

Kaptol: Hallstatt food workshop and cookbook

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KAPTOL

Hallstatt food workshop & COOKBOOK



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The INTERREG Iron-Age-Danube project is being carried out as part of the program financed by the European Union, and includes institutions from Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia. In the Republic of Croatia, as part of this project, scientific research is being conducted at the sites of Jalžabet and Kaptol, and, additionally, both locations are being used for the realization of open archaeological camps that include numerous workshops, lectures and activities that can be attended by all interested individuals and groups. The following text will focus precisely on one such workshop that was held at the “Stari fenjeri” restaurant, not far from the archaeological sites in Kaptol near Požega, and where a group of archaeologists and enthusiasts tried to reconstruct the Early Iron Age diet. The recipes themselves are a product of the participants’ imagination, but the groceries were selected in accordance with actual archaeobotanical and archaeozoological finds discovered in Iron Age graves from one of the most significant Early Iron Age sites on the territory of Croatia – Kaptol near Požega.

The food and beverage workshop was held from 12 to 4 PM on September 19, 2017, at the “Stari fenjeri” restaurant in Tunić. Through the workshop, the participants tried to recreate one of the possible Early Iron Age menus based on finds discovered in the graves at Kaptol. The preparations included studying the results obtained by archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological analysis of the grave finds, as well as the selection of foods that are still available today, and which the participants saw as interesting enough to include in a menu that the modern visitor would find attractive and tasty. Following weeks of preparations, the grocery list was defined: wheat flour, integral flour, ground flax, yeast, chives, basil, nettles, wild apple, hazelnuts, eggs, honey, broad beans, barley, millet, oats, oat bran, meadow mushrooms, black pig bacon, pork liver, pork neck, pork belly and trout. Apart from the ingredients, the participants also studied various cooking techniques used during the Early Iron Age in order to reconstruct the menu as authentically as possible. Chicken eggs were used because it was impossible to obtain quail or eggs of other wild species. To achieve sweetness, downy oak honey obtained in the vicinity of the workshop location was used. It was decided that the food would be cooked in metal kettles, baked on heated stones, baked under a baking lid and smoked. The menu was influenced by many people whose suggestions and ideas encouraged the “cooks” to try out really interesting techniques and dishes.

By reviewing the ingredients and coming up with possible combinations, the workshop participants prepared the following dishes that were accompanied by freshly made black pork scratchings:

- BARLEY PORRIDGE WITH NETTLES, COOKED IN A KETTLE
- BROAD BEAN, MILLET AND NETTLE PORRIDGE WITH BACON, COOKED IN A KETTLE
- WHEAT BREAD WITH FLAX AND SPICES, BAKED UNDER A BAKING LID
- MEADOW MUSHROOMS WITH BACON AND EGGS, BAKED UNDER A BAKING LID
- SMOKED TROUT
- WHEAT FLAT CAKES, BAKED ON A STONE
- PORK LIVER WITH APPLES, BAKED ON A STONE
- PORK BELLY COATED IN HONEY, BAKED ON A STONE
- PORK NECK, ROASTED OVER AN OPEN FIRE





Dishes cooked
in a kettle



BARLEY PORRIDGE WITH NETTLES

Ingredients:

- salt (as desired)
- 1 kg of previously soaked barley
- a pinch of fresh basil leaves
- a pinch of fresh chives
- 1 tablespoon of lard
- 2 tablespoons of oat bran
- 0.5 kg of nettles
- about 3 l of water that was used to blanch the nettles

Preparation time: about 1 h

Serves 6-8 people

The dish was prepared in a 3-liter metal kettle. When the kettle was sufficiently heated, a tablespoon of lard was added and chopped basil and chive leaves were shortly sautéed. When the herbs became aromatic, barley and about 3 l of water used to blanch the nettles were added. The dish was cooked for about 30 minutes, that is until the barley became completely soft. In order to achieve the desired consistency of the porridge, two tablespoons of oat bran were added. After about 15 minutes, the porridge was done and served.

The complete dish was interesting primarily due to the addition of wild nettles, and due to the fact that it was boiled in the same water that was used to blanch them.

Additionally, the taste was improved by the other herbs that gave the porridge a slightly hot, but refreshing earthy flavor that perfectly matched the stronger flavor of meat and bacon baked on a heated stone.

While defining the menu, it was established that a metal kettle would be used to prepare two kinds of grain porridge – one with, and one without meat. The one with meat also included broad beans, millet and nettles, and the meatless porridge included barley, oat bran, chives, basil and nettles.

It is important to stress that the grains, barley and millet, were soaked the previous day in order to reduce cooking time, as well as the fact that the herbs were picked and used fresh, apart from the nettles that were blanched in boiling water before use. The greatest challenge while preparing these dishes was to maintain a constant temperature, especially because the weather was unsteady, with occasional downpours that made maintaining a steady fire quite difficult.

Apart from the temperature, it was challenging to produce a tasty dish, especially when it came to the meatless porridge that was only seasoned with herbs and salt. The technique was chosen based on the numerous finds of metal kettles that appear in Early Iron Age contexts throughout Europe, and that could have been used for the storing, as well as for the thermal processing of food.



BROAD BEAN, MILLET AND NETTLE PORRIDGE WITH BACON

Ingredients:

- 1 kg of broad beans
- 0.5 kg of previously soaked millet
- 0.5 kg of black pig bacon
- 0.25 kg of nettles

Preparation time: about 1 h

Serves 6-8 people

This porridge was prepared in a 3-liter metal kettle. When the fire reached the desired strength, the kettle was filled with roughly diced black pig bacon. When the bacon became crispy and golden-brown, the kettle was filled with water. Once the water was boiling, broad beans were added and cooked for about 30 minutes. In order to thicken the porridge and give it a different flavor, previously soaked millet was added along with a small quantity of nettles.

The dish was served right after it was taken off the fire, and the full taste of this porridge perfectly accompanied the slightly bitter taste of baked liver, made lighter by burst of sweetness from apples baked on a heated stone.





Dishes prepared
under a baking lid



WHEAT BREAD WITH FLAX AND SPICES

Ingredients:

- 1 kg of wheat flour
- 0.5 kg of integral flour
- 0.5 kg of ground flax
- a pinch of salt
- a pinch of dried chives
- a pinch of cumin
- water

Preparation time: about 1.5 h

Serves 6-8 people

The dry ingredients were mixed in a bowl, and water was slowly added until the desired thickness and quality of dough was reached. The dough was then left to rest in a cool place to rise (it was covered with a damp cloth until preparation, about 3 hours).

After it had sufficient time to rest, the dough was transferred to a metal baking lid and covered with embers for about an hour and a half.

When baked, the bread was served as a side dish with meadow mushrooms and eggs that were also prepared under a baking lid, as well as with the smoked trout.

Preparing food under a baking lid was certainly a usual occurrence during the archaeological period studied within the INTERREG project – the Early Iron Age. Namely, numerous sites dated to between the 8th and the 4th century BC, and throughout Europe, yielded finds of baking lids – complete sets with a bottom vessel and a lid, and precisely they encouraged the participants to prepare some of the dishes in this fashion.

Somewhat unconventionally, it was decided that the lid would not only be used to prepare meat, but also bread and dishes that could be labeled as “side dishes” – meadow mushrooms with eggs.

Seeing as it was impossible to get a ceramic baking lid similar to the ones used during the Early Iron Age, the dishes were prepared under metal baking lids that were covered by large amounts of embers.



MEADOW MUSHROOMS WITH BACON AND EGGS

Ingredients:

- 2 kg of freshly picked meadow mushrooms
- 10 eggs
- 0.5 kg black pig bacon

Preparation time: about 45 min

Serves 6-8 people

All of the ingredients were combined and placed under a baking lid that was then covered with embers.

The thermal processing lasted for about 45 minutes, and the dish was served along with the wheat and flax bread that also included chives and cumin.





SMOKED TROUT

Ingredients:

- 15 pieces of trout
- salt (as desired)

Preparation time: about 1.5 h

Serves 6-8 people

Cleaned and salted trout were tied to a net-like construction and were then inserted into a pipe-like metal frame that was sealed.

The fish was smoked for about 1.5 h, and was served with a side of warm bread prepared under a baking lid.

During the planning stage for the preparation of the menu for the workshop, the participants decided to try out the technique of smoking food.

Archaeological theories suggest that this technique must have been employed by the Early Iron Age population, and one of the possible ways of doing so was by smoking food in a hollow tree trunk. Seeing as it was not possible to obtain a suitable tree trunk, the food prepared during the workshop was smoked in a hollow metal pipe because its shape most resembles the shape of a trunk.





Dishes baked
on a heated stone



WHEAT FLAT CAKES

Ingredients:

- 0.25 kg of wheat flour
- 0.25 kg of integral flour
- 1 egg
- 2 dl of water
- a teaspoon of salt

Preparation time: about 30 min

Serves 6-8 people

All of the ingredients were kneaded into dough of non sticky, but soft and pliable consistency. The mixture was covered with a damp cloth and was left to rest for about half an hour. After that, the dough was divided into balls of equal size and was stretched into “flat cakes”.

The baking was done on the stone surface, and the cakes were baked for about 15 minutes on each side, until they became slightly puffy with golden crispy circles.

The flat cakes were served with baked pork liver and apple as an entrée, but also as a dessert, combined with honey and crushed hazelnuts.

The participants of the workshop wanted to know if meat really could be baked on a stone tile that was exposed to fire on one side, so they decided to test this interesting cooking technique. Larger blocks of amphibolite rock obtained in the vicinity of the site of Kaptol, on the Papuk Mountain, were used. The tiles were arranged so as to form a kind of fireplace so that fire could be started within the construction, and the upper surface was straightened so it would be suitable for baking. Apart from meat, in this case pork liver and belly, the stone was also used to bake apples and homemade wheat flat cakes. The biggest problem that occurred during the testing of this technique was the participants' inexperience, i.e. the question of how long it would take to bake a piece of meat and if the stone could transfer enough heat for the meat not to be raw in the middle. The questions of the participants of the workshop were soon answered – it was concluded that, not only did the technique work, but it could be used to cook extremely tasty savory dishes. The participants used this technique to prepare three dishes. Before the food was cooked, the surface of the stone used for baking was coated with a small amount of lard in order for the meat not to stick to the stone and/or burn too quickly, as well as for the meat to obtain a somewhat stronger, fuller taste.



PORK LIVER WITH APPLES

Ingredients:

- 2 kg of pork liver
- several apples
- black pig bacon (as desired)
- salt (as desired)

Preparation time: about 40 min

Serves 6-8 people

The liver was salted and placed on a previously heated stone where they were baked for approximately 20 minutes on each side.

Next to the liver, thin slices of bacon and apples were also baked. An old local sort of apples was used because it resembled the wild apples discovered by archaeobotanists at the archaeological site of Kaptol.

When the meat was done, it was served in an interesting fashion: larger pieces of homemade flat cakes were covered by pieces of baked liver that was topped with crispy baked bacon and baked apples.

In this way, the participants of the workshop could try a really exquisite combination of crispy and soft textures, as well as the classic savory-sweet combination of flavors that perfectly matched the slightly bitter taste of the liver.





PORK BELLY COATED IN HONEY

Ingredients:

- 2 kg of precut pork belly
- salt (as desired)
- honey

Preparation time: about 50 minutes

Serves 6-8 people

Apart from pork liver, the participants wanted to know if a heated stone could be used to bake a more “solid” piece of meat that requires longer cooking time on higher temperatures even in today’s modern kitchens.

It was decided that this technique would be used to bake pork belly. On a heated stone coated in lard, the meat took about 20 minutes on each side to be completely cooked through. In order to avoid repeating flavor combinations, the participants coated the meat with a thin layer of honey towards the end of the cooking process, thereby gaining a classic combination of salty pork accompanied by sweet notes, all in combination with grain and nettle porridge that gave the dish an additional herby flavor and an interesting texture.





Meat baked
over an open fire

PORK NECK AND BLACK PIG BACON BAKED ON A STICK

Ingredients:

- pork neck (1-2 inch cubes)
- black pig bacon (1-2 inch cubes)
- salt (as desired)

Serves 6-8 people

The meat had been cut into smaller pieces and left to marinate in salt the previous day. Slices of bacon were inserted in-between the pieces of pork neck to enhance the flavor of the meat.

Seeing as the meat was sliced into different sizes, the baking on the open fire took between 15 and 25 minutes, and the activity was received as a fun culinary experience by the participants.

Despite all the preparations, planning and menu creation, the people who came up with the idea for the workshop about Early Iron Age food also wanted to enable all interested parties to participate in this interesting experiment, so it was decided that some of the pork would be baked on sticks next to an open fire.





Finally, it should be pointed out that, even though the workshop officially lasted until 4 PM, the cooks, participants and tasters were not deterred by pretty heavy rainfall and stayed until late into the evening, so we can joyfully conclude that the Early Iron Age workshop was a huge success and that at least some of the dishes prepared on this occasion could be included into the local gastronomy, especially in the sense of redoing the workshop on a yearly basis.

If the preceding text sparked your interest, or if your eye was caught by a certain dish, we encourage you to try and prepare some of the herein suggested dishes, and to surprise your family, friends and guest in a completely new way.

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