

Spices in Late Medieval England

Uses and Representations

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Degree, School of Philosophical,
Historical and International Studies, Monash University, October 2012

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Frequency of Spice Usage in Cookery Books.....	6
Quantity and Expense for the Household.....	13
The Representation of Spices in Literature.....	23
Conclusion.....	31
Appendix 1.....	32
Bibliography.....	37

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1. Comparative Expenditures for Battle Abbey, 1352-1413.	23
Figure 2. Comparative Percentages of Expenditure for Battle Abbey, 1352-1413.....	23
Table 2. Spice expenses for the household of Dame Alice de Bryene, 1412-1413. ...	24
Table 3. Spice expenses for the household of Dame Alice de Bryene, 1418-1419.....	25
Table 4. Spice expenses for Selby Abbey, 1416-1417.....	25
Table 5. Spice quantities and costs for the Coronation Feast of Richard III.....	27

Introduction

In the late-medieval period, Europe's position on the world map consolidated dramatically, with increased trade with the Near East and explorations down the western coast of Africa. This eventually led to Da Gama and Columbus' voyages to India and the Americas respectively. One of the main factors driving these explorations was the alluring commodity of spices and the desire to by-pass the Arab traders in the passage to Europe, which would increase profit for the traders and reduce the end price for consumers. The demand for spices heightened in correlation with the rising living standards across Europe, as the wealthy increasingly saw the need to differentiate themselves from those below them, doing so in display through clothing, architecture, and, as will be examined here, spice.¹ Whilst spices were well known to Europe in the times of Ancient Rome, the use of trade routes to the Near East had diminished severely since the collapse of the Empire. Some commodities were nonetheless still traded, such as spices.² With the Crusades to the Holy Land, and increased contact with Muslims in Spain, the variety of foods consumed in Europe expanded with a concomitant possible increase in spice usage.³ These commodities reached across Europe, leading to a high demand amongst the upper classes, with consumption eventually filtering down towards the peasantry. It is this consumption of spices during the late-medieval period that is the focus of this thesis.

Previous scholarship largely focuses on the spice trade from India and the Spice Islands to Europe, or trends across Western Europe. This thesis however, will explore the end consumption of the product across England. Due to a shortage of material surviving on the topic before 1300, this study will investigate the consumption of spices from the fourteenth century up until the 1490s. This end point has been chosen as Da Gama and Columbus' voyages saw a shift in the way that spices were conceived, as new flavours were discovered, prices fell due to the circumvention of Muslim traders, thus eliminating the middle man, and production methods were observed, which challenged some of the myths surrounding the origin of spices. Working within this chronological period, this thesis will explore the household consumption of spices, through their use as an ingredient, commodity and status symbol. I will look at the frequency of spices in recipes for the ostentatious feast in order to understand just how often spices were used, thus engaging with academic debate on the spiciness of food. This will be complemented by an examination of the costs and quantities of spices purchased for both daily household consumption, and feasts in order to further investigate their use as a food substance. To provide a context for this quantitative study literature will also be examined to illuminate how spices were viewed and represented in a wider cultural setting. With the combination of these approaches it is the aim of this thesis to provide a detailed understanding of just what spices meant to people in this time and space, as well as providing a localised study to fit within, and complement, the macro studies that dominate the study of spice consumption in this period.

¹ Jean Favier, *Gold and Spices: The Rise of Commerce in the Middle Ages*, trans. Caroline Higgett, (New York & London: Holmes & Meier, 1998), 20.

² Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 25-26.

³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

Before further discussion of this thesis, it is important that the category, spices, is defined. For this, Francesco Balducci Pegolotti's *La Pratica della Mercatura* has been used to provide a definition,⁴ as well as a framework for this study. Whilst this source is not English, with Pegolotti being a Florentine merchant, the list of spices found in this text is the most comprehensive of surviving medieval records, and so will be used.⁵ This work was published before 1340, and is used because it is contemporaneous with the period this thesis examines.⁶ Whilst this source lists many items that today would not be considered a spice, such as fabrics, dyes and papers, the list of edible foodstuffs displays the range available to the medieval consumer. This thesis, however, does deviate somewhat from this list, excluding some listed items such as fresh butter and salt, as these could be produced domestically, fennel and pomegranates, as these were used fresh, unlike all other examined spices, and olive oil which was produced in continental Europe. Alkanet has been investigated as it was used as a food colouring, following the use of saunders, which comes from the mentioned red sandalwood. Figs, prunes and currants have also been included, as they are similar to the imported dried fruit mentioned such as raisins and dates. This study also includes pre-made spice mixes, which are not listed in *La Pratica della Mercatura*. I have translated these spices in Appendix 1, which will be referred to throughout this thesis.

Sources

The sources used in this thesis can be placed into three distinct categories for the purposes of this study. These categories are cookery books, which will be investigated to explore the usage of spices in medieval cooking; household and accounts to explore the financial aspects of spice consumption; and literature and correspondence, which will be examined for references to spices as an indicator of status and their associations with mystery and paradise.

Cookery books from the late-medieval period were used primarily as archival material, rather than practical guides.⁷ They are frequently found in miscellanies, accompanied by poems, remedies and other household advice, and generally only contain recipes for feast type situations. However, some contain instructions for producing substitute ingredients, should there be a shortage of what is required. These collections will be analysed for the frequency in which spices are used in order to understand their role in food for the medieval feast.⁸

These collections of recipes will be complemented by a study of the household accounts for the purchasing of spices. These accounts will be used to discuss the quantity of spices used, in order to determine the spiciness of medieval diets, as well as comparative expenditure on spices in order to determine their financial value. These aspects will be examined in relation to both the everyday diet and the

⁴ Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, "La Pratica della Mercatura," in *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. Allan Evans (Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America, 1936), 3-383. See Appendix 1.

⁵ Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*, 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷ Terence Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (UK: The Boydell Press, 1995), 25.

⁸ Recipes used here are, in chronological order: *MS Royal 12.C.xii, Diuersa Cibaria, Diusersa Servisa, The Forme of Cury, Utilis Coquinario, British Library Additional 27443, Liber Cure Cocorum, Harleian MS 279, Ashmole MS 1439, Harleian MS 4016, Douce MS 55, An Ordinance of Pottage, Laud MS 553, Thomas Awkbarow's Recipes (MS Harley 5401), and Gentyll manly Cokere (MS Pepys 1047)*

consumption at a feast in order to demonstrate the way in which spices were added to food in different domestic situations.⁹

In terms of literature from the period mentioning spice consumption, the works of Chaucer, in particular the *Canterbury Tales*,¹⁰ provide an insight into the ways in which spice consumption was perceived. This is achieved through Chaucer's description of the humoral system, with which his audience would have been familiar, to describe the personality of his characters according to their diet.¹¹ Whilst this study will not delve into the humoral properties of spices, what is useful in these diet descriptions is the way in which the spiciness of the diets also indicates birth status, instead of acquired status. This works of the belief that peasants can only stomach a simple diet of alliums, coarse bread and dairy products, that townsfolk prefer sausages and other preserved meats, and that only the nobility can eat a rich diet which is highly spiced, following the medieval notions of the hierarchy of the world order. Literature will also be examined to provide examples of beliefs about the origins and paradisiacal associations of spices, as well as their implication in greed and social corruption. These additional areas will be examined through works such as *Mandeville's Travels*, in which the origin of spices is richly described, and social commentaries, in which the excesses of society are discussed.¹² Whilst the descriptions of spices have been briefly examined in the secondary literature, there is little in depth analysis, a gap that this thesis will aim to close.

Historiography

Whilst there is little secondary literature specifically investigating what will be presented in this thesis, there is a strong body of work in which it sits. Despite this range of information, the study of spices has been a relatively recent phenomenon, as for a long time the subject was considered to be too elite and luxurious to produce any worthwhile study, as spices were not considered to be an influential element in the outcome of historical events.¹³ This historiography sits in two major areas, the trans-European trade and the editing and analysis of recipes.

The trans-European trade of spices has received a lot of scholarly attention, with the leader in this field being Paul Freedman.¹⁴ Freedman provides a macro lens to spices, presenting information regarding the origin, transportation and trade of spices,

⁹ Accounts used here will be: The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, 28 September 1412-28 September 1413, Fragmentary Memorandum on Fly-Leaves of the Account Book for the Year 1412-1413, Steward's Account, Michaelmas 1419 from the household of Dame ALICE DE Bryene, Margaret Paston to John Paston III, 5 November 1471, Accounts of the Cellarers of Battle Abbey, 1275-1513, Blakemere: The account of Richard Kenleye, Steward of Lord Talbot's Household there, Blakemere: The account for Thomas Clerc, Steward of the household of Sir Richard Talbot there, An' Ordynance for King Richardes Coronacion at Westminster the Sondag the vjth Day or July, and Ane Ordynance one Frydaye at Night at the Towre or Wher the King Wilbe the Same Day.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Canterbury Tales," in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, F. N. Robinson ed. (The Riverside Press, Massachusetts, 1933), 19-314.

¹¹ Joseph Allen Bryant Jr, "The Diet of Chaucer's Franklin," *Modern Language Notes* 63 (1948): 318-325.

¹² For this study of literature the following works will be used: Jean d'Outremeuse, *Mandeville's Travels*; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Romaunt of the Rose*; Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*; *Richard the Redeless*; *Mum and the Sothsegger*; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; and *Wynnere and Wastoure*.

¹³ Stefan Halikowski Smith, "Demystifying a Change in Taste: Spices, Space and Social Hierarchy in Europe, 1380-1750," *The International History Review* 29 (2007): 237-238.

¹⁴ See Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*; Paul Freedman, "Spices and Late-Medieval European Ideas of Scarcity and Value," *Speculum* 80 (2005): 1209-1227.

as well as their use in perfumery, medicine and cuisine. Whilst his work is fairly comprehensive in its study of spices, like most other works in this field, it does not provide the micro or local details due to his aim to write a more macro-history study.

The other field within which this thesis sits is the study of cookery books of the medieval period. Constance Hieatt and Sharon Butler dominate this area in the editing of and publishing of recipes, and Bruno Laurioux has been an influential contributor in the analysis of these recipes in terms of spice usage.¹⁵ Hieatt and Butler present and re-interpret these late-medieval recipes well, however, due to the narrowness of their field, these recipes are rarely contextualised in their usage, and thus spice quantities suggested are often inaccurate. Laurioux's work focuses more on spice usage than other ingredients, however he only focuses on two recipe collections. My study will substantially expand this.

This gap in both the micro study of spice consumption and a broader context for these micro studies is where this thesis will sit. Sitting within the broader studies, its combination of the study of recipes, household consumption and cultural contextualisation will attempt to fill this missing research in order to provide a greater understanding towards the consumption of spices in the late-medieval period.

Methodology

To explore this topic a multidisciplinary approach will be taken, which will incorporate a variety of different texts, each of which will be analysed with a different method. Chapters One and Two both take a quantitative approach to provide a statistical account of the way that spices were used and purchased, whilst Chapter Three provides a historical context.

Chapter One statistically analyses cookery-books from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to provide both numerical and percentage data as to the frequency that each spice appears in these recipes. This approach has been taken to extend on previous studies, such as that of Laurioux who uses only two recipe collections, (containing 263 recipes).¹⁶ I will further clarify spice usage through the use of a much larger range of data - 1377 recipes in total.

This is followed by another quantitative chapter analysing the percentage of the household budget and spice quantities purchased. This methodology has been chosen as the recipes in the first chapter rarely mention quantities, and thus through the examination of financial records these quantities can be seen.

Whilst this quantitative study illuminates frequencies and quantities there is also a need for a cultural context, which Chapter Three provides. Here literature is examined in order to discuss the perceived role of spices in society as an indicator of wealth and status to attempt to explain why people spent so much on food flavouring.

¹⁵ See Constance B. Hieatt, ed., *An Ordinance of Pottage* (London: Prospect Books, 1988); Constance B. Hieatt, *Concordance of English Recipes* (Arizona: ACMRS, 2006); Constance B. Hieatt, "The Medieval Culinary Recipes in MS Harley 5401: An edition and commentary," *Medium Aevum* 65 (1996): 54-69; Constance B., Hieatt and Sharon Butler, eds., *Curry on Inglysch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Constance B. Hieatt, and Sharon Butler. *Pleyn Delit: Medieval Cookery for Modern Cooks* (Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 1979 (1976)); Constance B. Hieatt, and Robin F. Jones, "Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections Edited from British Library Manuscripts Additional 32085 and Royal 12.C.xii," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 859-882; Bruno Laurioux, "Spices in the Medieval Diet: A New Approach," *Food and Foodways: Explorations in the History and Culture of Human Nourishment* 1 (1985): 43-75.

¹⁶ Laurioux, "Spices in the Medieval Diet: A New Approach," 45-47.

This follows on from the works of Freedman where the cultural context of spice consumption is briefly examined.¹⁷ This multidisciplinary approach can shed much light on the use, consumption and meaning of spices in the late medieval period.

This thesis will be divided into three chapters, each using a different framework to examine the sources. The first chapter, Frequency of Spice Usage in Cookery Books, will examine the appearance of spices in cookery books, discussing both the frequent uses for individual recipe collections, as well as presenting data collected from the analysis of fifteen recipe collections. The aim of this chapter is to provide an understanding of English cookery books and the presence of spices within them, to provide a demonstration of the display of spices in feasts.

The second chapter, Quantity and Expense for the Household, will provide a more detailed study into a field in which it is briefly covered, with the examination of household accounts with the specific interest of spices, as opposed to other studies of such material. This chapter will look into the economic side of spice consumption taking into account household spending, price comparisons, and the quantity consumed in relation to household size, status and other food quantities obtained.

Chapter Three, The Representation of Spices in Literature, will complement the first two in that it will analyse the social status displays and meanings of the consumption discussed in the previous chapter, as well as additional associations.

Through the culmination of these three chapters, a more comprehensive image of the ways in which spices were consumed in late-medieval England, and the symbolism of status the display of this consumption will be provided, therefore contributing in its own way to the existing field of scholarship.

Overall, my argument is that whilst spices were important in late-medieval England, they were primarily items of display, and that a multi-disciplinary approach, covering multiple forms of information, is required to see this. This approach is required because the examination of cookery books suggests that spice usage was frequent, however the household accounts would suggest otherwise, whilst literature shows that spice consumption was dictated by status. It is therefore through this combined approach that the consumption of spices in late-medieval England can be seen in all its variations and forms.

¹⁷ See Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*.

Chapter 1

Frequency of Spice Usage in Cookery Books

This chapter will present the empirical evidence for the frequency of spice usage in late-medieval English cooking. This data will be collated through the examination of fifteen of the surviving cookery books from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. From these sources it can be seen that spices are frequently used, however the quantities are rarely given in accurate terms, and therefore will not be examined in this chapter. The examined sources will be listed with their individual frequency of spice usage, as well as the two most frequently used spices, before the collated data is examined. This data will assist this thesis in engaging with the academic debate as to the frequency of spice usage in cookery.

Before presenting the cookery books and data, the context in which these recipes were formed, and how they were used is worth examining. Food in the medieval period was heavily conceptualised and regulated, and its meaning and use were influenced by the Galenic humoral system and fast day regulations. It was the job of the cook to present dishes that abided by these regulations.

The Galenic humoral system worked on the basis that there were four humors; sanguine, choleric, melancholy and phlegmatic. These were, in turn, warm and moist, warm and dry, cold and dry, and cold and moist. In order for an individual to be healthy, one had to balance these four humours through their environment and diet.¹⁸ Food did not only fall into these four categories, but also possessed different degrees, such as vinegar, which was considered to be cold in the first degree and dry in the third.¹⁹ In order to balance this, sugar was frequently used, which was warm in the first degree and moist in the second, thus producing the distinctive sweet and sour flavours of the medieval period.²⁰ Spices were also used to regulate this balance, as each had their own properties.

As well as the humoral property of foods requiring adherences, eating in medieval times was marked by fast and meat days. Contrary to modern understandings of fasting, these days only restricted the consumption of land animals and their products, such as eggs and dairy, but were no less extravagant in their use of spices. This can be seen in cookery books where recipes for fast days require simple substitutions for the meat, milk and eggs used, with seasonings being the same.

The examined recipes were not only shaped by these regulations, but also the extravagant feasts in which they were used. Whilst it is speculated that everyday diets were relatively simple, the food consumed in a feast context was elaborate. Here the wealth of the host and the craftsmanship of the cook were demonstrated through the use of expensive ingredients, such as spices, difficult cooking techniques, and opulent displays. It was in this context that the examined recipes were used. These feasts, whilst seemingly only constrained by finances, did abide by the above-mentioned regulations, as can be seen in surviving menus from the period designated for use on a fast day. These feasts were also regulated by sumptuary laws, such as that of 1336,

¹⁸ For a study of Galen, particularly on his treatises *On the Power of Foods* see Mark Grant, *Galen on Food and Diet* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁹ Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*, 51-2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

which restricted daily meals to no more than two courses, extending to three for important feasts.²¹

The sources

To investigate the use of spices in foods, this chapter examines 1377 recipes from fifteen different manuscripts. Whilst the impetus for the publication of these recipes is unknown, it is speculated that cooks collated them as archival, rather than practical material.²² The compilers of the below collections are unknown, apart from *MS Harley 5401*, which is signed Thomas Awkbarow, and the *Forme of Cury* which is attributed to Richard II's master cook. This anonymous compilership is common across Europe, with the occasional exception, such as the above-mentioned Taillevent.

MS Royal 12.C.xii

This Anglo-Norman manuscript has been dated to circa 1320-40, and is found in a collection containing various poems and prose.²³ This cookery book contains thirty-two recipes, of which only one does not contain spices. Unlike the majority of the examined collection, saffron is rarely used, as it is only found in three recipes, with almonds being the most prevalent, in sixty-three percent, and sugar in fifty-six percent.²⁴ This collection also stands out from the others examined in its use of pistachio nuts, which are not mentioned elsewhere.

Diuersa Cibaria

This collection is found in British Library Additional MS 46919, and dates to the first quarter of the fourteenth century.²⁵ This source contains translated recipes for all of the previously discussed Royal 12.C.xii, as well as other Anglo-Norman recipes.²⁶ It contains sixty-three recipes, with all containing spices, with the most frequent being almonds, which are in sixty-two percent of recipes, and sugar, present in forty percent.²⁷

Diusersa Servisa

This collection, from Bodleian Douce 257, can be dated as one of the sections of this manuscript is dated “Anno domini M^{lo}CCC^{mo} Octogesmio primo is[s]o die felicitis & audacti” or August 30, 1381, from which the manuscript as a whole can be approximately dated.²⁸ Eighty-nine percent of the ninety-two recipes in this manuscript contain spices, of which saffron, in forty percent, and almonds, in thirty-four percent, are the most frequently used.²⁹

²¹ Colin Spencer, *British Food: An Extraordinary Thousand Years of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 74.

²² Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*, 25.

²³ Hieatt and Jones, “Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections Edited from British Library Manuscripts Additional 32085 and Royal 12.C.xii,” 859.

²⁴ “MS Royal 12.C.xii,” in Hieatt and Jones, “Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections Edited from British Library Manuscripts Additional 32085 and Royal 12.C.xii,” 866-868, 877-879.

²⁵ Hieatt and Butler, *Curye on Inglysch*, 16; Hieatt and Jones, “Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections Edited from British Library Manuscripts Additional 32085 and Royal 12.C.xii,” 860.

²⁶ Hieatt and Jones, “Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections Edited from British Library Manuscripts Additional 32085 and Royal 12.C.xii,” 860.

²⁷ “Diuersa Cibaria,” in *Curye on Inglysch*, eds. Hieatt and Butler, 43-58.

²⁸ Hieatt and Butler, *Curye on Inglysch*, 17-18.

²⁹ “Diusersa Servisa,” in *Curye on Inglysch*, eds. Hieatt and Butler, 59-80.

The Forme of Cury

The *Form of Cury* is the most famous of the medieval cookery books, and is attributed to the master cooks of King Richard II.³⁰ This work, due to its attribution, has been dated to as early as 1390, although the manuscript is thought to be an early fifteenth-century edition.³¹ This source contains some 205 recipes, ninety-one percent of which contain spices. Saffron features in eighty-four percent of the recipes, and ginger and sugar are both incorporated in fifty-eight percent of the recipes.³² This is the only cookery book to contain cardamom, caraway and gold foil.

Utilis Coquinario

This collection can be found in British Library Sloane MS 468, and can be dated to circa 1400.³³ The spices most commonly found in these thirty-seven recipes are almonds and sugar, both found forty-three percent, followed by cloves at thirty percent.³⁴

Paston Letter

This recipe is found on the back of a draft letter addressed to the Abbot of Cluny, circa 1430.³⁵ This recipe is the only one out of those examined that contains Spikenard.

Liber Cure Cocorum

The *Liber Cure Cocorum* is written in verse and is found as an appendix to the *Boke of Curtasye* in Sloane Ms. 1986.³⁶ This manuscript dates from circa 1440.³⁷ Of the 126 recipes presented in this collection, only eighty-two percent contain spices, with saffron, thirty-seven percent, and pepper, twenty-nine percent, the most frequently used.³⁸ Like the *Ordinance of Pottage*, a large number of the recipes without spices are roasted meats, which are served without any additional flavouring.

Harleian MS 279

This manuscript dates to between 1430 and 1440, and is divided into three sections; *Kalendare de Potage Dyvers*, *Kalendare de Leche Vyaundez*, and *Dyuerse Bake Metis*.³⁹ The first section contains 153 recipes, which mostly use saffron, fifty percent, and sugar, forty-seven percent; the second contains saffron, fifty-two percent, and sugar, forty-four percent over sixty-four recipes; and the third contains fifty-six percent ginger and forty-nine percent sugar, over its forty-one recipes.⁴⁰

³⁰ Hieatt and Butler, *Curye on Inglysch*, 20. Although several versions of this work survive, here British Library Additional 5016 will be used

³¹ Hieatt and Butler, *Curye on Inglysch*, 24

³² "The Forme of Cury," in *Curye on Inglysch*, eds. Hieatt and Butler, 93-146.

³³ Hieatt and Butler, *Curye on Inglysch*, 19.

³⁴ "Utilis Coquinario," in *Curye on Inglysch*, eds. Hieatt and Butler, 81-92.

³⁵ "British Library Additional 27443," in *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Vol 1*, ed. Norman Davies (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 14.

³⁶ Richard Moris, ed., *Liber Cure Cocorum* (Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1862), iii.

³⁷ Hieatt, *Concordance of English Recipes*, xiv.

³⁸ "Liber Cure Cocorum," in *Liber Cure Cocorum*, ed. Moris, 7-54.

³⁹ Thomas Austin, ed., *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964 (1888)), vii.

⁴⁰ "Harleian MS 279," in *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, ed. Austin, 1-64.

Ashmole MS 1439

Nineteen recipes for sauces have been examined from this manuscript dating to circa 1430-40.⁴¹ Of these fifteen contain spices, with pepper and ginger both represented in forty-two percent of recipes, and cinnamon in twenty-three percent. This is the only recipe collection that contains nutmeg.⁴²

Harleian MS 4016

This collection dates to circa 1450 and contains 182 recipes,⁴³ of which eighty-three percent contain spices. Ginger is present in forty-six percent of recipes, and saffron, thirty-six.⁴⁴

Douce MS 55

This manuscript is very similar to Harleian MS 4016, and also dates to circa 1450.⁴⁵ Here only twelve recipes, all sauces, have been examined out of the 184. Of these only seven contain spices, of which five contain ginger and three contain saffron.⁴⁶

An Ordinance of Pottage

An Ordinance of Pottage dates to circa 1460,⁴⁷ contains 189 recipes, as well as eight additional recipes. Like many recipe collections, *An Ordinance of Pottage* is a part of a miscelany, accompanied by various, unrelated texts.⁴⁸ Eighty-seven percent of the recipes contained within the 189 contain spices, with the most common being ginger at forty-six percent, and sugar at forty-three percent.⁴⁹ The majority of the recipes that do not contain spices are roasted meats, which frequently do not have a sauce, and if one is suggested, it is usually vinegar. Of the eight additional recipes, all contain spices, with fifty percent containing ginger and thiry-eight cinnamon. Three of these recipes are sauces, two of which, Sauce verd and Sauce gynger, are commonly used in medieval cookery.

Laud MS 553

This manuscript can be dated to the mid-fifteenth century,⁵⁰ and contains twenty-five recipes, of which twenty-two contain spices. Almonds are used most frequently, with forty-eight percent, followed by sugar at thirty-six.⁵¹

Thomas Awkbarow's Recipes (MS Harley 5401)

This late fifteenth-century collection is the only one of those examined that we know of a possible author, as at the end of recipes, it states “quod dn Thomas Awkbarow”.⁵² This collection contains ninety-six recipes, with eighty-eight percent containing spices, with saffron featuring most frequently, at forty-six percent,

⁴¹ Austin, ed. *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, vii.

⁴² “Ashmole MS 1439,” in *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, ed. Austin, 108-114

⁴³ Austin, ed. *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, vii.

⁴⁴ “Harleian MS 4016,” in *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, ed. Austin, 65-107.

⁴⁵ Austin, ed. *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, vii.

⁴⁶ “Douce MS 55,” in *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, ed. Austin, 115-118.

⁴⁷ Hieatt, *Concordance of English Recipes*, xv.

⁴⁸ Yale Universtiy's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript library, ‘Wagstaff Miscellany’, ff 56-76. See “An Ordinance of Pottage,” in *An Ordinance of Pottage*, ed. Constance Hieatt (London: Prospect Books, 1988), 29-110.

⁴⁹ “An Ordinance of Pottage”, in *An Ordinance of Pottage*, ed. Hieatt, 29-110.

⁵⁰ Hieatt, *Concordance of English Recipes*, xiv.

⁵¹ “Laud MS 553,” in *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*, ed., 111-114.

followed by almonds at twenty-nine percent. This is the only collection examined to contain liquorice.⁵³

Gentyll manly Cokere (MS Pepys 1047)

This manuscript was produced in the later fifteenth century, after the plague of 1471, to which another part of this manuscript refers.⁵⁴ This collection of thirty-three recipes contains twenty-eight recipes that contain spices, of these, sugar is found in twelve, and ginger in eleven.⁵⁵

The results

From the examination of the above-mentioned fifteen collections, and a total of 1377 recipes, it can be determined that 89.18% of these contain spices. The dishes that do not contain any spices can largely be accounted for by the roast meats, which were often simply served with vinegar, salt or no accompaniment at all. Aside from these dishes, almost all other types contain at least one spice.

The most commonly used spice is saffron, which is used in thirty-nine per cent. It was used both for its flavour and its golden-yellow hue, which was favoured above all other food colours by the medieval dinner. This is followed by ginger and sugar, with 34.79% and 34.35% respectively. Almonds are fourth most common at 30.72%, and were used in almost all forms, with almond milk frequently used as a substitute for animal milk and it both kept longer and was able to be used on fast days. Other spices that are used in more than ten per cent of recipes are pepper, cinnamon, cloves, rice and mace. For all other spices that are used, refer to Table 1.

There are some inaccuracies in stating that these are the exact frequencies in which these spices are found in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Not all surviving manuscripts have been used, nor all the recipes in those that have been, largely due to limited accessibility. The listing of spices in recipes also can skew these figures, as in some only spices are mentioned as being an ingredient, with little more detail, or the various spice mixes, such as powders fort, douce and blaunch, of which the modern scholar can only guess as to their composition.

Whilst these results show that spices were used in almost all recipes, the ways in which they are used are debated in the scholarship. Whilst this debate is often concerning quantities used rather than frequency, this will be discussed in chapter three, as here only frequencies are investigated. The investigations compared do not state the number of recipes or full list of sources used, and therefore a complete comparison may have contrasts.

Hieatt and Butler argue that there is a steady progression in the use of spices across time,⁵⁶ with later recipes being sweeter and spicier. However there is no clear trend as to these qualities, with sugar ranging from five per cent in Ashmole MS.

⁵² Hieatt, "The Medieval Culinary Recipes in MS Harley 5401: An edition and commentary," +55; quoted in *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵³ "Thomas Awkbarow's Recipes (MS Harley 5401)," in Hieatt, "The Medieval Culinary Recipes in MS Harley 5401: An edition and commentary," 57-66.

⁵⁴ Gerald A. J. Hodgett, ed., *Stere Htt Well: A Book of Medieval Refinements, recipes and remedies from a manuscript in Samuel Pepys' library* (London: Cornmarket Reprints, 1972), i.

⁵⁵ "Gentyll manly Cokere (MS Pepys 1047)," in *Stere Htt Well: A Book of Medieval Refinements, recipes and remedies from a manuscript in Samuel Pepys' library*, ed. Hodgett, 1-46.

⁵⁶ Hieatt and Butler, *Curry on Inglysch*, 10

Spice	Saffron	Ginger	Sugar	Almonds	Pepper	Cinnamon	Cloves	Rice	Mace	Galangal	Currants	Saunders
Frequency	537	479	473	423	321	286	244	164	151	95	95	93
Percentage	39.00%	34.79%	34.55%	30.72%	23.31%	20.77%	17.72%	11.91%	10.97%	6.90%	6.90%	6.75%
Spice	Dates	Raisins	Figs	Cubeb	Verjuice	Good Powder	Non-descript Spices	Pine nuts	Powder fort	Powder Douce	Powder	Blaunch Powder
Frequency	85	78	58	53	56	41	43	42	42	39	30	26
Percentage	6.17%	5.66%	4.21%	3.85%	4.07%	2.98%	2.93%	2.86%	2.86%	2.66%	2.04%	1.77%
Spice	Mustard	Allcanet	Cumin	Anise in confit	Prunes	Anise	Grains of Paradise	Powder Lombard	Dragon's blood	Pistachio nuts	Savaryn	Powder Marchant
Frequency	23	20	18	15	12	13	13	6	5	4	4	3
Percentage	1.57%	1.36%	1.23%	1.09%	0.87%	0.94%	0.94%	0.44%	0.36%	0.29%	0.29%	0.22%
Spice	Long pepper	Silver foil	Walnuts	Hay	Nuts	Spikenard	Salt Petre	Nutmeg	Caraway	Cardamom	Gold foil	Liquorice
Frequency	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Percentage	0.15%	0.15%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.00%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%	0.07%

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Spices in Late-medieval English Recipes

1439, to fifty-six per cent in Royal 12.C.xii, and anywhere in between across the examined period.⁵⁷

These results do, however, align more closely to Lauriou's assessment of the use of spices in English cooking of the period. For Lauriou nine out of ten recipes contain spices, which follows the results I present here. My presented results also align with his, as saffron falls in the thirty-five to forty-one per cent range, ginger is in the thirty-four to forty-seven per cent range for the fifteenth century, standing at thirty-six per cent, and cloves are up to forty per cent. The data contrast however with ginger considered over the entire period, which, for Lauriou is only eighteen to twenty-five per cent, pepper is stated to be at less than ten per cent, and sugar in twenty-eight to thirty per cent. In this study all of the contrasting figures are significantly higher. When not considering almonds, his study also correlates in stating that cinnamon, cloves and sugar were the most common spices aside from saffron, ginger and pepper.⁵⁸

Conclusion

From this chapter it can be seen that spices featured heavily in the opulent feast menus of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries through the examination of cookery books. Whilst the daily food of consumers in this time period is unknown due to a lack of documentation, the ways in which they were used on feast days remains evident. Through the examination of these recipe collections, through the spice framework provided by *La Pratica della Mercatura*, frequencies that are largely representative of their usage can be determined, showing that almost ninety per cent of recipes use spices, with saffron being the most dominant. The quantities used, to accompany these frequencies will be explored in Chapter Two, whilst the cultural symbolism of this usage will be examined in Chapter Three.

⁵⁷ Here the Paston recipe, which contains no sugar, is not used, as this would not be representative in its singular form.

⁵⁸ Lauriou, "Spices in the Medieval Diet: A New Approach," 45-47.

Chapter 2

Quantity and Expense for the Household

This chapter will examine some of the financial or economic aspects of the consumption of spices. This will be achieved through the examination of quantities consumed of spices, and expenditure as recorded in household and monastic annual accounts. This expenditure will also be contrasted to that of meat, fish and overall expenditure to demonstrate the value of spices. Following from this study of annual accounts, the coronation of King Richard III will be examined for the feast context explored in Chapter One, in order to provide a contrast between daily spice and that of an extravagant feast.⁵⁹ A list of those spices regularly consumed will also be contrasted to those present in recipes to further refine the English taste in spices in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Towards the late-medieval period the household became more complex, with larger expenses that required bookkeeping. As a result many households kept detailed accounts of daily and annual expenditures and incomes in various different departments, however, unfortunately, very few have been made accessible to the contemporary audience, and those that are, are largely monastic. Working within these constraints, accounts from the households of Dame Alice de Bryene and Talbot, the abbey of Battle and Selby, and a shopping list from Margaret Paston to John Paston III, will be utilised to explore the purchases and consumption in relation to spices and other food products.⁶⁰

Quantities Consumed

One of the most contested fields in the literature regarding the study of spices in the medieval period is the spiciness of the food that was consumed. From Chapter One it can be seen that spices featured prominently in the lavish feast context, with almost ninety per cent of examined recipes containing spices. However, these recipes did not represent the quantities used, especially on a daily basis. In this chapter the everyday consumption of spices will be examined, this will also be accompanied by an example of a feast, presented later in this chapter.

This daily consumption of food is best represented in the *Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene*,⁶¹ in which the number of people present at each meal, and the

⁵⁹ In Anne F. Sutton and P. W. Hammond, eds., *The Coronation of Richard III: the Extant Documents*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1983), 291-302.

⁶⁰ In Vincent B. Redstone, ed., *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413* (Suffolk: Paradigm Press 1984 (1931)), 1-139; In Barbara Ross, "The Accounts of the Stewards of the Talbot Household at Blakemere: An example of Medieval Accounting Practice," *Abacus* 4 (1968): 66-71; In Eleanor Searle and Barbara Ross, eds, *Accounts of the Cellarers of Battle Abbey, 1275-1513* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1967), 46-86; "Westminster Diocesan Archives, Se/Ac/10," in *Monastery and Society in the Late Middle Ages: Selected Account Rolls from Selby Abbey, Yorkshire, 1398-1537*, ed. John H. Tillotson (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1988), 153-193; "British Library Additional 34889" in *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Vol 1*, ed. Norman Davies (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 355.

⁶¹ "Chancery Misc. 4/8B, The household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene," in *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413*, ed. Redstone, 1-102. Alice de Bryene was the widow of a minor baron, and was of a part of the middle level of wealth in terms of landlords.

bread, wine, meat, fish and other purchased products consumed, as well as food for the horses, are presented every day between Michaelmas 1412 and Michaelmas 1413. This household would provide between twenty-three meals to 240 in a day, averaging 45, and spending an average of 5s 3d per day, which, in 2005, would be approximately equal to £121.⁶² Throughout this record there is no purchase of spices for one specific day, not even for feasts, whereas fish, butter and eggs are frequently mentioned. Therefore it must be assumed that spices were purchased in bulk, as demonstrated in the accompanying list of purchases, which also includes items such as salt, candles and firewood, and then used throughout the year in small quantities.⁶³

An example of a large expenditure can be seen in the record for Sunday, January 1, 1413, for which both breakfast and supper saw thirty people fed, with 180 people fed at dinner. For this day

314 white, and 40 black, loaves, whereof newly-baked 104 white, and 14 black, loaves...2 pigs, 2 swans, 12 geese, 3 joints of mutton, 24 capon, 17 connies. PURCHASES – beef 8s 2d., veal 3s., 5 young pigs 2s 4d., 12 gall. milk 18d⁶⁴

were consumed, along with wine and ale, with eighteen horses also catered for. Here it can be seen that the list on what was consumed is limited in its information, and the ways in which this meat was cooked, as well as accompaniments and flavourings are missing, therefore making it impossible to determine the actual spice usage. This record is also exemplary in its format for this household book, demonstrating the overall difficulty in determining a daily use of spices.

What is known about spices in this examined year, however, is the total amount purchased. Throughout the year 20 lb of almonds, one frail and 4 lb of raisins, one frail and 7 lb of figs, 2 lb currants, two quarters of sugar, 4 lb of rice, 3½ lb of pepper, 2 lb ginger, and one lb of dates, saffron, cinnamon, soda-ash, cloves and mace were purchased.⁶⁵ Whilst it is possible to divide these quantities by the 16423 meals served over the course of the year, this would provide inaccurate data the consumption of spices was uneven in both daily consumption, and across hierarchies within the same seating.

This account can be contrasted to that of 1418-1419,⁶⁶ where 4 lb of pepper and rice, ½ lb saffron, 2 lb of ginger, cinnamon and soda-ash, 1 lb of cloves, mace and sugar, 40 lb of almonds, 8 lb of currants, 1 frail and 2 lb raisins, 6 lb dates, 1 frail and 4 lb figs, and 2 bush, one pk. seed mustard were purchased.⁶⁷ Here an increase in almonds, currants, pepper, cinnamon, soda-ash and dates can be seen from six years earlier, however there is a decline in the amount of saffron, figs and raisins used, whilst cloves, ginger, rice and mace stayed the same. Therefore we can conclude that

⁶² Calculation obtained from “Currency Converter,” The National Archives, accessed September 25, 2012, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>.

⁶³ “Chancery Misc. 4/8B, Fragmentary Memorandum on Fly-Leaves of the Account Book for the Year 1412-1413,” in *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413*, ed. Redstone, 103-105.

⁶⁴ “Chancery Misc. 4/8B, The household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene”, in *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413*, ed. Redstone, 28

⁶⁵ “Chancery Misc. 4/8B, Fragmentary Memorandum on Fly-Leaves of the Account Book for the Year 1412-1413,” in *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413*, ed. Redstone, 103-4.

⁶⁶ “Ministers’ Accts. Bdle. 1429, no. 4, Steward’s Account, Michaelmas 1419,” in *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413*, ed. Redstone, 116-139

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

the diet was not necessarily spicier overall in this six year gap, however noticeably different in the main spices used.

Quantities of spices purchased can also be seen in the records for the *Kitchener's Account of 1416-1417* from Selby Abbey⁶⁸ and the shopping list from Margaret Paston. These sources, like those examined above, also only provide information that cannot be translated into consumption habits, especially as the quantities of meat and fish given are in number of animals, rather than a consistent measure. Selby Abbey purchased 19 lb of pepper, 5½ lb saffron, 8 dozen and 2 lb almonds, 113½ lb rice, 2 lb saunders, 2 lb cumin, 13 lb of figs and a secta of figs and raisins. This purchase differs from that of Alice de Bryene's household in its strong usage of pepper, saffron and rice, as well as the inclusion of saunders and cumin, however the variety is smaller. The examined monastic records in this chapter are from Benedictine abbeys. This difference may be partially explained by the diet of Benedictine monks, which was not heavily regulated, with the abbot's discretion playing a largely role, however their diet was supposed to be moderately frugal.⁶⁹ Differences may also be accounted for in the various guests that would stay at the abbeys and their accommodation according to status in diet.

The shopping list differs from these sources as it is not an annual account, nor is it an actual purchase, however it does demonstrate the spices that were utilised by the Paston household.

I send yw v s. to by with swger and datys fore me. I wold haue iij or iiij li. Of swger, and beware þe rmmont in datys and send hem to me as hastely as ye may, and send me word qwith price a li. of peper, clowys, macys, ginger, sinamun, almannys, rys, reysonys of coranis, ganyngall, safrun, grenys and comfytys – of ich of these send me word wath a li. ys worth, and yf yt be better shepe at London than yt ys here I shall send yw money to by such stufe as I wull haue.⁷⁰

Here the request for prices for sugar, dates, pepper, cloves, mace, ginger, cinnamon, almonds, rice, currants and saffron aligns with the other accounts in spices, however the inclusion of galingale, grains of paradise and comfits differs.

From these sources the commonly used spices can be seen, as well as the quantities used over an annual period. What cannot be shown, however, is the amount that was consumed at any one time to determine the overall spiciness of the food consumed. What can be said, however, is that if these spices were used on a daily basis, their usage would have been minute, with a pound of spice distributed across a year working out at 0.04 ounces daily. However, in the examination of the coronation feasts it will be shown that spices were used heavily for feasts, therefore this even distribution would be unlikely.

The Cost of Spices

A better indication as to the value of spices in medieval cookery is through the examination of comparative costs, which can therefore show the accessibility and

⁶⁸ “Westminster Diocesan Archives, Se/Ac/10,” in *Monastery and Society in the Late Middle Ages: Selected Account Rolls from Selby Abbey, Yorkshire, 1398-1537*, ed. Tillotson, 153-193.

⁶⁹ Searle and Ross, eds, *Accounts of the Cellarers of Battle Abbey, 1275-1513*. 4-6.

⁷⁰ “British Library Additional 34889,” in *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, Vol 1*, ed. Davies, 355.

limitations of the use of spices. These costs will be contrasted to two costs calculated for the daily meal. The first is John Walsh's calculations for the cost of a meal in the Talbot household, which he places at 2½ d a meal, spread over 15,700 meals over the period of 1417-8,⁷¹ and that of the above mentioned household of Dame Alice de Bryene working out at 1.4 d for the period of 1412-3.⁷²

The cellarer's accounts from Battle Abbey are useful to this study as they provide twenty-nine annual accounts from 1352 to 1413 that give comparative expenditures on meat, fish and spices.⁷³ Whilst the surviving records cover a much larger time frame, before 1352 there is no category of spice from which to derive figures from, especially as the manuscripts are damaged, and thus individual entries lost, therefore comparisons cannot be given, and after 1413 spices disappear from the records of the cellarer as the department moves to dealing only with fresh produce.⁷⁴

The numbers feed throughout these records is also difficult to ascertain, as records for the number of monks range from twenty-seven to thirty-five, as well as the various guests, corrodians and servants present.⁷⁵ The cost of maintaining guests would have also varied drastically according to the status of those receiving hospitality. This is especially evident in the cases where the cellarer's budget cannot accommodate the dietary requirements of status of those in residence, which may also account for the years in which spice expenditure rose significantly.⁷⁶

Figure 1 shows the comparative expenditure from the Abbey on meat, fish and spices in relation to the total expenditure, whilst Figure 2 demonstrates this in terms of percentage, showing a change in prices and potential quantities. Unfortunately there is insufficient data on quantities of spices consumed, in part because of damage to the documents, but also some years are more concerned with expenses, listing several spices in one entry. What is shown, however is that spikes in expenditure, such as that of 1383 do not necessarily mean a higher expenditure in spices, as this spike is in all prices, whereas the end of the examined period, in 1408 and 1410 overall expenditure declines, with the percentage spent on spices the highest in the examined period. The spike for 1483 can be accounted for by an unusually high expenditure on wine at £101 2s 8d,⁷⁷ whereas the general height of wine expenditure for other years is £55, however other factors might also cause these chances such as price fluctuations, repairs, and the demands of guests. What this does show, however, is that expenditure on spices was not constant, with a percentage range of three to nine percent of total expenditure.

None of the other examined sources provide such a range of annual accounts, and therefore cannot be analysed for trends, however they can still provide a broader understanding of the proportion of the budget that spices filled. The records for the Talbot household at Blakemere are brief in their information, providing information

⁷¹ Ross, "The Accounts of the Stewards of the Talbot Household at Blakemere: An example of Medieval Accounting Practice," 64-5.

⁷² "Chancery Misc. 4/8B, The household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene", in *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413*, ed. Redstone, 1-102.

⁷³ Searle and Ross, eds, *Accounts of the Cellarers of Battle Abbey, 1275-1513*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-32

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25

⁷⁷ "Account for 1382-1383, from Chancery Misc. 4/8B, The household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene," in *Accounts of the Cellarers of Battle Abbey, 1275-1513*, eds. Searle and Ross, 76.

only in categories of expenses. For the two examined years, 1393-1394⁷⁸ and 1424-1425,⁷⁹ the percentages of expenses that spices occupy are 4.3% and 3.8% respectively. Whilst relatively low in relation to those of Battle Abbey they are still within the presented range, especially with their overall expenditure of respective £277 6s 2d and £336 8s 6½d being similar. What also must be noted here is that the categories within which spices reside differ between these two accounts, with the earlier account being for honey, spices and wax, and the later for almonds, spices and sweetmeats.

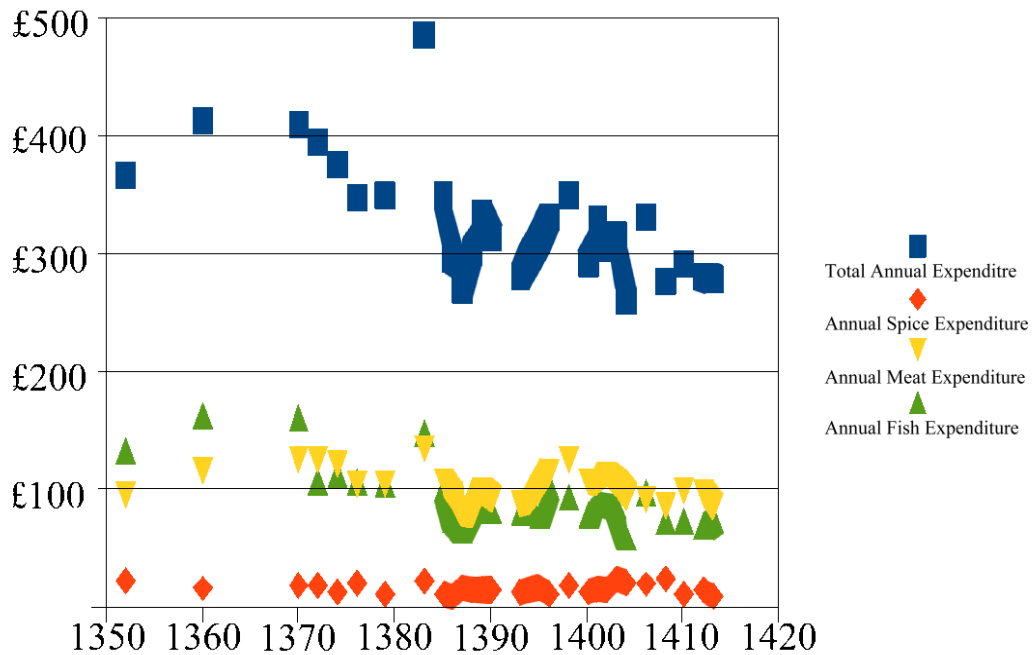


Figure 1. Comparative Expenditures for Battle Abbey, 1352-1413.

⁷⁸ “Blakemere: The account for Thomas Clerc, Steward of the household of Sir Richard Talbot there,” in Ross, “The Accounts of the Stewards of the Talbot Household at Blakemere: An example of Medieval Accounting Practice,” 66

⁷⁹ “Blakemere: The account of Richard Kenleye, Steward of Lord Talbot’s Household there,” in Ross, “The Accounts of the Stewards of the Talbot Household at Blakemere: An example of Medieval Accounting Practice,” 71. (70-71)

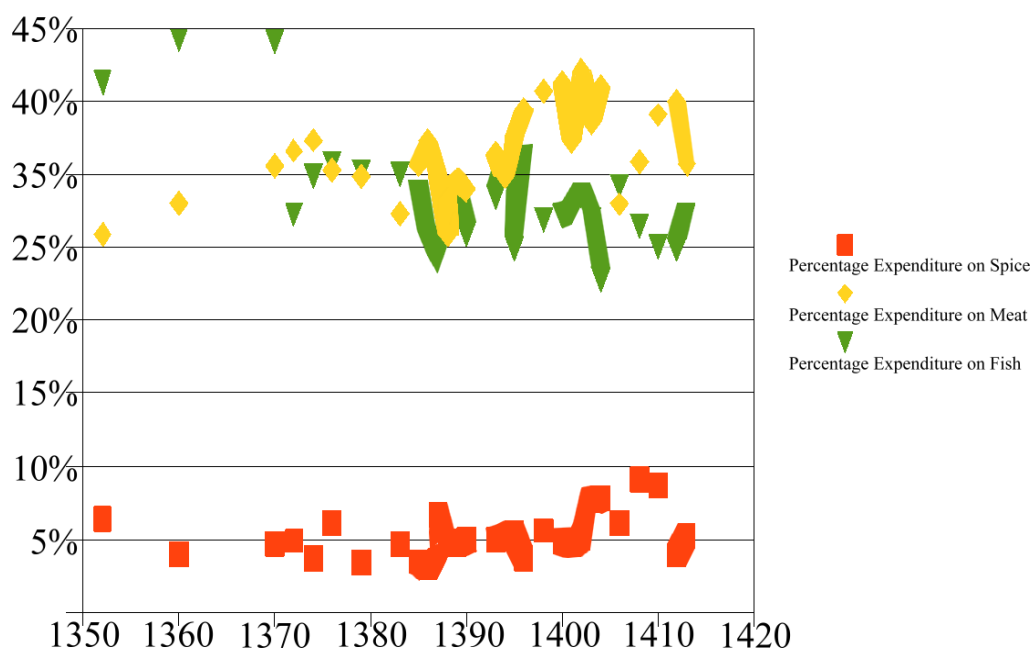


Figure 2. Comparative Percentages of Expenditure for Battle Abbey, 1352-1413.

Whilst not providing daily accounts for spice expenditure, as previously noted, the household accounts of Dame Alice de Bryene provide individual expenditures for spices. Here spices are classed as being the wardrobe, which at an expenditure of £2 16s 10½d only makes up three percent of the total budget for the year of 1412-13. The quantity and expenditure is presented in Table 2.

Spice	Expenditure	Quantity
Almonds	4s 2d	20 lb
Figs and Raisins	7s 11d	1 frail of each, 11 lb
Currants	7d	2 lb
Dates	4d	1 lb
Pepper	11s 9d	3 ½ lb
Sugar	9½d	2 quarters
Saffron	13s	1 lb
Ginger	3s 4d	2 lb
Cinnamon	4s 6d	1 lb
Soda-ash	1s	1 lb
Cloves	3s 4d	1 lb
Mace	3s 8d	1 lb

Table 2. Spice expenses for the household of Dame Alice de Bryene, 1412-1413.

These figures can be contrasted to those of 1418-19, which had a similar spice expenditure of £2 14s 10d, however, only makes up a miniscule 1.7% of the total expenditure. This can be accounted for by the greater range of items purchased within this account as wages, liveries, and various other expenditure are also covered, unlike the account of 1412-13. These spice expenditures can be seen in Table 3.

Spice	Expenditure	Quantity
Pepper	8s 2d	4 lb
Saffron	7s 6d	½ lb
Ginger	3s 10d	2 lb
Cinnamon	3s 2d	2 lb
Cloves	3s	1 lb
Mace	2s 6d	1 lb
Soda-ash	1s 8d	2 lb
Almonds	8s 4d	40 lb
Rice	4d	4 lb
Seed-mustard	2s 3d	2 bush, 1 pk.
Figs	4s 8d	1 frail and 4 lb
Dates	1s 8d	6 lb
Raisins	4s 3d	1 frail and 2 lb
Currants	2s	8 lb
White sugar	1s 8d	1 lb

Table 3. Spice expenses for the household of Dame Alice de Bryene, 1418-1419.

The Kitchener's Account from Selby Abbey from 1416-17 also falls within the expected range at three percent.⁸⁰ The total expenditure on spices was £6 16s 1½d, which, whilst almost three times the expenditure of the two accounts from Dame Alice de Bryene, demonstrates that the expenditure percentage expectation can be carried across different sized expenditures. The expenditures on individual spices are presented in Table 4.

Spice	Expenditure	Quantity
Pepper	£1 15s	19 lb
Saffron	£2 15s 3d	5¼ lb
Almonds	15s 3d	8 dozen, 2 lb
Rice	11s 9 ½ d	113½ lb
Saunders	2s 5d	2 lb
Cumin	4d	2 lb
Figs	1s 1d	13 lb
Figs and raisins	15s	One measure (secta)

Table 4. Spice expenses for Selby Abbey, 1416-1417.

From these accounts it can be seen that whilst individual expenditures on spices may vary between accounts, the percentage of the overall budget spent tends to fall roughly within the same six percent range. As discussed above these differences are largely because of other items included in the account where their inclusion or exclusion affects the percentage breakdown of expenses rather than the spices themselves. When other concerns such as repairs and liveries are removed from the account the spice percentage increases significantly, as can be seen in the following account from the coronation of King Richard III, however the expenditure of spices has also risen significantly.

⁸⁰ "Westminster Diocesan Archives, Se/Ac/10," in *Monastery and Society in the Late Middle Ages: Selected Account Rolls from Selby Abbey, Yorkshire, 1398-1537*, ed. Tillotson, 153-193.

A feast for a King

The coronation for King Richard III presents two lavish feasts, which this chapter will explore. The first, the victual on the Friday night provides little detail as to the complete nature of the feast, only presenting purchases for spices, dairy, eggs and onions. The feast of the coronation itself presents much more information giving costs and quantities for everything required for the feast down to the aprons for the servants. The Sunday feast contains 1200 messes or servings, which may be served to up to four people per messe according to rank, and uses 3000 cups, from which an attendance of 3000 people can be obtained, which is the figure that will be used for this examination.⁸¹

These documents are found in BL Add. MS 45716A, Folios 71-78, however are not necessarily exact in their representations of the feasts, as they do not specifically state the occasion, merely the date and a reference to the feast being for a King Richard.⁸² It is also possible that these records are a draft, with the completed records now missing.⁸³ Nonetheless, due to the evidence locating this manuscript, it will be used as even though this may not be a true representation of the actual event, if this was merely a planning document, it still reflects an expectation of the expenditure for a feast of such magnitude.

The Friday vigil, judging by the quantities consumed, was a much smaller feast than that of the Sunday.⁸⁴ Those in attendance, however, would have still equalled to several hundred as one thousand eggs were consumed, along with fifty gallons of milk, ten gallons of crème and six gallons of butter. In terms of spices, 2 lb of pepper, 1 lb of ginger, cloves and mace, saunders and aniseed, ½ lb of saffron, 20 lb of rice and almonds, 12 lb sugar, ¼ lb grains of paradise, 8 lb of dates and currants, and 6 lb of prunes were purchased. These quantities are comparable to those purchased by the household of Dame Alice de Bryene for a year, covering some 16,000 meals. From this comparison it can be seen that it is unlikely that meals were evenly spiced throughout the year as the quantities required for a major feast could require the majority of the annual purchase.

The Sunday coronation feast at Westminster was much more lavish than that of the vigil, with a budget of £447 13s 2d.⁸⁵ Of this budget £207 5s, or 46.3% was spent on meat, £91 10s, or 20.5% on wine and £83 3s 2d, or 18.6% on spices. This percentage expenditure can be contrasted to that of the above-mentioned accounts, however, its size can be partially accounted for in the lack of other expenses, such as repairs and large equipment purchases which may also be found in accounts. This expenditure can also be contrasted to the examined accounts in terms of value, where the expenditure on spices is more than the total annual expenditure.

⁸¹ Sutton and Hammond, eds., *The Coronation of Richard III: the Extant Documents*, 285

⁸² *Ibid.*, 288-289.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 284

⁸⁴ “Ane Ordynaunce one Frydaye at Night at the Towre or Wher the King Wilbe the Same Day,” in *The Coronation of Richard III: the Extant Documents*, eds. Sutton and Hammond, 291-292.

⁸⁵ “An’ Ordynaunce for King Richardes Coronacion at Westminster the Sondag the vjth Day or July,” in *The Coronation of Richard III: the Extant Documents*, eds. Sutton and Hammond, 294-302.

Spice	Quantity	Cost	Per person average
Pepper	44 lb	£2 18s 4d	0.23 oz
Saffron	11 ¼ lb	£4 7s	0.06 oz
Cinnamon	39 lb	£5 18s	0.21 oz
Ginger	26 lb	£2 16s	0.14 oz
Sugar	126 lb	£6 4s 3d	0.67 oz
Saunders	22 lb	£2 11s 4d	0.12 oz
Mace and cloves	28 lb	£3 3s 8d	0.15 oz
Grains	14 lb	£1 1s	0.07 oz
Mustard	8 lb	16s	0.04 oz
Anise	28 lb	9s 4d	0.15 oz
Turnesalle	20 lb	17s 8d	0.11 oz
Long pepper	5 lb	16s 8d	0.3 oz
Currants	300 lb	£3 10s	1.59 oz
Liquorice	4 lb	4s	0.02 oz
Alkenet	3 lb	3s	0.02 oz
Rice	86 lb	17s	0.46 oz
Almonds	210 lb	£4 15s	1.13 oz
Dates	380 lb	£4 6s 8d	0.15 oz
Prunes	140 lb	£1 11s 8d	0.07 oz
Gold	460 leaves	£1 8s 4d	
Galingale	4 lb	13s 4d	0.02 oz
Figs	652 lb	£10 13s 4d	3.49 oz
Raisins	500 lb	£3 2s 6d	2.67 oz

Table 5. Spice quantities and costs for the Coronation Feast of Richard III

From this table the sheer quantities of spices used in this feast, even when evenly divided between the estimated three thousand guests, can be seen. This distribution would not have been even as is assumed in these calculations, however, as the complexity and use of expensive ingredients increased in dishes served ascending the hierarchical order, as well as the quantity served to each person. From this it can be seen that medieval food was indeed spicy when utilised as a part of a celebration in the lavish feast.

Which Spices were Consumed

Whilst Chapter One may have seen saffron, sugar, ginger and almonds as being the most commonly used spices, this is not necessarily reflected in the quantities purchased. For the likes of saffron little is needed to flavour or colour a meal and therefore the weight is minimal, in contrast to almonds which were used as a meal base as well as a flavourant. From those used in the examined recipes, most of the spices reappear in purchases, apart from the spice mixes and cubeb. In purchases for the coronation feast, purchases of Turnesalle, a blue food dye, also appear, which does not feature in any of the examined recipes, however, this may have been mostly used to colour subtleties in the appropriate heraldic colours in honour of the new king.

Conclusion

From this evidence it can be concluded that whilst spice usage may have been excessive in a feast context, this was not the case for daily consumption. Through the examination of various accounts from households and abbeys in terms of quantities obtained and costs, it can be seen that purchases were relatively small. This size can be seen particularly if divided evenly across the year, in which case the one lb purchases seen frequently equate to only 0.04 oz per day, let alone accounting for the number of people that were served. Despite this small quantity, between 1.7% and 9% was spent on spices out of the total budget, which demonstrates the importance that spices held during this period, demonstrated through the price that people were prepared to pay.

Through the examination of the records for Richard III's coronation, the role that spices played in both the flavouring and colour of food presented at the feast highlights their social significance. From the contrast in spice expenditure for one day to that for an entire year, it can be speculated that the daily diet throughout late-medieval England was relatively spice free. This, however, would be in stark contrast to feasts, where, as it has been demonstrated in Chapter One and the accounts from the coronation, spices played a very important role, with their presence in nearly every dish, as well as the sheer quantities purchased. From this it can be concluded that spice usage on a daily basis in the late-medieval household was minimal, if not completely absent, with the majority of the presented expenditure reserved for feasts, where dishes were likely to be heavily spiced. Thus the late-medieval daily diet was not spicy at all, but the food served at feasts was very spicy.

Chapter 3

The Representation of Spices in Literature

Although the study of cookery books and financial accounts, as seen in chapters one and two, provide a detailed insight into the way spices were consumed in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, they fail to provide the historical context in which this consumption occurred. This chapter will therefore provide this context through an exploration of the way that spices are represented in literature from this period. Works of literature can add to the understanding of a historical context through their representation of the surrounding culture, and therefore can add to our understanding of late-medieval spice consumption. The examined texts were produced in an era of increased consumption of secular literary works that were often received in groups orally through many levels of society.⁸⁶

The texts will be examined following three key themes that will be used to demonstrate attitudes towards spices and their consumption in the later medieval period. The first, Origins, Harvests and Myths, will discuss beliefs regarding the origin of spices and the mythological presence of spices in literature. For this *Mandeville's Travels*, the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and the Tale of Sir Thopas from the *Canterbury Tales* will be used.⁸⁷ The second theme, The Conflict of Status, is the conflict between birth status and achieved status in a hierarchical consumption, as will be demonstrated through a study of some of the works from *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.⁸⁸ The third theme, Greed and Waste, will be discussed in relation to the social commentaries *Richard the Redeless*, *Mum and the Sothsegger*, and *Wynnere and Wastoure*.⁸⁹

It is through these key themes that this chapter will aim to present an understanding of cultural attitudes towards spices in terms of both their origins and consumption, in a manner that complements the previous chapters detailing what was consumed.

Origins, Harvests and Myth

Medieval understandings of the origins of spices were often mythologised, and were frequently connected to the Garden of Eden, or were associated with mythical beasts that either harvested or guarded the precious commodity. Although Eden was cut off from mankind, the four earthly rivers that flowed from it, the Tigris, Euphrates, Nile and the Phison (interpreted as the Ganges or Indus), were sometimes

⁸⁶ Cheryl Glenn, "Medieval Literacy outside the Academy: Popular Practice and Individual Technique," *College Composition and Communication* 44 (1993), 498.

⁸⁷ Jean d'Outremeuse, "Mandeville's Travels," in *Mandeville's Travels Volume 1*, ed. P. Hamelius (London, New York & Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1960 (1919)), 1-211; Geoffrey Chaucer, "Romaunt of the Rose," in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1933), 663-740; Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Canterbury Tales" in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1933), 198-201.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 19-314; "Sir Gawain and þe Grene Knyȝt," in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, eds. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1967 (1925)), 1-69.

⁸⁹ "Richard the Redeless," in *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. James M. Dean (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 23-48; "Mum and the Sothsegger," in *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. Dean, 83-136; "Wynnere and Wastoure," in *Wynnere and Wastoure*, ed. Stephanie Trigg (UK: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-16.

cited to have spices, most commonly aloe wood, floating down them.⁹⁰ Other connections with the Garden of Eden are seen in the notion that spices grow in the East because of the proximity to the Garden, which was placed in various locations around Asia.⁹¹ In addition to these myths, fantastical beasts often guarded the spices, such as the serpents described in *Mandeville's Travels*.

Ideas about the origins of spices can be seen in the immensely popular fourteenth-century *Mandeville's Travels*. Whilst this work was originally published in French, it is included due to the amount of surviving English versions.⁹² This text gives the account of an aristocratic traveler, Sir John Mandeville and his travels across northern Africa, the Middle East, India and China. *Mandeville's Travels* is a useful source for this thesis as it presents medieval conceptions of the geographical and physical origins of spices, as well as addressing concerns of quality. These origins were used to explain the value and costs associated with spices due to the dangers encounters and distances that were covered in the harvesting and transportation of spices to Europe.

According to this work,

This yle (Java) is full wel enhabyted t full wel manned þere growen all maner of spicerie more plentyfoulsh þan in ony oþer contree, As of gyngeuere, clowegylofres,⁹³ canell, zedewall, notemuges t maces.⁹⁴

Whilst the mentioned ginger, cloves, cinnamon, zedoary, nutmeg and mace do come from the south and southeastern regions of Asia, this identification with Java shows a limited understanding of exact locations. A statement that cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon and other spices grow in Cathay follows this geographical understanding. Pepper, on the other hand, in its black, white and long forms are stated to be harvested in India from the same plant.⁹⁵ These geographical understandings, although varying in their accuracies, demonstrates the awareness of the author of the eastern localities of these spices, without any direct personal experience.

This awareness is further demonstrated in the discussion of the harvesting methods for pepper. Here we hear of the myth of serpents guarding the pepper groves, which potentially has its roots in a letter to the emperor Hadrian.⁹⁶ The way this myth is discussed, however, dismisses a previous component. This discussion begins with “Summe men seyn þat whan þei wil gadre the peper þei maken fuyr,” however, this method would be counter-productive as “for 3if þei breten abouten, the trees þat beren te peper scholden ben brent t it woulde dryen vp all þe vertue.”⁹⁷ The alternative provided to this method is that “þei enoynten here hondes t here feet mad of snayles t of oþer thinges made þerefore, of whiche the cerpentes t the venymous bestes haten”

⁹⁰ Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*, 89-94.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 91

⁹² There are thirty-two known surviving copies of the Defective version. For this study MS. Cotton titus C.Xvi will be used as it is a part of the strongest English tradition, the Defective, however also draws from one of the other traditions, the Insular. For further discussion of English versions, see M. C. Seymour, *The English Manuscripts of Mandeville's Travels*, (Edinburgh Bibliographical Society: Edinburgh, 1966).

⁹³ Whilst clowegylofres also translates as carnation, when discussing an exotic import, this translates as cloves, as carnations were found in English gardens. See John H. Harvey, “Gilliflower and Carnation”, *Garden History* 6 (1978), 48.

⁹⁴ D'Outremeuse, “*Mandeville's Travels*,” in *Mandeville's Travels Volume 1*, ed. Hamelius 125.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111-2. Whilst white and black pepper are merely harvested and treated in a different manner, long pepper is an entirely different species.

⁹⁶ Freedman, “Spices and Late-Medieval European Ideas of Scarcity and Value,” 1209.

⁹⁷ D'Outremeuse, “*Mandeville's Travels*,” in *Mandeville's Travels Volume 1*, ed. Hamelius, 111-2.

which causes the beasts to flee, therefore enabling the pepper to be harvested.⁹⁸ Another component of the fire versions is that the pepper becomes wrinkled and black as a result of the burning, which is here answered by the men “putten it vpon an owven t þere it waxeth blak t crisp.”⁹⁹

A major concern regarding the purchase of spices was quantity and authenticity. This is represented in the work in discussion of balm and the way that Saracens in Egypt were likely to sell counterfeit products to Christians. These counterfeits could be “Turbentyne in stede of bawme And þei putten þereto litill bawme for to 3euen gode odour” or distilled “clowes of gylofre t of spykenard of Spayne t of oper species þat ben wel smellynge”.¹⁰⁰ Whilst penalties were imposed for those selling spices that had been tampered with or were counterfeit, this was still a very real concern, especially because of their cost. There were, however, methods for the consumer to test the authenticity of the product, which for balm this text suggests examination of the colour, which should be “full cleer t of cytryne colour t strongly smellynge”,¹⁰¹ as well as testing to see if burns in a fire, whether it curdles goats milk, whether it turns clear water turbid, or if it sinks “as þough it were quyk syluer”.¹⁰² Whilst this section does impart racism, some trust would be required as spices were traded through the Middle East before reaching Europe, as there was no method of bypassing the Saracens before Da Gama’s expedition to India.

Spices were also seen to have otherworldly origins, which also attributed to their desirability. This can be seen in the *Romaunt of the Rose*, a poem exposing morality and love.¹⁰³ This text also mentions spices as existing in the text’s “Garden.” This listing adds to exploration of the perception of, and mystery surrounding spices. This description states that

Ther was eke wexyng many a spice,
As clowe-gelofre, and lycorice,
Gyngevre, and greyn de parys,
Canell, and setewale of prys,
And many a spice delitable
To eten whan men rise fro table.¹⁰⁴

This quasi-paradisical association with the text’s “Garden” can be seen in relation to ideas that spices originated in the Garden of Eden, or near by,¹⁰⁵ however is contrasted with the addition of the “many homly trees” listed,¹⁰⁶ such as pears, medlars, cherries and chestnuts. This inclusion of spices appeals to the sensory experience of the garden with paradise often being described as smelling of spices.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 111-2.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 111-2.

¹⁰⁰ D’Outremeuse, “*Mandeville’s Travels*,” in *Mandeville’s Travels Volume 1*, ed. Hamelius, 32-3

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 32-3

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 32

¹⁰³ This text is a translation of the popular French poem *Roman de la Rose*, the author of this version is unknown, however M. C. Seymour attributes it to Chaucer, due to a reference in the *Legend of Good Women*. For further discussion regarding this authorship see Robinson, ed. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer: Student’s Cambridge Edition*, 663 and M. C. Seymour, *A Catalogue of Chaucer Manuscripts: Volume I Works Before the Canterbury Tales* (Scolar Press, England, 1995), 9.

¹⁰⁴ Chaucer, “The Romaunt of the Rose,” in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Robinson, 677.

¹⁰⁵ Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*, 91

¹⁰⁶ Chaucer, “The Romaunt of the Rose,” in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Robinson, 677

This otherworldly connection can also be seen in the Tale of Sir Thopas from the *Canterbury Tales*, in the fairyland through which he travels. Here he is fed from the royal spicerie “gyngbreed that was ful fyn, and lycorys, and eek comyn, with sugre that is trye.”¹⁰⁷ In this fairyland spices are also found growing, as

Ther spryngen herbes grete and smale,
The lycorys and the cetewale,
And many a clowe-gylofre;
And notemuge to putte in ale.¹⁰⁸

The herbs mentioned here are licorice, and likely setwell and carnations,¹⁰⁹ as well as nutmeg. These descriptions, whilst not paradisaical, can be seen to represent the otherworldly, magical, connotation that spices carried, along with the associations of higher status, through the consumption from the royal spicerie and association with the “queene of Fayerye.”¹¹⁰

These worldly and otherworldly origins of spices discussed in the literature can be used to demonstrate the allure of spices beyond simply their sensory properties. These connections also can account for the high expenditure of spices with their high prices as, from the examinations in Chapter Two, it is evident that people were prepared to pay for this luxury commodity, perhaps as it gave them a closer connection to their paradisiacal origins. Their consumption would therefore have afforded the consumer a higher position, which would collaborate with their usage in the displays of status.

The Conflict of Status

As the wealthy sought to differentiate themselves from those of lower statuses, they used products of high value, both economically and socially,¹¹¹ with the exoticism and otherworldly appeal of spices fulfilling this requirement. In addition to this separation on basis of wealth for the nobility, the rising merchant class’ purchasing power negated this separation, thus producing a conflict between birth status and achieved status. This conflict, in terms of food consumption, was viewed in terms of the ideal diet for one’s health, with the richness increasing with one birth’s status, thus rendering a high spice consumption unhealthy for one born into a lower status, who could now afford such luxuries. For this the way in which literary characters do and do not include spices in their diets will be examined. This conflict will be discussed through the use of the tales of the Franklin, Somonour, Pardoner, Nun’s Priest and Man of Law in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

As can be seen in the above discussion of the origins and associations of spices, these products were desirable as they represented wealth and status for those who were able to acquire them. This desirability can be further seen in the first two chapters with the amount that people were prepared to pay, as well as their frequent use in displays. For a pure representation of the value of spices, the Man of Law’s

¹⁰⁷ Chaucer, “Canterbury Tales,” in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Robinson, 199.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 198

¹⁰⁹ Whilst these can also be translated to mean zedoary and cloves, the use of the word herbs, and the grouping with liquorice would suggest the less exotic translation, although liquorice is also seen as being a spice. See Appendix 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹¹¹ Favier, *Gold and Spices: The Rise of Commerce in the Middle Ages*, 20.

Tale can be used as the spicerie is listed with “clothes of gold, and satyns riche of hewe.”¹¹² From this listing of other items that are immediately seen as expensive, the value of spices can be extrapolated as being not simply an expensive foodstuff, but also an item of display. This value through association can also be demonstrate in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,¹¹³ when, upon entering the castle of King Arthur on Christmas Eve, Sir Gawain is led to a chamber where he will stay as a guest. He is served fish cooked multiple ways, including “sewe sauered with spyces.”¹¹⁴ In addition to this presentation of food, over a chair is hung a mantle “enbrauded ful ryche”, with a fur lining with “fellez of þe best, Alle of ermyn”, as well as silver spoons on the table.¹¹⁵ Once again, the listing of spices in addition to these items of great value shows the association of spices with wealth and luxury, especially as items of lower value are not mentioned.

As Chaucer describes the personality and status of his characters in the *Canterbury Tales* through their diet, using the humoral system for their temperament and spices and richness for wealth, this work lends itself to this study of status conflict. This can be seen through the Franklin, who enjoyed his “sop in wyn”,¹¹⁶ which Bryant describes as “a piece of toasted bread soaked in wine which had been spiced with canella, mace, powdered ginger, and cloves.”¹¹⁷ Whilst this recipe may have varied in terms of the spices used, this meal would have been eaten in the morning, with its everyday consumption demonstrating wealth. This can also be seen in the Franklin’s consumption of fresh, seasonal food as he changed his diet “after the sondry sesons of the yeer,”¹¹⁸ whereas those poorer would have consumed preserved meats, such as bacon and salted fish, throughout winter. His consumption of “poynaunt and sharp” sauces,¹¹⁹ demonstrates his status of a higher birth, due to the richness, which was considered to be dangerous to those of a lower status. Bryant argues that this sauce would be in keeping with the healthy diet for the Franklin as he is eating according to his status.¹²⁰ Another character that is defined by his consumption of spices is the Pardoner, whose sauce is made “of spicerie of leef, and bark, and roote.”¹²¹

In stark contrast to the Franklin and Pardoner, the widow in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale is defined by her inability to consume such rich food. This example particularly demonstrates the conflict of status as she had married above her birth status, however since her husband’s death, she and her two daughters had lived a simpler life, and “hir diete was accordant to hir cote.”¹²² This diet according to her cote meant that she was never sick, as her consumption was in perfect balance for her lowly born body. She avoids the “poynaunt sauce” and “deyntee morsel(s)” that the Franklin would consume, and in addition

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹³ This text is thought to be late fourteenth century, with the existing manuscript dated to no later than 1400. This work is found in MS. Cotton Nero A. x, Art 3, in the British Museum, and is the last of four poems.

¹¹⁴ “Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Kny3t,” in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, eds. Tolkein and Gordon, 25

¹¹⁵ “Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Kny3t,” in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, eds. Tolkein and Gordon, 25

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22

¹¹⁷ Bryant, “The Diet of Chaucer’s Franklin,” 324. Canella can be translated to cinnamon.

¹¹⁸ Chaucer, “Canterbury Tales,” in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Robinson, 23.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²⁰ Bryant, “The Diet of Chaucer’s Franklin.”

¹²¹ Chaucer, “Canterbury Tales,” in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Robinson, 182.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 238.

No wyn ne drank she, neither whit ne reed;
Hir bord was serve moost with whit and blak,
Milk and broun breed, in which she foond no lak,
Seynd bacoun, and somtyme an ey or tweye.¹²³

Furthermore her mixed grain bread, dairy and preserved meats, again shows her lower status in contrast the Franklin, thus demonstrating the social divide in consumption of food extended well beyond the spices and fresh meat that were only affordable to the wealthy. This lower diet is also seen in discussion of the Somonour, who “Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes”, as the strong flavours of alliums were associated with peasants, however, unlike the widow, also liked “for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood.”¹²⁴ This would indicate a higher status than the widow, and yet still well below the Franklin, especially as his enjoyment of such peasant food roots him strongly in his birth status.

Greed and Waste

Whilst the feast was sometimes seen as the height of medieval perfection,¹²⁵ where the conspicuous consumption was used for both outward and inward displays of wealth,¹²⁶ it possessed the danger of becoming “sinful excess.”¹²⁷ This can be seen in the social commentaries of the period, which bemoan the greed of society, especially those of higher status, who neglect their role as benevolent leaders to live a life of excess, demonstrating moral corruption and complacency. These sources show the darker side of spice consumption as a social display, as whilst one aimed to demonstrate their wealth, the avoidance of appearing greedy was also strong. Some avoided this such as Eleanor de Montfort, who refrained from excess except for the occasions where she had guests, thus avoiding the guilt of excess and obtaining the praise of hospitality.¹²⁸ This negotiation between grandeur and excess is not, however, displayed in the commentaries.

Richard the Redeless and *Mum and the Sothsegger* portray spices as a commodity, rather than necessarily an ingredient. Both dating to the turn of the fifteenth century, they deal with contemporary social issues relating to the king. For *Richard the Redeless* the king is Richard II who was poorly advised, with this poem specifically focusing on 1399,¹²⁹ whereas *Mum and the Sothsegger*, whilst often connected to *Richard the Redeless* to the extent where they are sometimes associated as part of a whole,¹³⁰ discusses societal issues in the reign of Henry IV.¹³¹

¹²³ Chaucer, “Canterbury Tales,” in *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Robinson, 238

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²⁵ Aisling Byrne, “Arthur’s refusal to Eat: Ritual and Control in the Medieval Feast,” *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011), 64.

¹²⁶ Laura Crombie, “Honour, community and hierarchy in the feasts of the archery and crossbow guilds of Bruges, 1445-81,” *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011), 104.

¹²⁷ Byrne, “Arthur’s refusal to Eat: Ritual and Control in the Medieval Feast,” 65-66

¹²⁸ Lars Kjær, “Food, drink and ritualised communication in the household of Eleanor de Montfort, February to August 1265,” *Journal of Medieval History* 37 (2011), 87.

¹²⁹ Dean, *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger*, vii. This poem has been dated to circa 1400 due to its content, however the surviving version, Cambridge University Library MS Ll.iv.14, dates to the early mid-fifteenth century, following a B version of *Piers Plowman*, another poem criticising contemporary societal issues.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 78

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, vii. This work exists in MS BL Additional 41666, circa 1403 to 1409.

For the author of *Richard the Redeless*, kings were first ordained to serve the common good, rather than live a life purely for themselves, however this has changed.¹³² In contrast, this king lives for pleasure, and is up all night at parties, “and spende of the spicerie more than it neded, Bothe wexe and wyn, in wast al abouthte”.¹³³ Here the only items listed are non-essentials, thus further demonstrating the excess of the conspicuous consumption of spices. The expenditure on other commodities such as furs and silver spoons, with which spices are associated with in other texts, are perhaps not mentioned, as they are not immediately consumed. The view of spices as a commodity is further demonstrated in *Mum and the Sothsegger* where they are used to bribe a speaker, as “he spendith no speech but spices hit make.”¹³⁴ Here not only do spices possess a monetary value, but also power, thus reflecting the international power play over the access to spices.

In contrast, *Wynnere and Wastoure* does not implement spices in a political situation, despite its overall discussion of contemporary issues,¹³⁵ nor does it present spices as a pure commodity. Here a debate is presented between the winners and wasters of society. Not only does this text provide the dishes that the author considers to be opulent excess; “fesanttes”, “swannes”, “tartes of ten ynche”, “Venyson with the frumentee”, meat “Roste with the riche sewes, and the ryalle spyces”, “mawmene”, “larkes and lyngwhittes, lapped in sogoure”, and “Caudils of conynges”,¹³⁶ he also considers the amount to be eaten by each individual to be sufficient for six men.¹³⁷

These complaints of greed and excess demonstrate the extent to which spice were consumed and viewed as not purely being an ingredient, but also a commodity in themselves. Although this discussion may present spices as purely being an item of unnecessary conspicuous consumption, their consumption was required as a social divider where the maintenance of hierarchies was essential.

Conclusion

Through the examination of these literary sources, it can be seen that spices carried multiple meanings. *Mandeville's Travels* shows what the origins of these spices were perceived to be in both their geographical and physical location. These notions of origins can be used to explore the social value these commodities possessed, and why people were prepared to pay as much as Chapter Two shows that they did. This desirability is further demonstrated in *Sir Thopas* and the *Romaunt of the Rose*, as whilst the spices consumed by the audience would not have had these origins, it further shows how spices were symbolised in a way that increases their desirability. This chapter shows how this desirability was used in order to differentiate between those who did and did not consume spices, which was deeply set in feudal hierarchies despite a rising middle class.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 68

¹³³ “Richard the Redeless,” in *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. Dean, 43.

¹³⁴ “Mum and the Sothsegger,” in *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. Dean, 104.

¹³⁵ Due to the discussed issues, this text can be dated to being between September 1352 and March 1353, however the surviving manuscript, British Museum Add. MSS. 31042 is fifteenth-century, and contains a large number of corruptions, possibly due to an illegible previous edition.

¹³⁶ Rabbits

¹³⁷ “Wynnere and Wastoure”, in *Wynnere and Wastoure*, ed. Trigg, 12.

What has also been demonstrated in this chapter, however, is the negativity of excessive consumption of spices. This indicates another social control on the consumption of spices where those who can afford to buy spices still should act within moderation. From this evidence, it can be seen that whilst spices were highly desirable as an item of consumption, their consumption was tightly regulated by social norms and expectations both in terms of who was able to consume these luxury items and the amount that they were able to consume without labels of greed.

Conclusion

From the presented data it can be seen that spices played an essential role in the preparation of food in the late-medieval period in England and were also symbolically important. From the examination of cookery books it can be seen that spices were frequently used, thus alluding to a spicy diet. This must, however be taken into consideration with the context in which these recipes were used being mostly feasts. This spiciness of the feast is further demonstrated in the examination of documents from the coronation of Richard III. This is, however contrasted to annual purchases of spices of households, which shows either a small amount is used daily, or more likely, the daily diet was largely void of spices, with these being reserved for feasts. This balance between display and daily use is further supported in the examination of the literature, which demonstrates that whilst spices were highly desirable due to their origins as a social marker, excessive consumption was seen as morally corrupt.

As can be seen in these differing conclusions from different forms of information, a multidisciplinary and textual methodology is required in order to best represent spice consumption. Whilst the examination of cookery books presents a well-informed image of how often spices were used in a feast context, they fail to explore the daily consumption. This is balanced by the examination of financial records, which shows a defined split between the daily and feast contexts, however this does not explain why such a large percentage of the annual budget was spent. This is further explained by the literature, which, whilst in itself does not show the consumption of spices, nonetheless illuminates the meaning that spices held.

Overall it can be concluded that spices were largely used as an item of display, due to their excessive use in the feast context, but absence on a daily basis. This can be explained by both economic and social constraints on the usage of spices on a daily basis, which would lead to accusations of greed. However in a feast context this spice usage was required as an indicator of status, wealth and hospitality. This therefore defines the separation between the daily consumption of spices and their usage in a feast context to conclude that the use of spices in the medieval diet can tell us much about status, display and the layers of meaning to be found in medieval consumption.

Appendix 1

Italian text from Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, “La Pratica della Mercatura”, in *La Pratica della Mercatura*, Allan Evans, ed. (Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America, 1936), 293-297. Translations from Allan Evans, ed., *La Pratica della Mercatura*, (Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America, 1936), 411-435; Barbara Reynolds, *Cambridge Dizionario Italiano-Inglese, Signorelli: dal “Cambridge Italian Dictionary” di Barbara Reynolds* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

N.B. Items that are considered to be spices for this study, due to their usage in food are listed in bold. Question marks indicate an unknown spice.

Italian	Translation	Italian	Translation
Argento vivo	Quicksilver	Anzeruto	Sarcocolla
Argento silimato	Mercuric chloride	Aghetta	Lithage, Lead oxide
Aloe patico	Hepatic aloe	Acqua rosa	Rose Water
Aloe socoltrino	Socotrine aloe	Acqua arzente	Alcohol
Aloe cavallino	Black aloe	Belorigi	Belliric myrobalans
Allume di rocca di Colonna	Rock alum	Bambagio d'oltre a mare	Cotton blend cloth from overseas
Allume di sorta della buona lumiera	Second quality alum	Bambagio di Romania	Cotton blend cloth from Romania
Allume di Foglia	Phoenician alum	Bambagio di Puglia	Cotton blend cloth from Puglia
Allume del Coltai e d'Altoluogo	Kutahieh alum	Bambagio di Calavria	Cotton blend cloth from
Allume lupai	Ulubad Alum	Bambagio di Cicilia	Cotton blend cloth from
Allume chisicco, allume corda, allume giachile: questi tre sono le piggiori ragioni e piggior sorte	Poorest grades of alum	Bambagio di Malta	Cotton blend cloth from Malta
Allume scagliuolo concio	Scayolle alum	Bambagio filato bianco	Fine, white cotton blend cloth
Allume di Castiglio	Feather or Spanish alum	Bambagio filato tinto	Fine, coloured cotton blend cloth
Allume zuccherino	Sugar alum	Balsimo	Balm
Allume bolgano	Volcano alum	Biacca mezzana	White lead
Allume di feccia di vino	Tartar	Biacca della treccia	Braided white lead
Armoniaco	Ammoniacum	Bituro fresco	Fresh butter
Aspalto	Asphalt, Jew’s Pitch	Borrace pietra e pasta	Borrax
Agiafedita	Aisafetida	Biono da maestri	?
Anisi	Anise, Aniseed	Berbari	Barberry

Italian	Translation	Italian	Translation
Ambra fine	Amber	Balaustre, ciò sono fiori di pomegranate	Pomegranate Flowers
Agarigo fine	Agaric, gilled mushroom	Cera di getto	Wax casting
Armonio	Armenium/armenio	Cera di Rausia	Wax from Rausia
Argento battuto	Wrought silver	Cera di Romania	Romanian Wax
Azzurrino oltre a marino	Ultramarine	Cera Zavorra	Wax Ballast
Azzurrino della Magna	Azurite	Cera di Spagna	Spanish Wax
Amido	Starch	Cera di Pollana	Wax from Pollana
Aranci freschi	Fresh Oranges	Cera di Riga	Wax from Riga
Astufii sagria	Slaves acre	Cera cronco, cioè come viene tratta del mele senza essere affinata	Unrefined wax
Cera bianca	White wax	Contre da Monrieri	?
Cera rossa	Red Wax	Canterelle	Chanterelle Mushrooms
Cera verde	Green wax	Cassia ligna	Cassia bark
Cannella di sporta	Bag of cinnamon	Coppa rossa	Coparas
Cannella di gabbia	Crate of cinnamon	Capperi	Capers
Cardamom dimestichi	Domesticated cardamon	Cubebe dimestiche	Domesticated cubeb
Cassia fistola	Cassia fistula	Cubebe salvatiche	Wild cubeb
Comino di Puglia	Cumin from Puglia	Coralli rossi	Red coral
Comino di Cerinchan	Cumin from Cerinchan	Coralli bianchi	White coral
Comino di Spagna	Spanish Cumin	Corallo nero	Black coral
Cinabro	Cinnabar, vermillion	Cheponico	Ketone
Chebuli	Mirabolani	Denti di liofante	Ivory
Cardamoni salvatici	Wild cardamon	Datteri	Dates
Cetrini	Myrabolans	Draganti di Romania	Romanian tragacanth
Candi	Rock candy	Draganti di Turchia	Turkish tragacanth
Caffera	Camphor	Dionvici	?
Custoro	Castor	Embrici	Tiles/emblic myrobalans
Corpobalsimo	Carpobalsam	Euforbio	Euphormia
Carte marchigiane	?	Erba buggia	?
Carte reali	Royal paper	Fusti di gherofani	Clove stalks
Carte di Dommasco	Damascus paper	Fistuchi	Pistachios
Carte da stracciare	Wrapping paper	Finocchi nostrali	Native fennel
Colla fiorentina	Glue from Forence	Finocchi di Tunizi	Tunisian Fennel

Italian	Translation	Italian	Translation
Colla bolognese	Glue from Bologna	Fangaccio	Clay/crushed ultramarine
Colla di pesce	Fish glue	Fiori di lacca	Lacquer flowers
Carvi	Caraway	Fiori di cannella	Cinnamon flowers
Calamo armatico	Calamus	Fienogregio	Fenugreek
Costo	Costus	Giengiovo belledi	Common ginger
Cinabrese	Red ochre/Sinoper	Giengiovo colombino	Quillon ginger
Coloquinta	Colocynth	Giengiovo crespo	Black ginger
Cervoni	Fish glue	Giengiovo pilazuto	Peeled ginger
Cederni	Citrus	Giengiovo ma a beril	?
Galla di Romania	Romanian Gall	Lacca cotta	Baked lacquer/Shellac
Galla di Turchia del veglio	Furry galls from Turkey	Lacca cruda	Raw lacquer/Sticklac
Gherofani	Cloves	Melegchette	Grains of paradise
Galanga grave	Heavy galangal	Manna	Manna Ash
Galanga leggiere	Light galangal	Meliloto	Clover
Gomerabica	Gum Arabic	Mastico primo	1st quality gum mastic
Galbino	Galbanum	Mastico secondo	2nd quality gum mastic
Isquinanti	Squinianth	Mastico terzo	3rd quality gum mastic
Istorace	Storax	Munmia	Mummy
Ispigonardi	French lavender/Spikenard	Mandragora	Mandrake
Ispico celantico	Celtic nard	Mele crudo	Raw apple
Indaco baccaddeo	Baghdadi Indigo	Mosco con falla	Musk with fault
Indaco del Golfo	Indigo from the Gulf	Mosco senza falla	Musk without fault
Indaco di Cipri	Indigo from Cyprus	Mirabolani conditi	Myrobolans
Indaco rifanti	?	Mace	Mace
Incenso	Incense/Frankincense	Mirra	Myrrh
Istagno di Vinegia	Tin from Vinegia	Mondiglia di verzino selvatico	Chaff of wild sappan wood
Istagno di Provenza	Tin from Provence	Mirabolani chieboli	Myrabolans
Istagno battuto	Tin-foil	Mirabolani cetrini	Myrabolans
Iscotano	Purple smoke tree	Mondiglia di verzino domestico	Chaff of domesticated Sappan wood
Istinchi	?	Mandorle	Almonds
Iscamonea	?	Minio	Red lead
Istamigne	Stamin, a wool cloth	Noce moscade	Nutmeg
Ispodio di canna	Tabasheer	Nitro	Salt peter
Ispodio di liofante	Burnt ivory	Ninufarre	Nenuphar, White waterlily

Italian	Translation	Italian	Translation
Iscorza di buggiea	?	Nigiella	Nigella
Landano	Ladanum	Noce d'India	Coconut
Litargiro	Lithage	Noce vomica	Nux vomica
Legno aloe	Aloe wood/ling aloe	Opopotico	?
Lapis ligni	Lignite (graphite) pencils/lynx stone	Orpimento rosso	Red orpiment
Orpimento giallo	Yellow orpiment	Rame viniziano di due bolle	Venetian copper balls
Oppio tebaco	Opium from Theban	Rame in grana	Copper grain
Oppio tranese	Opium from Trani	Rame vecchio	Old copper
Oro battuto fine	Gold leaf	Rame duro in piastre grandi	Hard copper plates
Oro di meta	?	Regolizia	Liquorice
Olio aurino	Laurel oil	Robbia soda di Romagna	Madder, with soda. From Romagna
Olio di linseme	Linseed oil	Robbia macinata di Romagna	Powdered madder from Romagna
Olio d'uliva	Olive oil	Robbia d'Allessandria	Alexandrian Madder
Ocria bella	Beautiful ochre	Robbia di Romania	Romanian Madder
Osso di como di cervio	Deer Antlers	Robbia di Cipri	Cypriot madder
Pepe tondo	Pepper corns	Reopotico	?
Pepe lungo	Long pepper	Seme da bachi	Silkworm eggs
Polvere di zucchero di Cipri	Powdered sugar from Cyprus	Serrapino	Segapenum
Polvere di zucchero d'AUessandria	Powdered sugar from Alexandria	Sorcocolo	Anzeruto
Polvere di zucchero di Bambillonia	Powdered sugar from Cairo	Sena fresca	Fresh senna
Polvere di zucchero del Cracco	Powdered sugar from Kerak, Jordan	Sale nitro	Salt petre
Polvere di zucchero di Soria	Powdered sugar from Syria	Sale genmo	Rock salt
Pezzi di zucchero	Granulated sugar	Sale armoniaco	Sal ammoniac
Pece greca	Rosin	Sale alcali	Soda ash
Pece navale	Naval pitch	Sandoli bianchi	White sandalwood
Pegola bianca	Pitch/burgundy pitch	Sandoli rossi	Red sandalwood
Perie	Brush/pitch	Sapone sodo	Hard soap
Pilatro fresco	Fresh St. john's wort	Sapone molle	Soft soap
Pignocchi	Pine nuts	Sangue di dragone	Dragon's blood
Pepe bianco	White pepper	Senape	Mustard
Papaveri	Poppies	Solfo giallo	Yellow sulphur
Piombio	Lead	Solfo nero	Black sulphur
Penniti	?	Santonico	Wormseed

Italian	Translation	Italian	Translation
Ragia di pino	Pine seeds	Siliobalsimo	Silphium, extinct from ancients
Risalgallo fine	Realgar	Sinobia	Red ochre
Risalgallo spagnolo	Spanish realgar	Sermontano	Silphium resin
Riso d'oltre a mare	Rice from overseas	Sermenti comuni	?
Riso di Spagna	Spanish rice	Verzino salvatico	Wild sappanwood
Riobarbero fine	Chinese rhubarb	Verzino domestico	Domesticated Sappan wood
Rame viniziano d'una bolla	Bubble of Venetian copper	Verzino colombino	?
Vetriuolo di Cipri	Vitriol from Cyprus	Vescovo	?
Vernice in grana	Paint flakes	Vermicelli, cioè tria	Vermicelli
Vernice cotta	Baked paint/refined sandarac	Vino di cotogne	Quince wine
Verderame fine	Verdigris	Uve passe d'Erminia	Raisins from Armenia
Vernicanti rossi	?	Vino di pomegranate	Pomegranate wine
Trementina	Turpentine	Zettoara fine	Fine Zedoary
Turbitti	Turbith	Zucchero caffettino	Basket (container) sugar
Tamerindi	Tamarind	Zucchero mucara	Refined sugar
Triaca fine	Fine theriac	Zucchero di Babilonia	Sugar from Cairo
Trefola magna	Great truffle	Zucchero musciato, ch'e in gran	?
Turcisi di Tiro pani	Turquoise	Zucchero dammaschino	Damascus sugar
Terra sugelata	?	Zafferano toscano	Tuscan saffron
Terra di canmello	?	Zuchero candi	Candied sugar
Tutia d'Allesandria	Tutty From Alexandria	Zucchero rosato	Rose sugar
Tratto	?	Zucchero violato	Violet sugar
Vivole secche	Raisins	Zenzeverata d'India	Candied ginger
Uve passe di Romania	Raisins from Romania	Verdeterra	Verditer

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