Gastronomy of Taste in the Seventeenth Century

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Gastronomy of Taste in the Seventeenth Century,
Based on Two Recipes from Sir Kenelm Digby’s
The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Kt. Opened, 1669
Background
Sir Kenelm Digby (1603 –1665)

- Born into the Catholic gentry
- Attended Oxford, but left before earning a degree
- Later granted an honorary M.A. from Cambridge
- Founding member of the Royal Society
- Spent a number of years traveling France and sailing to Gibraltar
- Maintained a presence at court under Charles I & II, and Cromwell
- Wrote many works on natural philosophy, astrology, religion
- Died at age 62, possibly from a kidney stone

Gayhurst Court, Buckinghamshire
Digby’s birthplace
Digby’s Culinary Interests

- **The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Kt. Opened** was published after his death in 1669, possibly by his former household steward, “Hartman”.

- Contained many recipes for mead, fruit wines, cakes, pies, soups, stews, and preservation.

- Some of the recipes were medicinal in nature, others were for pleasure.

- Cuisine presented in Digby’s Closet was heavily dominated by medieval culinary styles, but also showed an interest in more recent developments in cuisine such as flower distillations and fruit candying.

- A heavy hand with spices was present, inherited from medieval culinary styles, but it was far more muted than in earlier works.
Today’s Recipes

*Nourissant potage de santé*
- a meat broth intended to balance the humors and restore homeostasis in ill persons

*Tea with Egg*
- a thickened tea (caudle) meant to fortify the stomach in ill or hungry persons
Recipe 1: Digby’s *Nourissant potage de santé*

- “Fill a large earthen pot with water, and make it boil.
- Then take out half the water, and put in Beef and Mutton and boil and skim.
- As soon as it boils, season it with Salt and Pepper.
- After an hour and half, or two hours, put in a Capon, and four or five Cloves.
- When it is within a good half hour of being boiled enough, put in such herbs, as you intend, as Sorrel, Lettice, Purslane, Borage and Bugloss, or Green-pease; and in the Winter, Parsley-roots and White-endive, or Navets, &c.
- Pour the broth upon tosted light bread, and let it stew a while in the dish covered.
- …It is good to put into the water, at the first, a whole Onion or two.”
Recipe II: Digby’s Tea with Eggs

“The Jesuite that came from China, Ann. 1664, told Mr. Waller, That there they use sometimes in this manner:

To near a pint of the infusion, take two yolks of new laid-eggs, and beat them very well with as much fine Sugar as is sufficient for this quantity of Liquor; when they are very well incorporated, pour your Tea upon the Eggs and Sugar, and stir them well together. So drink it hot.

The water is to remain upon it, no longer than [the time it takes to] say the Miserere Psalm very leisurely.”
Miserere

c. 2 minutes 20 seconds

“He beat the yolkes of eggs with sugar candie in a basin and then powerd in it the hot infusion of Thee always stirring of it. When it was well mixed makeroons were broken and sopd in it and rose water added. This was a very pleasante drinke or rather caudle. The preparation was about 3 eggs to ½ a pint of the liquer.”

Thank You

Michelle Erickson, *Black & Blue Teapot*, 2001, V&A Museum,