

SOMETHING FOR THE PALATE

I thought collecting exotic recipes from members of the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology would be a rather simple task. But I was mistaken. Doing ethnographic or archeological fieldwork does not necessarily mean that researchers share in the "fruits" of the land with the people among whom they are working. Dr. William Merrill has studied the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico for many years, but has not acquired a taste for their food, which he will flavor with his own condiments. And, the Tarahumara have not acquired a taste for the canned food he often brings. A typical Tarahumaran meal might include boiled greens and fresh corn tortillas. For major feasts, sheep, goats, or cattle are butchered and the cut up meat boiled for hours. The animal's blood is also boiled, resulting in a kind of pudding.

Over the 22 years Dr. William Crocker has conducted ethnographic research among the Canela Indians of northeastern Brazil, he has acquired a taste for their foods, though they were totally lacking in condiments except for the occasional use of black pepper. The Canela's main staples are manioc, which has an acidic taste and is used in making pancakes, mush, and flour, and boiled rice. Meat, hunted or bought, is rarely part of the diet. The head of a cow and its internal organs are a special delicacy eaten only by the young or old, since the Canela believe such foods cause infertility.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to reproduce the unique flavors obtained by the traditional methods, such as those produced by cooking in a well-seasoned clay pot over an open fire or by using manually ground corn. In addition, we usually cannot obtain essential ingredients that give regional food its unique flavor, in spite of the proliferation of gourmet and other specialty food shops. Take,

for instance, seal oil and whale blubber, or boiled monkey.

Fortunately, the Smithsonian's large anthropology staff has, in fact, managed to compile recipes, using widely available ingredients, from cultures in Africa, Asia, Polynesia, and the Southwestern United States for an adventure in eating.

SENEGAL: Mafe ("peanut butter stew")

Mary Jo Arnoldi, Curator, West African Ethnology

Saute 2 chopped onions and chunks of fish, meat, or chicken in peanut oil. Add water to cover. Stir in until dissolved approximately 1/4 to 1/2 cup of peanut butter and 2 tbsp. of tomato paste. Add salt and red and black pepper to taste. Cook until tender. (Optional: soy sauce, boullion cube or meat paste.) Add large, bite-sized pieces of vegetables (i.e. eggplant, carrots, white or sweet potatoes). Add more tomato paste or peanut butter if necessary to obtain the consistency of a thick cream sauce. Separately cook long grain white rice.

The Senegalese eat out of a communal bowl. To serve, layer the cooked rice at the bottom of a large, wide and shallow bowl. Ladle the sauce over the rice, being careful not to make the rice soggy; the stew will be eaten with the fingers. Drain the meat and place it in the center of the rice and surround the meat with vegetables. An alternative would be to serve this dish in individual bowls. This meal is prepared mid-day when the Senegalese eat their major meal; any left-overs might be eaten in the morning. In this society, there is a tendency for the men and women to eat separately, the men, of course, being served first. Today, however, there is more variation in eating behavior to accommodate the changing times and the need for practicality.

Strict etiquette is observed during mealtime. After washing their hands, family members sit around the bowl of food tucking their legs underneath them to take up the least amount of space. The host or hostess makes sure each person receives an equal share of the portion; guests may receive a special vegetable. The proper manner of eating is to take some rice and roll it into a small ball. Following the rice, the vegetables and meat are eaten, though separately. Four important rules to follow are: 1) food should only be eaten with the right hand, 2) eat only the food directly in front of you, 3) do not lean over the bowl, and 4) always leave some food in the bowl to demonstrate that more than enough food was offered.

During the meal there is little conversation. After the meal, soap and water are brought in to cleanse the hands and young girls or the junior wife remove the food and sweep the area clean. Drinking water is then passed around and people relax and converse.

The Senegalese generally enjoy hot, spicy food and have borrowed flavors from Portuguese and French cooking, since much trade takes place between the countries. Cheb-u-jin (rice and fish) is their national dish.

KOREA: Bul-kogi ("fire meat")

Chang-su Houchins, Museum Specialist,
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Slice 2 pounds of tender beef (i.e. sirloin tip or delmonico) into thin pieces of approximately 3" or 4" in length. Marinate for 30 minutes to one hour in: 1 tsp. salt, 1/2 tsp. black pepper, 1 tbsp. sesame seed oil, 1/4 cup Japanese soy sauce, 1/4 cup chopped scallions, 1 tsp. minced fresh garlic, and 1 tsp. sugar. For best results, broil over a grill. If broiling indoors, leave broiler drawer partially open to allow air to circulate to obtain the desired crispness and juiciness. Cook 5-10 minutes.



This dish may be served as an hors d'oeuvre or as an entree with rice, dipping each slice of meat in a sauce consisting of Japanese soy sauce with vinegar or lemon to taste and served in a shallow dish. Another alternative is to wrap a small amount of rice with a slice of meat in a lettuce leaf, preferably romaine. Traditionally, approximately 12 dishes were served at once among the leisure class, consisting of a pickled vegetable; soup, consisting of chicken or beef broth with a few vegetables usually including mushrooms; fish, meat, or poultry; a salty dish such as preserved fish; and a bowl of rice. Since soup provided the liquid during the meal, tea and fresh fruit followed. The peasant class ate little meat, relying primarily on tofu and miso soup for protein along with vegetables and the staple, rice.

Adult male and elderly female members of the family would kneel at an individual serving table, while the mother and the children would sit together. Now families usually kneel or sit around one large table. The eating utensils consist of chopsticks and spoons. Silver spoons and chopsticks were prevalent among the upper class and brass was used by the peasants; today, wooden, plastic, and stainless steel utensils are common. At the commencement of the meal, some Korean families say what would be translated as "I shall eat" or "I shall take" to express gratitude for the food they are receiving.

Traditionally, children were supposed to remain silent at mealtime, during which there was minimal conversation. However, to show appreciation for the appetizing food, slurping and chewing noises would be emitted and to top the meal off--a burp. Such a show by young women was considered ill-mannered. Western influence has since made these gestures inappropriate for all.

HALMAHARA ISLAND, INDONESIA: Hiode (in Tobelo "meat accompanying a starch staple")

Paul Taylor, Curator, Asian Ethnology

Cut up chicken into bite-sized pieces (pork or other meat can be substituted). Mix with ginger, chili peppers, and tumeric to taste. Stir fry ingredients in coconut oil in a wok until cooked.

This dish, which constitutes the usual method of preparing birds and mammals, may be served with fried or boiled plantains, boiled manioc, yams, sweet potatoes, or cooked rice. Any of these starch staples may be served with a pickled vegetable sauce consisting of palm wine vinegar (any vinegar might do) with minced shallots and chili peppers.

A popular meat used to prepare this native hiode dish of the Tobelo people of Halmahara Island, Indonesia is dog--the household variety. Dog meat, though really very tasty, is bland and requires a heavy hand with the chili peppers. Also the longer an animal has been dead, the more spices are added, since there is no refrigeration. Civets, flying foxes (large bats), and deer are also common foods prepared in this manner.

The meal is served in individual plates and eaten with the hands. Gather a small amount of rice between your first and third finger of your right hand only (never touch food with your left hand), and flick the food into your mouth with your thumb nail. You may find that the Tobelorese method of eating will take some practice. Palm wine or boiled water, from the local stream, are commonly drunk with the meal.

The main meals in this agricultural and fishing society are eaten mid-morning and evening with much snacking in between. If guests are invited to dinner, the men eat first, served by the women. Each Tobelo likes to leave the table as soon as he or she feels full. As each person finishes his meal, he leaves to go to another room where after dinner conversation takes place. Eating itself is not generally a social event--men eat quietly, leave one by one, then the women do the same.

The Tobelo have some strict rules of etiquette that express not only their generous hospitality but also their distrust of one another. For instance, houses consist of split bamboo or split palm trunk walls and are easily seen through. If someone should walk by the house, the family is obliged to call that person in to eat, even if that person did not observe the activity going on inside. Fear of murder is pervasive and thus it is bad etiquette to use or sharpen a knife during a meal. If a guest brings a

beverage such as palm wine, he or she must be the first to take a drink to show that it is not poison. The guest must also drink the last drop to show that there is no poison at the bottom of the container. And if a gecko should happen to squeal while a beverage is being poured, it is an omen of poisoning.

The Tobelo also adhere to individual food avoidances, depending on the magic learned or one's ancestry. For example, a person who knows the magic to prevent bullets from piercing his skin will not eat watermelon, because watermelon are hollow and can be easily pierced. People temporarily avoid some foods during illnesses. For example, people with fungal skin infections do not eat dried anchovies during treatment, for fear that the "itchiness" of the rough, dry food will make their skin itch more.

NAVAJO: Na'neskhadi' (Navajo fry bread. Literal meaning - "slapped again and again")

Erenda Manuelito, Fellow
SI Native American Program

Mix together 4 cups of Gold Medal* white flour, 2 tbsp. Calumet baking powder, and one tsp. of salt in a large bowl. (* The commercial brands mentioned in this recipe have given the best results.) Add up to 1 1/2 cups of warm water. Knead the dough. When it starts pulling away from the bowl, it is ready to roll. Take a portion of the dough, about the size of a small peach, and flatten it with the palms of your hands. Then roll it out into a circle with approximately 1/4" in thickness.

(The traditional method of flattening the dough is done by making a fist with each hand and slapping the dough back and forth, turning the fist over and against the other with the dough in between. At the same time, gently pull down the edges of the dough.)

When the dough is stretched to 6" to 8" in diameter, cut a small slit in the middle. This allows air to escape so the heat is more evenly distributed, producing even browning. Lay the rolled dough in a frying pan with about an 1/2" of hot Crisco oil. The dough will bubble. Turn it over once with a fork to brown the top side. Drain the bread on a paper towel and serve hot. Salt can be sprinkled on the bread or the less traditional seasonings, honey or cinnamon sugar.

Fry bread is a traditional Navajo food usually accompanied by mutton stew and coffee, served as the two main meals of the day. It is also made in enormous quantities by the women at Navajo ceremonials as well as at tribal fairs where it has become quite popular. In this matrilineal and matrifocal society, men are not embarrassed to cook a family meal when the need arises.

Traditionally, the Navajo ate out of a common bowl while sitting on the floor of the hogan. There were no strict rules concerning eating behavior, though traditionally the women sat at the north end of the hogan, the men at the south end, and guests at the west end. The door always opened east. During the meal, conversation might center on local gossip. When the Navajo depended on crops for their sustenance, they would often pray for an abundance of food by holding stirring sticks (sticks bundled together and used for stirring food in large cooking pots) straight upwards and calling on the Holy People.

KENYA: Akapulu (Iteso for "bush vegetable")

Ivan Karp, Curator, West African
Ethnology, and Patricia Karp

Wash one pound of spinach, and remove the stems, and cook until tender in the water that clings to its leaves (approximately 5 minutes). Drain and

set aside. Cook 1 chopped medium-sized onion and 2 minced cloves of garlic in 3 tbsp. of ghee or butter until lightly browned. Add 1 tsp. salt, 2 tsp. curry powder and 1 chopped tomato and cook for about a minute. Add the onion mixture to the spinach and heat through. This "relish" dish is served as an accompaniment to atap, the basic food starch in the form of maize or cassava and millet bread eaten by the Iteso of Kenya.

No meal can be eaten without a starch, which is a bread made by pouring a flour of cassava and finger millet or sorghum into boiling water and cooking until it is too thick to stir. Sometimes the bread is made of cornmeal or plantains. Accompanying the starch is a relish made of boiled vegetables or meat served in a sauce consisting of the broth in which they were cooked. Curry powder is a common flavoring.

Only women can cook a starch, and it must be cooked inside the cooking-house on the women's fireplace constructed of three stones. Men, on the other hand, can cook meat, but only outside and only by roasting. Men cooked for such occasions as funeral sacrifices and, during precolonial times, for age-set ceremonies when cattle were sacrificed.

The Iteso start their day with a small meal, usually a thin porridge of cassava or millet flour and water or a piece of boiled cassava. The beverage is made of a strong, smoky-flavored tea boiled with large amounts of milk and sugar. Children are considered as needing a greater variety of foods than adults and some foods such as certain fruits were considered "children's food." The second and last meal of the day is eaten in late afternoon or early evening. It consists of atap and an accompaniment, referred to as a "relish" or "vegetable." The meat is usually beef or, for special occasions, chicken, and the vegetable is often

found growing wild. A favorite is ekwala, which is similar in taste to spinach. The meat is boiled for hours with a little curry powder. The vegetable may also be cooked for a long time, usually with spices or sour milk.

In this polygamous society, most meals are taken inside the sleeping house of the wife who has done the cooking. If there are guests, the meal is served in the husband's guest house. Each wife occupies a separate house where she feeds herself and her children. Children especially eat wherever they happen to be when food is served. Most people sit on the floor to eat, though some sit at tables and chairs made by local carpenters. Atap is eaten from a communal plate, but each person has his or her own bowl of relish. A small amount of atap is taken with the fingers of the right hand and formed into a ball. Then a depression is made in the center of the ball with the thumb. It is then dipped into the relish and eaten.

The sharing of food and drink is particularly important in Iteso society. After the initial greeting and exchange of news and inquiries about each other's health, two questions are asked by the Iteso. The first question asks at whose home beer is to be had that day, and the second question asks about the kind of food in your home that day.

TONGA, POLYNESIA: Lupulu ("lu" - made with taro leaves, "pulu" - corned beef)

Adrienne Kaeppler, Curator
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Have ready 16 taro leaves, 4 medium onions, 1 tin of corned beef, and a can of frozen coconut cream, defrosted. To prepare the leaves for stuffing, wash them thoroughly and remove the large stems. Take 4 of the heart-shaped taro leaves and arrange them in the shape of a cross with the narrower ends overlapping in the center. Slice the

corned beef into quarters, placing one slice in the middle of the leaves. Top with one chopped onion and a quarter of a can of coconut cream. Fold up the leaves and wrap in aluminum foil. Repeat this procedure three more times, using the remaining 12 taro leaves. Bake the stuffed leaves for 1 1/2 hours at 350 degrees until the leaves are well cooked. If undercooked, a chemical substance in the taro leaves can cause an itchy throat.

Lupulu is usually prepared for a special occasion or for Sunday dinner. Vegetarians can prepare the Samoan version called palusami by omitting the corned beef. If taro leaves are unavailable, spinach leaves may be substituted to make many smaller stuffed leaves. Aluminum foil replaces the traditional use of banana leaves, which are discarded after the leaves are baked in an earth oven.

The Tongans eat their main meal in the afternoon. This meal usually consists of starchy tubers such as yams, taro, sweet potatoes or breadfruit. Most of the meat and fish is imported in tins. Coconut milk or water with freshly squeezed lemon or lime juice accompany the meal. Leftovers are often eaten the following morning for breakfast.

The Polynesians are a hierarchical society with a very complicated ranking system. Within the nuclear family expressions of rank may be relaxed, though the father as head of the household always sits at a particular section of the grass or wooden house. Women are considered to have prestige while men possess power. For example, a sister outranks her brother and at feasts brother-sister avoidance is strictly observed, by sitting separately, as are other observances of societal and social rank.

At large public feasts the highest ranking men and women sit at the head of the "table" (at such occasions

people traditionally sit on the floor). These individuals also eat at the first of several sittings. Men carry large quantities of cooked food--young pigs, chicken, fish, large tubers--on long stretchers called polas made of coconut leaves. The polas are placed on the floor and the highest ranking men and women cut portions of the meat and vegetables and place them on a banana leaf. After they have eaten their fill and discarded the banana leaf and their uneaten portion, the next in rank sit down to partake in the feast. This procedure is followed until all have shared in the feast.

Not only are people ranked but so is food, pork being the most prestigious and eaten only at large feasts, with chicken coming in second. Even the parts of the animal hold prestige, the highest ranking individuals enjoying the highest ranking cuts such as the meat on the pig's back.

For further reading:

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