

STILL LIFE WITH PATE EN CROUTE

Sebastien Stoskopff (1596-1657)

LONDON (MATTHIESEN FINE ARTS)

This modest *pâté en croûte* is the successor to the “grete pie” of medieval European cooking. The magnificent game pies of the Middle Ages remained popular for several centuries. They were made with pigeons, doves, quails, rails, bustards, peacocks, cranes, swans, moor- and water-fowl and rooks. The quantities of spices were doubled if the pies were to be eaten cold.

In the ninth century, Charlemagne directed his officers to reserve the best flour for making a *pâté en croûte*. The pie had the advantage of keeping food relatively hotter when it had to be carried a long distance from the kitchen to the table. But they were also served cold and, being easily portable, out-of-doors or when traveling.

A 14th-century Italian cookery book gives a complicated recipe for a *torta*, which was the star of every banquet. Layers of chicken fried in oil, ham made into ravioli and sausage are covered with pastry and alternating layers of dates and almonds and more pastry. The same volume gives directions for a pie with live song birds which were meant to appear through windows in the “roof,” which was hung on a “tree” of pastry.

In the 15th century, on Ember Days, the three days of fasting which occurred four times a year (after the first Sunday in Lent, Whitsun, Holy Rood Day – 14 September – and St. Lucy’s Day – 13 December), a special tart was made, known as an English Tart. It was made with onions, sage, parsley, cream cheese, eggs, butter, sugar, raisins, cinnamon and ginger, with a pastry crust.

The famous 18th-century Yorkshire Christmas Pie contained a boned turkey, goose, fowl, partridge and a pigeon fitted inside each other with a crust constructed to look like a whole turkey. Pieces of hare and whole woodcocks were arranged around the sides and the whole edifice covered with 4lb of butter and a thick lid. They were often sent to London as gifts and had to be sturdily made. There was also a Yorkshire Goose Pie.

Pies are still a feature of every national cuisine in Europe and many traditional recipes have combinations of meat, fruit, spices and sharpening agents, such as citrus juice or vinegar, which date back to Roman times.

The recipe below is a 17th-century one for rabbit pie, published in La Varenne’s *Le Cuisinier François*.

PIE OF YOUNG RABBITS

“This pie is made in the same way as a game pie. Lard the cleaned rabbits with thick lard and season them with salt, pepper, vinegar and powdered cloves. If the pie is for keeping, make the dough from rye flour without butter, salt and pepper. Put aside a part of the dough to form the lid of the pie. Shape the dough to a pie and fill it with the rabbits. Shape the rest of the dough to a pie lid and make a small hole in it so the steam can escape during the baking. Cover the pie with the lid and cook it for three and a half hours. When the pie is done, close the opening in the lid with a little piece of dough.”

RABBIT PIE

Serves 6

2 young rabbits, skinned and cleaned	A pinch of ground cloves
1oz larding fat or fatty bacon	A sprig of savory, chopped
Salt and pepper	1tbsp chopped parsley
1tbsp wine vinegar	2 cups jellied stock
2 onions, thinly sliced	Pastry (10oz)
	Beaten egg

Joint the rabbits (remove the bones if you wish). Cut the fat or bacon into strips and insert through the flesh with a larding needle. Put into ovenproof dish with the seasoning and vinegar. Blanch the onions in boiling water, drain and add to the dish with the cloves, herbs and stock.

Cover with pastry, decorate and glaze with beaten egg. Bake at 400°F for 1 hour. Cover the pastry with foil or greaseproof paper, then lower the heat to 325°F for a further 1–2 hours.