

Flavours
of
Byzantium

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PROSPECT BOOKS

2003

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First published in Great Britain by Prospect Books in 2003 at Allaleigh House, Blackawton, Totnes, Devon TQ9 7DL.

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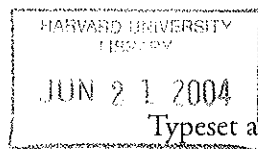
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

The illustrations on the cover and the details used at the head of each chapter are based on 'Meal of the sons and daughters of Job' (*Job* 1.13–19), from a Byzantine manuscript of *Job with commentaries* illustrated by Manuel Tzykandyles at Mistra in 1362; now Paris, Bibl. Nat., manuscrit grec 135 fol. 18v. Redrawn by Andras Kaldor.

ISBN 1-903018-14-5



Typeset and designed by Tom Jaine.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

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The Eight Flavours

Text I The Eight Flavours

In this first short handbook, an unknown Greek nutritionist attempts to classify the flavours of food and to determine how flavour relates to dietary power. His work – totally at odds with modern Western dietary knowledge – is an essential starting point for understanding Byzantine views on how to choose foods, wines and aromas. He appeals constantly to the two elemental pairs, hot and cold, dry and moist. He takes for granted the four bodily humours, blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile: for more on these see chapter three.

In slightly differing forms this brief handbook is to be found included in the various manuscript compilations known to modern scholars as *Peri Trophon Dynameos* 'On the Power of Foods' and *De Cibis* 'On Foods'. The present translation is based on *Peri Trophon Dynameos*, pages 467–469 in Delatte's edition of that text, but incorporates (as indicated by footnotes below) selected variants from *De Cibis* section 1.¹

[467] The nature and power of foods and drinks are known from their flavours. There are eight flavours: sweet, pungent, salty, sharp, oily, astringent, tasteless, melting.²

Sweet flavour is hot and moist. It is suited to those who have a well-balanced constitution, and increases the production of healthy blood. In the case of those with hot, dry, bilious constitutions it produces yellow bile. All juicy sweet fruits have less heat and dryness

¹ In the footnotes to this chapter the following abbreviations are used to identify various manuscript compilations. *DA*: *De Alimentis*. *DC*: *De Cibis*. *PTD*: *Peri Trophon Dynameos*. *PZT*: *Peri tes ek ton zoon trophes*.

² In *DC* the last two are given as 'acid, tasteless'.

than does sugar. In proportion with an increase in sweetness, in any food and drink, goes an increase in heat.

Pungent flavour has more heat and dryness than sweet flavour, and harms those whose constitutions are hot and dry. It lightens and dissolves phlegm, matures thick humours, and is helps those with cold and moist constitutions. [It produces thirst and appetite.]¹

Salty flavour is dry and [hot],² and creates thirst in in hot and dry constitutions. It cuts phlegm, and dissolves thick and unwholesome food residues in the stomach.

[468] The sharp flavour has a burning quality, as have pepper, pellitory, onions and garlic, all of which have great heat, and this harms hot and dry constitutions. Its exhalations produce headache and thin the blood. It helps those with cold and moist constitutions. It dissolves the moistness and thickness from the stomach and intestines, typical of cold and wet weather.

The oily flavour is moderately hot and moist. It is suited to those with a dry and hot temperament. It is unsuitable for those with a weak stomach, leading to loss of appetite and killing digestion. It is suited to dysenterics and to those with a dry temperament.

The astringent flavour, as of castor oil and the like, has a [dry]³ and cold temperament and is suited to those with a moist temperament. It is harmful to dry constitutions.⁴ It is suited to persons the sinews of whose stomachs are porous from excessive moistness, and to those with bowel disorders.

Foods with moderately astringent flavour, such as quinces, pears, apples and the like, have moderate capability and aptitude to

¹ Added text from *DC*.

² The text reads 'moist', which is contradictory.

³ Correction from *DC*.

⁴ *DC* inserts at this point qualities attributed by *PTD* to the melting flavour (below): 'It strengthens the stomach, arouses its appetite, stops stomach pain, encourages stomach activity, and assuages thirst. A food with this quality is harmful to those with cold temperaments and constitutions: it weakens and harms their nerves. The acid flavour's natural dryness is suited to a cold and moist temperament. It is harmful to those with dry constitutions ...' The next sentence in the text is thus made to belong to the acid flavour.

encourage the activity of the stomach, bowels and liver and to encourage appetite for food. Taken before other food they inhibit the natural function; taken after other food they encourage it.

The tasteless flavour, as of white of egg, fleasseed and the like, is moist and cold and rapidly alters the constitution towards moistness. It is suited to those with a hot and dry temperament.

The melting flavour is cold and dry. It is suited to those with a rather hot temperament. It strengthens the stomach, arouses its appetite, stops stomach pain, encourages stomach activity [469] and assuages thirst. It is harmful to those with cold temperaments and constitutions: it weakens and harms their nerves.

Acid [flavour], through its natural dryness, cuts, breaks up and dissolves moistness.

when they will be quickly assimilated and lead the way for other food. If eaten afterwards they are themselves wasted and they waste other food along with themselves.

[xxix] *Foods that are slow to break down*

[29] Winkles, horn-shells, lobsters, crayfish, crabs [*pagouroi*], shrimps, fan-mussels: these are recommended to those who fail to absorb their food through excess of bad humours. Boil two or three times in purest water, replacing with new water when the first becomes briny.

[xxx] *Foods that are slow to excrete*

[30] Anything made with pasta and durum wheat flour is slow to excrete. Roasted broad beans, white bread, lentil without the shell. Brain, spinal marrow, liver, foie gras, heart. Oeufs en cocotte, hard-boiled eggs, and even more so fried eggs. Lupins, black-eyed peas, sesame, acorns. Underripe apples and pears, carobs. Sweet wine and particularly astringent wine, and water.

[xxxii] *Foods that hurt the head*

[31] Mulberries, blackberries, juniper berries, hemp seed, dates. Rocket, fenugreek, linseed. Yellow and austere wine. All aromatic wines affect the head and the nerves, while watery wine affects neither. Milk. Plums. Saffron. Walnuts. New wine. Chestnuts. Leeks, onions, garlic. Tarragon. *Phoukas*.¹

¹ Vinegar-and-water, and perhaps beer: see pp. 84-5 and glossary s.v. *phouska*.

Text 4

A Dietary Calendar

The daily regimen involves not only the choice of foods and drinks but also their quantity and the frequency of meals: it involves exercise, sexual activity, baths, massage, the use and selection of soaps and lotions and other medicaments. All of these will vary depending on the climate and the seasons. It was therefore necessary to develop a general monthly regimen which anyone might follow, and that is the purpose of the fourth and last of these dietary handbooks. The individual Byzantine reader, and most particularly the physician of any well-paying Byzantine patient, would naturally regard this as no more than a general guide, to be adjusted to the individual constitution.

Several versions of this 'Calendar' exist, some of them attributed to a certain Hierophilus the Sophist. This is a translation of the version published by Delatte in 1939. Other versions were published by Boissonade, in 1827, and by Ideler, in 1841-2 (see bibliography).

[i] *January*

January: sweet phlegm. Take three small doses of fine and very aromatic wine, but not too quickly. Take no food for three hours. Food should be roast lamb served hot, or roast sucking pig, and gravies spiced with pepper, spikenard and cinnamon; seasonings including Eastern caraway, pepper and spices; when roasting pork, baste it with honeyed wine; also eat pigs' trotters and head, jellied, with vinegar. Among birds, chickens, white and *brakata* pigeons¹

¹ 'Breeched' pigeons, a domestic variety.

(these are the best kinds) roasted, accompanied by spicy gravy and served hot; also quails and wrens: these if from the wild, being tough, should be well boiled and served hot. Among fish, sar [*Diplodus Sargus*], fried; also daurade, which like the preceding should be flavoured with spiced sauces. Among vegetables, cabbage and turnips, carrots, leeks, wild asparagus, butcher's broom, bryony shoots, to be dressed with olive oil and fish sauce; and their cooking liquor, to be drunk flavoured with spices. The cabbage is to be cooked with oil and fish sauce. Garlic suits all constitutions this month, cooked in pure olive oil. Those of robust constitutions may also take a 'dry soup',¹ with pepper, spikenard, cinnamon, cloves, a little of the best storax, and just enough honey. Among garden herbs eat rocket, leek, celery and little radishes, also rue, mint and lovage. For dips use mustard, aloes, cumin and *oinogaron*. Among pulses, grass peas and *Lathyrus Ochrus*: they are to be seasoned with oil and ground cumin. Among fruits, raisins, almonds, pistachios and pine kernels; those of robust constitutions may take quince marmalade and a little lemon; pomegranate, pear, dates, cream blended with honey and spikenard and cinnamon, and durum wheat gruel.

Four baths in the course of the month; soap with sodium carbonate diluted in wine. Make a compound skin lotion by mixing 3 lb. weight aloes, 1 lb. myrrh, 2 egg yolks; combine these and apply to the skin. This is the quantity per person. Apply it before you enter the bath,² and have three bucketfuls [of water] poured over you, then sweat, then go into the open air and sponge the ointment off thoroughly. After washing the ointment off, rub down with cooling wine and egg yolks mixed with hot rose oil, then make love.

¹ One flavoured with ingredients that are 'dry' in terms of humoral theory.

² The versions edited by Ideler and Boissonade specify 3 drams of aloes, 1 dram myrrh, and instruct that the lotion is to be applied after bathing.

[ii] February

During this month no beet and no wild vegetables must be eaten at all, and among fish no corkwings, and no vegetable soups must be drunk except leek, celery, dill and garlic. Sauces and spices and old and aromatic wines should be taken in moderation. Meats may be eaten as in the previous list, also so-called crustacea, including oysters, crabs, lobsters, mussels, scallops and the like. Among fish, groupers, wrasses, sparailons, parrot-wrasses, *stromataioi*, gobies; flavour with mustard. Dips and fruits as for January. Garden herbs and vegetables as for January; also baths, ointments and love-making as prescribed above.

[iii] March

Sweet flavours are advisable in food and drink, but in moderation: all excess is inimical to health, but small quantities are safe. Sour and bitter foods should be avoided. All kinds of fish may be eaten except those without scales; bass and grey mullet may be eaten frequently. Among pulses, emmer groats well boiled, rather watery, flavoured with honey, spikenard and cinnamon, eaten with the most aromatic of wine. Soak broad beans and boil them thoroughly with salt and good green olive oil. Also take fenugreek seed, well boiled, cold, seasoned with honey, spikenard and cinnamon; you should wash the fenugreek, rub it in the hands, then boil it until partly boiled down. If it boils down completely it becomes indigestible, constipating and bad for the bowels, but if it is not fully boiled down the same liquor, with the same bitterness, does not block the bowels. Honey will relieve its bitterness. Grass peas and *Lathyrus Ochrus*, ground; those with robust constitutions may take black-eyed peas, well boiled, with honey vinegar. Among vegetables eat beet, mallow, orach and all kinds of asparagus and mushroom, but not bryony or butcher's broom shoots, because these are bitter. Among conserves eat green olives in brine [*kolymbades*] and olives in honey vinegar, but only from time

to time. Sour foods should not be eaten, only sweet. Among fruits those already listed, with dates as wanted. Your sweet wine should be *konditon* including pepper, cinnamon, spikenard and cloves.

Six baths in the course of the month: for three of these, on Tuesdays, anoint with oil but no myrrh or aloes; for the other three, wash with water, on Fridays. Light, aromatic wines of the colour of olive oil. Moderate sex.

[iv] April

This month one should avoid radishes, mint, capers, pepper, basil, savory and all bitter flavours. Among meats choose those that are rich and well-fleshed: lambs that are grass-fed, not suckling, but that have been suckled by their mothers, and they may be young males or castrated; suckling kids: lean meat well boiled. With this take gravy moderately spiced with spikenard, green coriander and a little pepper, and the fruit of safflower because it relaxes the bowels. Avoid pork. Among birds, eat hens, male chickens, white pigeons, ducks and geese; lean meat well boiled. With this take gravy moderately [spiced]. Serve sweetened, while still hot. Sweet food and sweet drinks are the rule. Among fish, bass, *syakia*, daurade, pagre in a little well-spiced sauce; wrasse, perch, gurnard, scad, oblade, and to speak simply all tender-fleshed scaly fish are to be eaten fried, with a little spiced sauce, no excessive quantity. Avoid all dried pulses, but fresh pulses may be eaten with the meats listed above. Among vegetables eat orach, dill and coriander, all green, and lettuce, which requires moderate dressing in squill vinegar.¹ Also eat boiled garlic cloves with olive oil and salt, and a little leek. Avoid all dried fruits. Drink highly aromatic, anise-flavoured, and white wines.

Inhale the scents of violets, roses, lilies, wild chamomile and all aromatic flowers, and among 'dry' scents those of musk and attar

¹ Squill root (*Urginea maritima*), now often said to be poisonous, was once important in Byzantine cuisine and medicine. See Stannard 1974; Jeanselme and Oeconomos 1923.

of roses. Moderate love-making. Eight baths in the course of the month; soap with Gallic soap. Apply a skin lotion once in the month, with no aloes; it should contain musk, three egg yolks and rose oil.

[v] May

May governs the black blood. Avoid anything dry, anything that produces bad humours, anything glutinous like extremities, offal and fibrous parts. Eat the meats prescribed for April. Eat salt and dried fish; avoid the young of the sea, and follow the previous month's rules for food and bathing. Among vegetables eat asparagus shoots, 'dry soups', pulse soups, porridges, watered fish sauce, fenugreek. Avoid everything dry, salty and sour. Take moderately sweet food and sweet drinks, and follow the prescriptions for April.

[vi] June

June governs the hot blood. [On rising] swallow three small doses of cold water, slowly, and then fast until the third hour. Choose all relatively cold foods, in moderation, and avoid the more bitter and dry flavours such as pepper, cloves, cinnamon and spicy products. Among garden herbs garlic, onion, leeks, radish, rocket, cress, mustard and chopped oregano, mint.¹ Savory and butcher's broom to be avoided. Among meats, rich lamb or kid: prefer the meat of male animals, and do not take any fat. They should be pastured or milk-fed lambs: no spicing is required at all except coriander, spikenard and anise. Take oregano moderately. Avoid drinking any kind of soup. Among birds, eat hens, chickens, young *brakata* pigeons, roasted and served hot. Take aromatic and anise-flavoured *kondita* and light wines with hot water, not old or deeply-coloured

¹ Herbs in this list beginning with garlic are recommended; those in the following list ending with butcher's broom are to be avoided (as if anyone would dream of eating butcher's broom shoots in June!) but it is not clear where the full stop separating the two lists should be placed.

wines. Among fish, eat all the rich-fleshed ones including wrasse, perch, gurnard, sparailon, daurade, grouper, gobies and all soft-fleshed fish. Avoid bass, grey mullet, corkwing, red mullet, rascasse, pagre, lobster, crab and all hard-shelled and coarse-fleshed seafood. Dips should be based on honey vinegar. Fish soups should be spiced with spikenard, anise and coriander; fried fish only moderately [spiced]. Lettuce, endive, white celery, dressed with squill vinegar, to be taken moderately: copious amounts of lettuce dim the eyesight. Among fruits eat 'white' cherries and cucumbers, moderately. Anything not listed should be avoided this month.

Eight baths in the course of the month: no skin lotion at all this month. Ointment and soap, of the same ingredients, until the 21st of the month. No love-making.

[vii] July

July governs the yellow bile. This month one should avoid sexual activity, excessive food of all kinds, stress and excessive drinking.¹ As prescribed for June, eat, in moderation, rich kid meat from castrated animals, hare, gazelle, deer, turtle doves and wood pigeons; always eat these with some vinegar. Garden herbs as for June. Among fish eat the rich-fleshed kinds such as corkwing, wrasse and all rich-fleshed and moist fish. [Conserves] in honey vinegar and in fish sauce and vinegar. Among fruits choose the moister ones such as melons, green figs eaten with salt, any grapes except the black ones, pear, apple, plum, peach and all that are moist to eat; avoid other fruits. Light wines: eat sparingly but take plenty of wine, also rose wine. Do not take any vegetable soups except carrot, flavoured with honey and spikenard.

Eight baths in the course of the month; wash briskly, using a lotion incorporating Cimolian fullers' earth. Do not use purges.

¹The versions edited by Ideler and Boissonade add that siestas, snacks and dried fruits are also to be avoided, explaining that all these things cause biliousness.

[viii] August

August governs the green bile. During this month avoid glutinous vegetables with thick juices, such as mallow and all wild greens: eat beet, blite and gourd. Among meats take lamb and castrated kid, with hare and gazelle till the 15th of the month; lean meat, served hot with honey vinegar. All hens, chickens and pigeons may be eaten without danger. Among [fresh] fish, flatfish and rich-fleshed kinds should be taken, occasionally with a mustard dip. [Salt and pickled fish, and also dried fruits, should be avoided. Take fresh fruit, including figs, grapes, pears, yellow plums, ripe peaches and the like. Among vegetables, all hot and dry types should be avoided,]¹ such as rue, savory, garlic, leeks, cress, radish and mustard.

Four baths in the course of the month.

Among conserves use capers, green olives in brine [*kolymbades*], olives in honey vinegar, almonds. Black olives must be avoided. Light and aromatic wines and rose wine.

[ix] September

September governs the black bile. All kinds of bitter foods should be eaten, in particular boiled leeks, fresh leeks, leek soup, boiled garlic, raw garlic and garlic in a spicy sauce. Among meat, lamb; [among] birds, pigeons and geese and quails (chicks and hens), ducks and wood pigeons and turtle doves and partridges; beef, along with deer, gazelle, fallow deer, hare and wild boar should be avoided. Among fish, grey mullet, corkwing and all scaleless fish may be eaten; only salt fish is to be avoided. Among pulses broad beans, lentils and grass peas are to be avoided; others may be eaten. All kinds of asparagus and cèpes de Bordeaux² may be eaten. Among fruits,

¹The missing text is supplied from the version edited by Ideler.

²The Greek is *amanitai leukoi* 'white mushrooms'. This species is similarly named in several modern languages and is found from August to September (Davidson 1999 pp. 152, 523 with reference).

white grapes, wild pears as they ripen, sweet apples, green figs, peaches of both kinds (downy peaches and nectarines), pomegranates, dates, quinces may all be eaten. Among dry fruits, pistachios, walnuts, almonds and pine kernels. Drink white and olive-oil-coloured wines and rose and wormwood wines.

Eight baths, using lotion. Make love.

[x] *October*

October governs light [phlegm]. All kinds of bitter foods should be eaten, particularly leeks and spicy leek soups. Avoid all fish, glutinous vegetables, and all salt meat.¹

[xi] *November*

November governs the watery phlegm. This month there must be no baths or anointing: if necessary, just two baths. Among meats, no deer or goat or wild boar or wild goat. All other meats of animals and birds may be eaten, lean, served hot, boiled and spiced; including sucklings. Among fish eat any except the more watery ones, corkwing and gobies, but do not eat scaleless fish. In using spices prefer the bitter tastes. Leek and mallow are good to eat, and all dry foods. Old, light, aromatic wines. Take fenugreek soup occasionally. Make love.

¹ The versions edited by Ideler and Boissonade are much fuller here. Ideler's adds: 'Firstly, all food should be either boiled or raw; and drink the cooking liquor. Boiled garlic, spiced: spikenard, pepper, cinnamon and cloves. This to accompany food. Among meats, lamb, chicken, pigeon, geese, quails, corncrakes, and suckling animals. Avoid ducks, woodpigeons, turtle doves, fallow deer, wild boar, hare. Among fish, avoid grey mullet, anchovies, red mullet, and all scaleless and all salt fish; all others can be eaten. Among pulses, avoid broad bean, lentil and grass pea: eat others. Among vegetables, avoid cabbage and turnip: eat others. Eat all kinds of asparagus and cèpes de Bordeaux. In fruits, eat white grapes, ripe wild pears, sweet apples, green figs, medlars, peaches, dates, pomegranates; in dried fruits, walnuts, pistachios, almonds, pine kernels and hazelnuts, but avoid bay berries. White and olive-oil-coloured wine and wormwood and rose wine.'

[xii] *December*

December governs the salty phlegm. During this month do not eat cabbage or *serizon*¹ or *skimbron*.² Meats just as for November, similarly with fish, vegetables, pulses, wine and leek soup. Take fenugreek soup in moderate amount, young green olives in brine [*kolymbades*], olives in honey vinegar.

Eight baths, using an ointment containing aloes and myrrh. Wash off with wine and sodium carbonate. Make love.

¹ Possibly *seris*, which would mean 'endive' or 'chicory'.

² For the unknown *skimbron* the version edited by Boissonade has *sisymbrian*, classical Greek for 'water mint'.