



## **Soups, roasts and puddings. Royal cuisine at Wawel**

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**In the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, Krakow experienced a boom - mainly thanks to the trade routes criss-crossing the city. Merchants brought with them new ingredients. An important buyer of goods was the royal court.**

Information about Polish kings' cuisine in the Middle Ages and Renaissance come predominantly from accounts of the court kept by stewards. With the aid of these court accounts, we can try and imagine what the monarchs residing at Wawel Hill feasted on.

Two meals a day were served at the royal court: an early lunch called *prandium* (between 9am and noon) and an evening *cena* (between 3pm and 6pm). There were at least a dozen dishes to choose from. In the literature there are no references to breakfasts. The accounts of Queen Jadwiga refer to *collatio*, a light evening meal that usually consisted of white bread and beer.

The dishes depended on whether it was a day of fasting or not and there were as many as 200 fast days per year. It was common to eat a lot of fish, crayfish, dried peas, millet, bread and broad beans. Skirret (*sium sisarum*) often appears in the accounts in the context of fasting. The most devout believers such as Kinga or Władysław Jagiełło fasted on bread and water only.

There was not much difference between the meals. Soups, roast meats or fish and puddings were served. On meat days *czernina* (black soup), beer soup or beef and poultry broth was served (with the addition of eggs and butter as the court accounts suggest).

The roast included several types of meat: beef was the most popular alongside pork and veal whereas mutton, lamb and game were less common. Poultry was eaten frequently including chickens, capons, ducks, grouse, fieldfares, pigeons and quail. On special occasions the royals dined on swans and peacocks. Different types of meat were often combined during roasting e.g. fatty pieces of capon (a castrated rooster) were laid on top of lean pieces of beef. Fresh fish was usually brought from Proszowice and Niepołomice. Salted herring and cod were transported from Gdańsk. Fish and meat were also prepared in aspic, a type of savoury jelly, usually served at the end of the meal. Mallow was used for setting aspic and saffron, cherry juice or parsley acted as natural colorants. Aspic was seasoned with vinegar and spices.

The final part of the meal was pudding or gruel made of cereal grains: barley, oats, buckwheat, manna grass (*gliceria fluitans* wild grass seeds) and millet (boiled with milk or butter), rice (18 times more expensive than cereals), pasta and all kinds of dumplings and wild mushrooms such as salted saffron milk cap.

Cabbage was the most popular vegetable and was eaten also as sauerkraut. A lot of dried peas were also bought. The accounts of the Jagiellonians also itemise onions, beetroots, spinach, turnips, green peas, radishes, carrots, parsley, parsnips, goutweed, horseradish, skirrets, cucumbers.

Fruit was also served, mainly apples and pears as well as seasonal fruit such as wild strawberries and sour cherries. Some fruit was also dried. Nuts and almonds were also present on the royal table, added to sweetened stewed fruit or pressed for oil. The primary fat used in



medieval cuisine was pork lard, replaced by vegetable oils during Lent.

Dishes were seasoned with pepper, saffron, ginger, nutmeg, star anise or cinnamon. Spices were so precious that during the times of king Władysław II Jagiełło and Casimir IV Jagiellon, they were kept in the treasury together with the crown jewels. Food was also seasoned with cheaper local spices such as mustard, horseradish, wormwood, sage, caraway and marjoram.

Breads have always been important in Polish cuisine. In the registers of Władysław II Jagiełło, we can read about special sacks that were used to carry bread to the table. Sweet baked goods included kolach, apple or cinnamon pies and honey gingerbread.

Royal accounts itemise also a lot of dairy brought predominantly from Łobzów: milk, cream, quark, fresh and salted butter and smoked cheeses.

Fermented milk was a common drink. However, beer was the beverage of choice in the Middle Ages. Interestingly, several kings from the Jagiellonian dynasty were abstainers. Władysław II Jagiełło, his son Casimir IV Jagiellon and his grandson Sigismund I the Old were all teetotalers. The latter started to drink wine only toward the end of his life as per his doctor's advice. The reason for the rulers' reluctance to drink beer and wine was probably the fact that it was easier to disguise poison in alcoholic drinks than water. With time not only beer but also wine became prevalent on the royal table and the account books of the 16th century monarchs show wine was served nearly every day. Wines came either from their own vineyards or were imported from Hungary, Romania, France and Austria.