them crumbly, soft and more pleasant to eat – it makes them short, in kitchen parlance. That is what shortcrust and shortbread are. Medieval cooks were aware of the phenomenon, and the *Kuchenmaistrey* includes instructions for applying it to pies that I will quote in full here because the whole thing is ingenious and completely out of left field:

3.xxv Item to make pastries in the Italian fashion (welchen sitten). Take good wheat flour and knead it with cold water. Beat (?buch) it under your hands so that it can be rolled out (welgen), lay it in a mortar and pound it very well so that it becomes hard, and throw a dusting of flour into it each (time) and when the flour has been absorbed (vrzert), take it out and shape a pot (i.e. a coffin) out of it in an old cooking dish (hafen scherben) or a glazed dish so that the dough and the container are of the same width. (As) the dough is set into the container, you place warm butter between the container and the dough coffin straightaway. Now a filling goes into it made of eggs. Chicken broth. Milk or wine beaten well together and seasoned with good spices and also with salt and chopped parsley. Put all of that into the same dough coffin. And also pound roasted or prepared forest birds into it. Or roast chickens, or boiled (ones).

Item the same boiled or roasted chickens, you cut them apart nicely, limb from limb, entirely and properly. Thrust them (the pieces) in (into the pastry filling) upright, or (pieces) of roast meat or roast pears or of sausages roasted dry or boiled, or (do) the same with what you have. And when they touch each other (der anstoß geschicht), set the container by hot embers (zu einer roschen gludt) without smoke. At first push it towards the fire (?des ersten feer herdan) and the more and more close (you move it) the filling begins to (turn) white and the dough coffin begins to smoke. Then pour in warm butter with the dough coffin so that the dough does not stick to the container. And then the filling cooks (wirt bachen – as in a fritter), turn the container frequently so that it has the same heat, and pour in half a spoonful of fat in occasionally (?yeleicht) so that the filling is moist in proper measure. Make a clean wooden skewer and thrust it into the container occasionally, all the way to the bottom, so that the hot fat goes to the bottom. That way it will sizzle and boil until the filling hardens, and that is nice enough.

Then remove it from the fire and let the fat sink in. lift the dough coffin out of the container and set it into a wide bowl and cover it with a clean bowl. Thus bring it to the table for a king or a prince. I keep quiet about common folk and poor men who would also like to eat from this (probably misplaced here: in ein dych werden to agree or become one). Also note that if you place the container by the fire, you must cover it with a warm pan that is so wide as to cover the container and the dough coffin well. If you do not have

one, make a sheet of the dough that the coffin is made from and cover it with the sheet, or pin it to a board so that it does not fall closed (cover up the coffin permanently) and (lift it to) see to it that the filling settles and the dough coffin does not burn.

This needs a bit of explaining: Most households, even wealthy ones, in the fifteenth century did not have baking ovens. Even if they had them, these were large and fuel-hungry structures, thermal-mass ovens designed to turn out batches of bread loaves, and you would not fire one to bake a pie. Instead, people used a *Tortenpfanne*, a pottery or metal pan designed to stand in the embers and covered with a lid that could have hot coals stacked on it. Cooking in this takes skill and timing, but it is effective and economical.

Here, the cook faces the additional challenge that the pie crust, sitting inside a glazed pan, is prevented from burning by periodically adding butter between the pan and the pie. The water paste produced by beating in flour with a pestle must have been very tough and pliable, but very unpalatable without that addition. I have replicated the process in a modern oven; It is important to apply the fat liberally. Think of it as an ingredient, not just a grease film to prevent the pastry from sticking. The temperature needs careful regulating, something an electric oven makes easy, and the kitchen should have a muscular fan or large windows, because the amount of greasy steam this produces is impressive even if it does not burn. The crust is quite good, soft and crumbly, and does not taste of the burned butter the kitchen smelled of. But on balance, I can see why cooks would prefer short crusts.

This cooking technique is described again in several other recipes, here using a dough of milk and eggs instead of water paste:

3.xxvi If you would make a good tart (turten), have a care to have a clean pan as small or as large as you wish the tart to be. Make a dough of milk and eggs, very strong, and roll it out thin with a rolling pin. Measure it according to the pan so that it hangs over the (edge of the) pan all around as much as a finger is thick. Make a dough coffin (teigpfannen) in the pan and for this, make a filling of beaten eggs, parsley, and fat, and also spices. Beat this well together and put it into the dough coffin. Make a sheet of dough (to go) over it and crimp (? portel) it shut as for a fladen to that the excess dough (crimped rim) sticks

out over the (edge of the) pan. See that the pan has fat so that the dough coffin does not burn. Frequently turn it around and around and let the tart bake. For this, you need a broad, shallow pan. You may thrust shelled crawfish into such a filling, or fish of pikes or basses or eel. See that these must be firm, fresh fish, for the soft ones are not suitable because they must first of all be boiled fully and seasoned with spices. When the tart browns, it has had enough. Take it off the coals when the fire and smoke make it burn and smell. Take it out, (set it) on a broad platter and serve it.

And a description of the sound by which you gauge the progress:

3.xxvii Item a meat tart, make the dough as before or the flappy dough (3.xxii) as is described earlier. Do not make the filling too stiff, of eggs and wine or milk or chicken broth or good, tasty meat broth, (but?) not much. Beat eggs and butter into it, salt and spice it as before. Set the dough coffin (teigpfannen) into the pan and pour fat between them all around so that the dough does not burn. Put the filling into the dough coffin. If you have chicken or venison, all boiled fully beforehand, or be it forest birds or roast meat, chop that very nicely and add it to the filling. Make a dough cover over it and crimp it (verrenftels) nicely and pour fat on the cover. Set the pan on hot coals. At first (start with) a small fire, then more and more. Frequently turn the pan so that the fat goes all around the dough coffin until it sizzles (bratzelt) and bubbles (boppelt) of boiling. When it is burning, you must prevent that with (adding) fat. Thus the dough coffin is as good to eat as the filling (scharrn) within.

This last sentence clinches it: The goal is a soft, short crust, though the recipe gets there by effectively frying rather than baking the pie.

There is another instance of adding fat to a lean dough during the cooking process: the ‘Prophets’ cake’ that is dotted with butter and baked in an oven. This would not have been practical with pies and tarts, It is interesting, too, that the technique does not show up in the sources for very long. Possibly that is because it becomes commonplace. A lot of things are taken for granted, and especially for pastries instructions are often perfunctory. However, the sixteenth century is also when we get the first surviving recipes for ‘short’ crusts including fat in the mix. Perhaps this is a

genuine transitional stage, that *fata morgana* of culinary history: evidence of evolution towards a higher level. At any rate, we have a recipe that clearly describes a hot water crust by the 1550s, and it is described neither as exotic nor novel:

To make a pastry dough for all raised pastries

Take flour, the best you can get, about two handfuls, or depending on how large or small you want it, place it on the table, stir in two eggs with a knife and salt it a little. Put water and an amount of lard the size of two good eggs into a pan and let it melt together and boil, then pour it onto the abovementioned flour on the table, make a stiff dough and work it well as you see fit. In summer, you must use meat broth instead of the water and fat ladled from the top of soups instead of lard. When the dough is kneaded, roll it into a round ball and stretch it out well forward with your fingers or with a rolling pin, so that a rim remains, and then let it harden in the cold. Then shape the dough in the measure I showed you and retain some dough for a cover, roll it out and moisten it and the top of the raised pastry with water, then press it well together with your fingers. Leave a little hole in one place, and when it is pressed together well and no openings are left, blow into the little hole you left so the lid rises up nicely. Then press it together immediately. Put it in the oven, but flour the container beforehand and see that the oven is heated well, thus it will be a good pastry. That is the way you make dough for raised pastries.

(Sabina Welserin #61)

The quantities are not easy to gauge – what exactly is a handful? - but the recipe is consistent with the way we modernly make hot water crust. I have used four cups of flour to one of water, with a quarter pound of fat and two eggs, to produce a pliable, stretchy but firm dough that makes good pies. You begin by combining flour and a little salt, work in the eggs – they do not need to be thoroughly mixed at this point – and make a well in the centre of the mound. Then you heat the water and fat together, pour in in the well, and mix it all quickly, then knead the dough for a few turns to make it stretchy. You can use it to line pans or shape free-standing pastries.

This is the pie crust we have evidence for, but there is no reason to think it was the only one. I do not think modern cold-water short crust was already common – it needs refrigeration to work

reliably – but I am fairly sure there were other ways of combining fat and flour.

There certainly were entirely different kinds of dough. What Sabina Welser's recipe book calls an Italian tart involves a crust – if you can call it that – made of pancake batter:

To make an Italian tart

Take twelve pears and roast them quickly over a lively fire, until the peel is charred and the rest becomes soft, afterwards put them through a strainer and put sugar, cinnamon and twelve eggs therein. Make a thin batter with eggs and pour it into a hot tart pan and let it bake until it becomes hard and pour the mixture onto it and let it bake.

(Translation by Valoise Armstrong)

There is a more detailed description of the process in Anna Wecker's 1598 Koestlich New Kochbuch:

Ein Kolhauffen (a fake pastry case)

Beat two or three eggs very well and add a spoonful of cream or of meat broth. Grate a good amount of nutmeg and saffron into it and salt it properly. Then take a deep small pan with a flat bottom. Heat a little fat in it, swirl it about (to coat the sides) and pour it out again. Then put in the eggs and swirl them about in the pan, let them run all over the bottom and around the rim so that it is shaped like a pastry case (Dorttenhafen). Let it bake (cook) nicely, and when it parts from the pan, take it out.

The idea of cooking a filling inside a pancake casing is old. It already occurs in the *Buoch von Guoter Spise* and, as here, in the 1440 *Mondseer Kochbuch*:

46 How you can prepare toasted bread to go over a chicken

You should roast a chicken. And toast a slice of semel bread, and fry the bread in fat. Cut pieces as though for a bread porridge (prot muos). Cut the chicken up (zuo leg) small and roast six pears and make a condiment sauce of wine and honey, and take anise with it.

Prepare a pancake (platt) of five eggs: Break them into the pan, lay in each (piece of chicken and pear?) separately and fold over the pancake. Invert a bowl over it and then flip over the pan. Cut a hole in the top and pour in the condiment sauce, and do not pour it on the pancake. These are called chickens of the Rheingau (Hünner von Ringkau).

Of course, describing this as a pie or tart is a stretch, but to Sabina Welserin, a very similar dish clearly qualifies. Finally, it is likely that leavened doughs were used to produce what we would call pies, as in this recipe from Johannes Coler's *Oeconomia ruralis et domestica* first published in 1598:

If you would make a good baked dish of cake (dough), make a good white dough of wheat flour and lukewarm salt water. Then take melted butter and make the dough nicely smooth (gelinde) so that it becomes all pliable (zehe) and always stays warm. Break it into pieces like (the size of) breadrolls (Semmeln), according to how large you would have your cake. Draw out the dough with your hands nicely thin and lay it on a concave (keulichte) wooden bowl on which bakers usually slide bread into the oven, and strew flour under it so that it does not stick. Then take leafy vegetables (kraut), white or green, cut it shaggy and blach (brüh) it in hot salt water. Press it out with your hands so that no water stays in it and strew the kraut on the drawn-out dough. If you wish, you may also strew in finely cut cheese, and drizzle it with melted butter and lay another sheet of dough atop it. Strew the same matter on that sheet again and add as many sheets as thick you would have it. Press it well together at the edges, slide it into an oven and let it bake. When it has baked, serve it. You may also make such cakes of apples, pears, raisins, and all manner of fruit and herbs.

The entire process, including the need to keep the dough warm, suggests that it is leavened. I have made this dish with a basic yeast dough and found it very good. It would very likely also work with a heavier and coarser sourdough, like a filled bread loaf. Rumpolt frequently refers to a rye dough used for meat and fish pastries, though it is usually for large pieces and could be an unleavened water paste meant to be discarded. Finally, we have records of something like puff pastry from the same source:

Take apples chopped finely, as you prepare them for tarts, and make a dough with fine white flour and warm water, not too thick. Place a layer of dough made with butter and eggs on the bottom so it is nicely crumbly. Spread the apple filling on that. Now take the dough you made with water and pull it apart with your hands, as thin as a veil. Make twenty or thirty of these leaves, all stacked on top of each other, and before you stack each one, spread it with fresh butter. Once they are stacked, trim the edges into a circle shape and place it in the oven. Watch out so it does not burn. It bakes quickly and the leaves rise nicely. If it is a meat day, use melted lard instead of butter. Serve it warm, sprinkled with sugar, so it is good and pretty. Thus Hungarian tarts are made. (clxxvii v)

A similar technique is referred to as 'Spanish' in the chapter on meat pies:

Prepare a dough with water so you can roll it out very thin, then spread it with larded fresh bacon and roll it around itself. Prepare enough so that it is as thick as an arm. When it is thick, cut pieces off it to make small or large pastries. If you wish to roll it out, wet the hands in melted bacon that is not hot so the dough does not stick to your hands. Shape a pie crust of white dough, and set the other one which you prepared with the bacon into it. This dough supports the Spanish one so it does not collapse. You can fill them with chopped meat. Then cut a piece off the Spanish dough again so you can make a lid. Brush paper with olive oil and set the pastries on it, slide them into the oven and bake them. See that they do not burn, because they burn soon because there is a lot of fat inside the dough. Open the lid and pour in good chicken broth so the chopped meat does not become hard, thus it will be good and well-tasting. You also prepare small pastries this way. You may also use this dough for fish. (clxxiv v)

I have made both the Spanish dough and the Hungarian tart and they work, but it is a lot of labour for the effect. More importantly, such recipes, included amid the more quotidian ones, remind us never to underestimate the inventiveness of our ancestors.

Of Fillings

There is no limit to the things people put into pies. Rumpolt's 1581 *New Kochbuch* alone lists beef and beef tongue, cow udder, veal, mutton, lamb, suckling pig, deer, wild boar, hare, chamois, rabbit, goose, duck, chicken, pigeon, swan, bustard, turkey, capercaillie, peacock, grouse, partridge, snipe, thrush, songbirds, sturgeon, salmon, pike, carp, eel, bream, trout, ash, goby, stockfish, beaver, lamprey, figs, raisins, plums, apples, pears, damsons, cherries, peaches, strawberries, mulberries, blueberries, gooseberries, spinach, almonds, parmesan cheese, rice, bitter oranges, fresh peas, blanc manger, cabbage, carrots, onions, redcurrants, orach, dates, pine nuts, and apple sauce. The recipes suggest a wide range of methods to turn these things into fillings, from simply wrapping pieces of meat into coarse dough to chopping and processing, spicing, pre-cooking and layering. We have already seen a few.

The first and most common was to enclose meat or fish and spices in a crust and add wine, or more rarely broth, as a cooking liquid. The *Kuchenmaistrey* describes another option: The bottom of the crust is covered in a layer of beaten egg and the meat or fish arranged over this, with a further layer of dried or fresh fruit on top. I am particularly fond of combining crawfish with pears and dates though it is a sinfully expensive thing to do.

Of course there was always the method most common today – simply mixing all ingredients together and filling them into a pie. We do not find it referenced often, but it is recorded at times. In this case, the 1550s recipe book of Maria Stengler from Augsburg records a preparation with stockfish:

A pastry with stockfish

Take a stockfish, boil it in water, and when it is boiled, pick it apart well and put it into a pot (crust). Add verjuice, sugar, ginger, cloves, pepper and a little mace, and butter. Let it bake.

(Stenglerin #10)

With fish, which was expensive and often in short supply, this was unlikely to have been a common approach. With meat, though, it must have been more common, and we have a beautiful description

in the *Koestlich New Kochbuch* by Anna Wecker. It not only confirms the 'whatever is at hand' approach to pastry fillings but also the creativity and joy that could go into decorating them:

Pastries of leftover meat

Take of such (meat) as you have that is no longer suitable for the table , it is good for these things. Cut the meat off the bones and chop it well. Make a dough of fine flour and eggs, a little fat, salt it well, or the way you make it for tarts, as you please.

Take two thin sheets, one as big as the other, shape it as you would like it and as you can, round, triangular, or rectangular, into hearts, roses, or stars. The add good spices to the meat, raisins, and what you like to have sweet or sour, as you please. (Add) enough fat from what is skimmed off soups (Suppenschmalz) or beef marrow, according to how fat or lean the meat itself is. If you wish, you can also add good herbs, with or without spices, or eggs as though you wanted to make sausages that go into the fat-lined part of the large intestine (Klobwürste). You may also take coarsely ground almonds, (but) they are better grated, especially if you also add eggs, and grate a little bit of hard white bread if you please. Always add a little meat broth.

If you want to make them, prepare it (the meat) and put a little of it on part of the abovementioned sheets (shaped) according to whatever you want of animals, birds, hounds , hares, as described above. Shape it with the prepared stuff (meat mixture) and then place the second sheet on top. Press it together according to its shape and close it as artfully as you can.

Give each its form: to the sow, bristles with a pastry wheel, give each one eyes from black dried cherries or juniper berries, (arrange) the skin of an egg around it or of red apples or rose petals, each after its kind. As to what else belongs to them, I have kept the little sheep's trotters and such things as well as the young hares' feet, those who are artful do not need much description, to those who aren't it is in vain. Roughly done does not improve them or detract from them. Close them, brush them with egg as is always done, bake them quickly and serve them warm. They are best without egg, but to each as they like it. Almonds and a little bread makes them good.

Beyond meat and fish, we also have a number of recipes for dairy and vegetable pies. Many of these seem to have come in as cultural imports from Italy with the kind of high-status horticulture that came from there, but some have longer roots and may well go back to before there are recorded recipes in German. My favourite is the ubiquitous 'green tart' that shows up in varied forms in almost every recipe source. The principle is simple: leafy greens, eggs, cheese, spices. This recipe is from the mid-15th century Innsbruck Manuskript:

146 If you would prepare a tart (durden), take chard and salt and parsley and cut it up small all together. Wash it in fresh water, grate cheese into it, and add fat and eggs. Then prepare sheets of dough and put it into there, and bake (pach ?) it in a pan and put egg yolk on top and let it bake well etc.

147 If you would prepare ravioli (rabel), also prepare them in this manner and wrap it in sheets like krapffen, and boil it very well in a pan. And when you take them out, put grated cheese on them and also fat and salt etc.

Interestingly, the same filling is also used in *rabel*, the earliest recipe for ravioli in German that I have yet to find. This dish remains commonplace, but the foreign name does not take root.

Another 'green' tart is a refinement of an already familiar egg-based recipe, the so-called 'May Cake' we find in the *Kuenstlichs und Fuertrefflichs Kochbuch* published in 1559. The original recipes do not call for a crust, so in this case a plainer dish was repurposed as a filling for a fashionable tart. It looks as though the buttering technique described in the *Kuchenmaistrey* is still current at this point:

33 Who Would Make a May Cake (mayenkuchen)

Take Mayenkraut (could be greater celandine (chelidonium maius), ground elder (aegopodium podagraria) or woodruff (galium odoratum), though Grimm states this association is of recent date) and chop it small. Also take figs and cut them small, and raisins, take out their pips, and weinberlin. Put all of this into the Mayenkraut, break eggs

into it, and make it neither too thin nor too thick. Take a flat cooking vessel (scherblein) and set it on the coals. Make a bottom crust (platz) that is as wide as the cooking vessel (scherb oder tigel) in which you wish to cook it, just like you prepare a carnival cake (Faßnacht platz). Roll out a platz, put May butter into the cooking vessel (tigel oder scherben), and when it has melted, place the platz in it so it reaches beyond the vessel (dz uber das tigelein außreich i.e. is wider than just the bottom). Also put in the mass (teig) with the Mayenkraut. Stick in mayen (sprigs of the herb?) and prepare it with the platz like a fladen. Do not add much May butter. Place the scherblein over it (like a lid) and lay coals on top. Do not make much fire underneath, otherwise it will readily burn. See that the bottom is thin like a Fladen, then it is a good Mayenkuchen.

This recipe suffers from the fact that we have only a limited idea what it is talking about. The author is trying to be helpful, but we simply don't know what made a *Faßnacht platz* specific. Similarly, there must be a clear idea what *Mayenkraut* is, but unfortunately the word can refer to a variety of culinary herbs. Woodruff is tempting, but unfortunately its popularity seems to be strictly a modern phenomenon.

Eggs and dairy were mainly a springtime food, and we have several recipes for pies associated with Easter. These were most likely a long-standing tradition and made, in their simple form, with eggs and cheese curds, but we have no recipes of these surviving. Two that we do have are for different kinds of tart, one with a leavened dough (in this case got from the baker) and a custard filling from Balthasar Staindl's 1547 *Künstlichs und Nützlichs Kochbuch*:

ccxxii Make a good gentle egg cheese (like a custard) and do not burn it. Put it on a draining board so that it sinks down (drains) well, then take the egg cheese and stir it apart with a spoon, add more eggs, a little sweet cream, also grate manchet bread into it, yellow it (with saffron), season it, add sufficient raisins. Then take manchet bread (semmel) dough from a baker, roll it out wide, put the abovementioned egg cheese on it, and wreath (kränzle) it around and around (make a plaited edge). Bake it in an oven, but before you put it into the oven, add figs, put almonds on top. Anoint the wreath outside with yellowed (saffron-dyed) egg yolks and put it back into the oven briefly. These flecken (tarts) are blessed for Easter.

The other is again from Rumpolt, a cheese tart that uses extravagant imported Parmesan cheese and similarly luxurious raisins and almonds to elevate a simple cheese tart to courtly status:

45 Roll out a tart and take grated Parmesan cheese and grated Weck bread. Mix it with egg yolks and butter and add entire almonds and large raisins (Ziweben) as well as small black raisins that are washed carefully, and sweet cream that is nicely thick. Stir all of this together and do not oversalt it. Fill the tart with this and do not put a lid on it. Slide it into the oven and bake it. Moisten a brush with warm butter and brush the tart with this above and below so that it shines brightly, and let it cool. And this is how you bake Osterfladen. (clxxviii v)

Next to this recipe, we also find instructions for turning the plain dough for tart crusts into a snack, which suggests we are talking about a short crust:

44 Take of the dough with which you make tarts and roll it out round and thin. Brush it with fresh butter. Take grated Parmesan cheese and strew it over the dough. Slide it into the oven and let it bake and let it cool. This way it is a good Käbkuchen. (clxxviii v)

A simpler custard tart is recorded on a few occasions, usually as a very rich mix of eggs and cream, and it is often referred to as “English”. Sabina Welsler's collection includes a recipe:

To make an English tart

First take one third of a quart of cream, some three quarters of a pound of fat and a quarter pound of sugar, which must be allowed to cook with the milk and the fat. After that take six eggs, according to how [large] they are, and, also six egg yolks, beat two eggs with a small spoonful of flour and stir it until smooth, and when it is well-beaten, then beat into it all the eggs, put it all in a pan and let it simmer together until it becomes fairly thick, and watch out that it does not burn, and when it is cooked then salt it a little and pour in a little rose water on it while it is still warm, and let it bake.

(Translation by Valoise Armstrong)

The idea is older than this, though. As early as the 1460s, Meister Hans records an 'English' *fladen* made with curd cheese and butter, though not including eggs.

Make an English fladen thus

(Take) soft cheese, butter and pepper, mix it together, then make a pot of dough and fill it with the cheese above half full. Let it bake in a pot (i.e. crust). This is called an English fladen.

(Maister Hannsen #95)

For the highest refinement in cheesecake, you could always turn to the courtly standby of almond milk. Cheeses made from it are included in almost every fifteenth-century recipe collection. They often use thickening agents, but some rely on acid coagulation. We are not told which method is used in the *Kuenstlich und Fuertrefflichs Kochbuch*, but the result serves to fill sweetened tartlets:

58 To make small pastries (Bastecklein)

Take blanched almond kernels. Pound them and grind them as finely as you can. Make milk with them that is to be thick, so take all the more almonds. Let it stand in a pot for a day or two so it separates out a little (ein wenig schottet werd) or hang it up in a bag. But it should stand a day and a night before it is dried or poured off. Take this and grind fine white sugar into it. Let it be thick. Take a pastry base (blatz) as though for gewolne küchlein and make a deep bowl (degelein). Put milk into this and bake it in the dough like a May Cake. You must not use fat for this but bake it like bread.

Finally, we must not neglect the other great luxury of the lordly table: almond tart. This also comes in many variations including one (1598) with a meringue topping. Most commonly, it consisted of sugar, egg white, cream, and blanched almonds, and the point was to have it white. Maria Stengler's recipe book sums it up succinctly:

An almond tart

If you want to make an almond tart, take the whites of eggs and a little grated bread. Take almonds, grind them up small and add rose or lavender water. Add these to the eggs, add

sugar, and make a bottom crust as for a tart.

(#12)

And then there are the fruit pies. There are many references to those, sometimes in complex recipes that involve pre-cooking, mashing and seasoning the fruit. In other cases, there is little more than the sparse instruction to put the fruit in a crust and bake them, usually adding sugar and spices. We can assume that that was the default method. Philippine Welser's recipe collection includes a trick for preventing cherry juice from soaking the bottom crust:

If you want to make a tart of tart cherries

make a crust as for other tarts, and when it is done, take fine white bread, grate it small, fry it in fat and then spread it on the bottom crust evenly thick all over. Break off the tart cherries and lay them atop this, close together. Take out the pits so it cooks better. Strew it with sugar and cinnamon and put a thin top crust over it. Make cuts in it as you wish, brush it with an egg and let it bake till it is done.

(Philippine Welser 18v)

An interesting addition to a berry pie, in this case using strawberries or gooseberries, comes from Anna Wecker's 1598 cookbook. She sets the fruit in a custard base and covers them in sugar before baking. This recipe is an ancestor in spirit to German *Erdbeerkuchen*, but since the fruit is baked, it does not work very well with modern cultivated strawberries. The large fruit lose so much moisture that the bottom soaks through. It is, however, excellent with the smaller, more flavourful forest strawberries.

A tart of strawberries or gooseberries (Kreusel- oder Stichbeeren), whatever they be called

Take eggs, the yolks alone or all together as you wish, beat and whip them well, then take good thick cream that is sweet, stir in as much as there are eggs, add rosewater if you wish, grind of almonds what is right and pass it through (a cloth) with the cream, but in that case take a little more of the milk (cream) than of the eggs. Hold it over a bright fire, but far away, stir it diligently until it begins to thicken a little, but do not let it boil. Then the dish (pastry) should be ready, and it should not be too high, half as high as another

tart is. Then pour the mix into it and place nice strawberries or gooseberries in it so that they are half in the mass and half sticking out, and strew it well with sugar so that you neither see the mass nor the berries. The strawberries should be washed in rosewater and not too ripe, for then they turn to mush immediately, but the gooseberries are fine and right when they are already yellow and clear. They need much sugar. Bake them well and give a lot of heat below, but not too much above so that they stay nicely white. It is enough quickly. If you bake them in an oven, lay a piece of paper on top.

More elaborate preparations are often associated with apples. Apple pies seem to have been popular and the good keeping qualities of the fruit would have made them available much longer than more perishable fruit. We are not told in as many words, but it is likely that the different methods of preparation would be chosen according to how dry, shrunken, and leathery the apples in question were. Again, Philippine Welser's recipe collection provides several recipes of which we choose the richest and wintery-est:

If you want to make apple tarts

Take good apples, peel them and cut thin slices from them. Float them in fat until they brown, then place them on a plate and let them cool. Put them in the crust close together in two layers, then take sugar, cinnamon, and a little ginger and strew it on all over. Also take raisins, and place a cut-up top crust on it. Brush it with an egg and let it bake gently in a tart pan.

(Philippine Welser 14r)

The collection also lists instructions for making similar tarts from chopped apples, the filling pre-cooked with raisins, sugar, fat and cinnamon, and from steamed, pureed ones with cinnamon, ginger and sugar. Pears get much the same treatment. The only thing that appears to be missing is simply using raw fruit with spices and sugar.

Another recipe that was independent of the season used dried prunes. This one comes from Sabina Welser's collection and it points out specifically that fresh or dried fruit could be used, but fresh plums would not have been available for longer than a few weeks every year:

A pie of plums, be they dried or fresh

Let them boil in wine before, pass them and take eggs, cinnamon, and sugar. Let it bake.

For the pie crust dough, you begin thus: Take two eggs and beat them, then stir flour into it until it turns thick. Then, turn it out onto a table and work it well until it turn out right.

Afterwards, take a little more than half the dough and roll out a sheet as wide as you want your pie. Then pour the plums on it, roll out a second sheet and cut it as you would have it. Put it on the pie, pinch it well together and let it bake. This is how you make all pie doughs.

(Sabina Welser #70)

This is very much a favourite wintertime treat for me.

Redacted Recipes

I worked out a few of the recipes for a workshop I taught at the SCA's Kingdom University 2023 event. Please note these are approximations and in many cases suggested, plausible approaches, not attempts at actually replicating what the original would have been like. They are designed to work in a modern kitchen depending on ingredients that we can buy in most supermarkets.

Pie Crust (Sabina Welser, 1550s)

It is tempting to over-rely on this recipe because it is so simple and practical. I read it as a basic hot-water crust enriched with egg and have found it eminently useful. The recipe makes two pie crusts.

4 cups flour, plus more for working

2 eggs

125g butter or lard

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup water

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt

In a bowl, combine flour and salt. I prefer to use bread flour (German type 550), but cake flour (German type 405) works as well. Break two eggs into the flour and mix in just until the yolks are broken up and all liquid parts are coated in flour. This prevents the egg being cooked when the hot liquid is added.

Bring the water and fat to a boil in as small saucepan and remove from the heat. Pour into the flour mixture while still hot and begin stirring immediately. As soon as the mass is cool enough to handle, turn it out on a smooth, floured surface and begin kneading. Keep working and, if necessary, adding more flour until the dough no longer sticks to your hands or the surface. If you intend to make free-standing pies, you need to aim for a stiffer consistency. For pies baked in pans, a softer (and thus crumblier) dough is fine.

Once cooled, the dough can be rolled out and cut or shaped into pie and pastry crusts. It can be made a day in advance and kept, but in my experience you get the best results when you prepare it fresh.

Green Tart (Innsbruck MS, c. 1450)

The 'green tart' occurs in many variations across the time period, using various ingredients in the same basic combination: leafy greens, egg, cheese. I personally like it best with spinach and gouda, but you can experiment until you get your own favourite. This quantity is enough for one pie shell.

500g chard or leaf spinach

35g chopped parsley

250g Quark or cottage cheese

or

200g of grated cheese of choice

2-3 eggs

salt

spices as desired (I suggest nutmeg and pepper)

Parboil the chard or spinach just until wilted, then drain thoroughly. Press out excess liquid.

Combine in a bowl with the chopped parsley, quark, eggs, salt, and spices. Mix thoroughly, and if necessary break up large leaves by hand or by slicing through the mass with a sharp knife several times. You can do this in a food processor, but make sure not to reduce it to too fine a consistency.

Fill into open pie crusts and bake at 180°C for 30-45 minutes, longer if you are making large pies.

If your pie is very wide, cover it with greaseproof paper so the top does not brown too much.

Crawfish Pie (Kuchenmaistrey, 1480s)

This is one of the recipes that the *Kuchenmaistrey* gives us in connection with pie crusts cooked in the "Italian style". They can be made that way, but it is needlessly complex. I usually use either hot water crust or a modern refrigerator shortcrust. The quantity is intended for a standard pie shell. The recipe does not work well in large pastries, so if you are feeding large numbers, it is better to prepare multiple smaller pies.

200g shelled crawfish tails
4 eggs
2-3 firm, aromatic pears
100g dried dates
chopped parsley
salt
spices as desired

Beat the eggs with the parsley, salt, and spices. I find that pepper, ginger, and cinnamon work well with crawfish, but any reasonable combination will do. Pour this into the bottom of the pie shell and arrange the crawfish tails on it. Slice the pears lengthwise, remove the cores, and arrange the slices on top of the crawfish. Slice the dates into rounds and scatter on top of the pears. If desired, sprinkle with more spices.

Close the pie firmly with a top crust and cut a small vent into it. Bake at 180°C for 45 minutes. Serve warm. Be aware that, depending on how water your crawfish are, an amount of liquid may run out as you slice the pie. Good fresh crawfish should not sweat much, but frozen ones often do.

Prune Tart (Sabina Welser, 1550s)

The prune tart is a variation on the plum tart from Sabina Welser, and I like to serve it in winter. Again, this is the quantity for one standard pie shell.

250g dried prunes
2-3 eggs
¼ cup sugar
1-2 cups wine or grape juice
cinnamon
spices as desired

Place the prunes in a saucepan and add just enough wine or juice so they still show. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring regularly and adding liquid as they soak it up. This stage can take

between 5 and 20 minutes, depending on how soft your prunes are. They are ready when they fall apart while being stirred.

Allow the fruit to cool, then stir in the sugar, cinnamon, and other spices as desired (I like ginger, cloves and nutmeg). Finally beat in the egg and fill into a the pie crust. This can be baked either in an open or a closed crust, or in small individual pastries like mince pies. It takes about 45 minutes at 180°C.

Osterfladen with Parmesan Cheese (Marx Rumpolt, 1581)

This is a deeply luxurious, but quick and simple recipe, and the combination of the salty parmesan tang and the demure sweetness of raisins makes it interesting. This is enough for one pie shell.

200g grated Parmeggiano (or other grated hard cheese)

2-3 eggs

½ cup cream

1 cup raisins and/or currants

½ cup slivered almonds

breadcrumbs

salt

pepper or other spices as desired

Combine the grated cheese, cream, eggs, raisins and almonds in a bowl. Personally, I prefer to leave out the almonds because I do not like the consistency they add. Stir breadcrumbs into the mix until it is thick and begins to be gummy. Try, and adjust salt if needed. You can add spices, but carefully so as not to overwhelm the aroma of the cheese.

Spread the mixture evenly over the bottom of the pie crust. It works best on a wide, flat base, so if you can, line the bottom of a springform or tart pan with dough rather than using a pie dish. Gently bake at 160°C for 30-45 minutes. You can raise the temperature at the end to gently brown the top.

Pastries of Leftover Meat (Anna Wecker, 1598)

This is a fun recipe if you have time and are artistically inclined. The quantity makes hand pies or small pastries for 4-6 people. I like to use hot water crust with these, but a yeast-leavened dough actually works well.

300g cooked meat

100g raisins

1-2 eggs, plus more for brushing

grated bread or grated almonds

salt

spices as desired

Coarsely chop the meat and raisins together. Add the eggs and adjust the consistency by adding breadcrumbs or grated almonds. You are aiming for a filling that holds together without being liquid. Add spices as you like them. I am fond of pepper, mace, ginger and cinnamon with beef, ginger, pepper and mace with pork, cinnamon, pepper and cloves with chicken. Bear in mind the raisins add a sweet note, so this is not a strongly savoury pie,

The fun part here lies in shaping the pastries. You can simply make small round or half-moon pies, but as the recipe suggests, cutting out artistically challenging shapes is encouraged. They can be decorated with anything at hand – nuts, dried fruit, coarse salt or spices – before being brushed with egg wash and baked. Depending on size, they can be ready after as little as 20 minutes at 180°C.

Cabbage Cake (Johannes Coler, c. 1600)

This is not a pie and will not work with a pie shell. It needs a leavened dough and a good deal of patience, but it is very much worth it. This quantity makes one large cake in a springform or round cake pan.

For the dough:

500g flour

1 packet yeast

125g butter

about 1 cup warm water

salt

For the filling:

1kg cabbage or leafy greens (savoy or kale work well)

250g aromatic hard cheese (cheddar can harmonise well)

salt

pepper and other spices as desired

In a bowl, combine the flour, salt, and yeast. Melt the butter in a saucepan and add to the bowl. Stir and gradually add warm water until you get an elastic, but firm dough that no longer sticks to your hands or the kneading hook. Cover the dough in a bowl and let it rest in a warm place until it has roughly doubled in size.

In the meantime, coarsely chop the greens and remove thick stems. Blanch in boiling salt water, remove, and drain thoroughly. Coarsely grate or chop the cheese. Be sure it has an assertive flavour, otherwise you will not notice it in the final product.

Grease the baking pan. Divide the dough into five parts. Take two parts and roll them out thin on a floured surface. Line the bottom and side of the pan with this, leaving a little hanging over the edge. Roll out the remaining three parts into round sheets the size of the pan. Fill a third of the cooked greens and cheese into the pan and add spices as desired. This recipe works well with a limited palette, it is enough to adjust saltiness. If you wish to add other spices, just pepper or mace or nutmeg will work well. Cover the first layer with a sheet of dough, press it against the sides along the edges, and continue filling the pan until you have three layers of green and cheese separated by dough sheets. Cover with the final dough sheet, fold over the overhanging edges on the side of the pan, and crimp shut. Cut a small vent or slits into the top and bake at 180°C for 45-60 minutes. The outside should be crisp, the bottom soft. Remove from the pan, leave to cool, slice, and serve warm.

Of Sources

The earliest printed cookbook in German was the *Kuchenmaistrey*, first published in Nuremberg in 1486 and reprinted regularly for over a century. The second edition of 1490 is online (<http://diglib.hab.de/inkunabeln/276-quod-2/start.htm>). A translation into English can now be bought at Ellipsis Imprints.

Balthasar Staindl's *Ein sehr künstlichs und nutzlichs Kochbuch* first printed in 1544 was reprinted repeatedly well into the seventeenth century. The edition of 1569 is online (https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10990136_00005.html).

A manuscript that belonged to Sabina Welser of the patrician Welser family of Augsburg also dates to mid-century. A modern edition was published as a book (Stopp, Hugo (Hg.): *Das Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin*. Heidelberg, 1980). A transcription and an English translation are also available online: (http://www.davidfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Sabrina_Welserin.html).

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The Innsbruck manuscript and the Mondseer Kochbuch are available combined in a modern edition (Aichholzer, Doris: *„Wildu machen ain guet essen ...“ Drei mittelhochdeutsche Kochbücher: Erstedition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*. Berne, 1999).

Many other recipe sources in English translation are available at my blog culina-vetus.de