

The Siren

June 2008



*Vol 29, Issue 4 A.S. XLII
Barony of Stromgard
Founded: Winter of AS XIV*

Important Information

King and Queen of An Tir

Their Royal Majesties Cedric Rolfsson and Elizabeth Owles
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Prince and Princess of An Tir

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Seneschal of An Tir

Viscountess Nadezhda Volynskaiia (Kim Stump)
(541) 905-9443 seneschal@Antir.sca.org

The An Tir Handbook

<http://www.Antir.sca.org/Pubs/ATH/0toc.php>

The Laws of An Tir

<http://www.Antir.sca.org/Pubs/Laws/kingdomonly.pdf>

SCA Organizational Handbook

(Including Corpora, the Bylaws, Corporate policies, and the Articles of Corporation)
<http://www.sca.org/docs/govdocs.pdf>

An Tir Info Scroll

<http://www.Antir.sca.org>

Current event information and calendar

Baronial Newsletter: The Siren is available for free in electronic format on <http://www.stromgard.org> in MS Word format. Free black and white copies are available for anyone without email access upon request. *The newsletter for the Barony of Stromgard is not a corporate publication of The Society of Anachronism, Inc., and does not delineate SCA policies.*

Baronial Website: <http://www.stromgard.org>

Baronial Emailing List: http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/The_Stream

Baronial Cooks List: <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/StromgardCooks>



Around the Barony and Abroad

Council Meeting: 2nd Wednesday of each month, 7PM, 2108 Grand Blvd., Vancouver, WA. Contact: Seneschal.

Fighter Practice: Every Thursday at 6:45 PM, Harmony Elementary School, 1740A NE 18th Street, Vancouver, WA. Contact: Heavy Marshal.

A&S Workshop: 4th Wednesday of each month at 7 PM, same address as Council Meeting. Contact: A&S Minister.

Cooking Guild: Last Sunday of each month at 6:30 PM. Contact: Judita (360) 991-1329
jkamethyst@yahoo.com.

Dragon's Mist Revels: Fridays at Beaverton Community Center, 7PM, 12350 SW 5th Street, Ste. 100, Beaverton, OR



Champions of Stromgard

Champion of Armored Combat: Sir Torfin Torgulsson

Champion of Horse: Contessa Illaria veltri degli Ansari

Champion of Fence: HL Jacques Avec de L'eau

Champion of the Bow: Cyriac the Hunter

Champion of the Arts and Sciences: Fionnabhair inghen Donnchaidh Guthrie

Champion of the Senior Children: Gianni Dellamora

Champion of the Junior Children: Isolde Parthalan

(Please note that some contests are ongoing because of the new points system the barony is experimenting with.)



Officers of Stromgard

Baron & Baroness: Sir Arnsbjorn
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Chamberlain: Open

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Rapier Marshal: Open

Dean of Pages: Open

Pied Piper: Open

Gete Boke/Historian:
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April Meeting Notes and Reports

Baron's Report

Unto the populace of Stromgard:

Everything is quiet as we head into the tournament and war season. Our events seem to be coming together nicely. We are going to be going to both the Fair in the Grove and Bargamels events to show our support for our neighbors. The Baroness is attending the Fair in the Grove. If you happen to be attending, please make sure she is well taken care of. Thank you.

The Baron will be going to a demo this weekend in Terra Pomaria and also attending Bargamels.

As for our events, we know that there is still a need for volunteers. Also, the land allocations are open so make sure to put in for any land you might need.

Thank you. -Arnsbjorn Tiernanson CuRigh Hersir Stromgard

Seneschal Report

Nothing new to report.

Exchequer Report

April 9, 2008

Greetings everyone.

Here is my report for this month.

FULL DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIALS IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST TO BARONY/SCA MEMBERS.

The Grand Thing III is fast approaching the end of May. I have only received a few pre-Registered people's money and forms. Please mail these in to the barony's P.O. if you can get it in soon.

Our event could have a big crowd attend, being close to Portland and all and gas prices what they are, and we know that it is a great event from past experience! Please consider volunteering for different areas of need, as always the barony needs volunteers for gate Shifts fire/roving watch, water bearing, heralding and marshalling, and more as well as Sat. night feast in the hall. -Sabina MacLlyr, GdS

Chamberlain: Open

Chatelaine: Nothing new to report.

Demo Guy Report

We have a request from Kingsway School. I will keep everyone updated and harassed. Planning stage: July Demo for the Ridgefield Library. They are going to pay us for this one in Euros, cool. Demo to pay for Fairground rental at the Columbia Co. Fair. -Raul

Gold key

Unless something happens in the next couple days, I have nothing new to report. -Ilaria

Herald's Report

March 2008, reported 9 Apr 2008

I am currently going through Stromgard's Order of Precedence, and will have a list of updates for the webpage ready shortly.

I am in need of a deputy or two, especially one that would like to become our Herald eventually. If you have an interest, please contact me privately.

I am publicly asking for help with heraldic duties at the Grand Thing. I have need for Town Criers and Tourney Field Heralds. This is a great learning opportunity, and a chance to be a loud mouth and get away with it.

Write letters of recommendation for Baronial and Kingdom Awards! We all know someone who deserves an award, but they won't get it if you don't write letters. Anyone can recommend anyone else for any award, so quit procrastinating.

As always, please email me at macllyr@hotmail.com, if you have any questions or concerns. -Stanton MacLlyr, Red Trident Pursuivant

Marshal Report

In the past month since I have taken office, I have received the Marshal Box, gone through it, removed some of the old out dated forms and replaced them with new ones.

I have replaced the ABCs with the newest copy, and I have the new 4 year authorization forms.

I have received the loaner armor, which I will be inventorying. There are some things I need to look at, and work on, and I eventually might be coming to the Council with a request or two in the future. We have had fighter practice as usual with some good turnout, and lots of talk and help and advice offered and accepted all around.

We have re-authorized one fighter with the help of Sir Tiernan. I am reading the ABCs and getting to where I know all the regs and rules pretty much by memory, and should be receiving my promotion to Senior Combat Marshal within the next month or so. -Lord Cærdic Æthelwulf

Lists

Greetings to All:

There is nothing to report from this office. -AElfwynn Fiske

Waterbearer Report

There are currently no activities for Stromgard. I will be doing waterbearing at the Grand Thing. I will need volunteers. Donations are always welcome. -Gemma Northwode

Chronicler Report

The March issue of The Siren is ready in print format and has been mailed. Thank you to Stanton and his daughter for helping me get it printed and assembled.

We will be discussing what to do about the newsletter since the cost of printing is very high, and postage rates are due to increase.

I have caught up with the notes from January through March. -Gemma Northwode

Web Minister's report 04-04-08

I have made several changes to the Citizens page. Changed contact info and names as well as titles. The Grand Thing 111. Updating class listings. Curia. Updated the baronial officers listings. -Joctar

A&S

March A&S Night was held Sunday March 30, 2008 with Bardic and Cooking Guild. Many people working on making shoes. There was great music and tasty food. I will be out of town for A&S night in April; I will make arrangements for this gathering to still happen. Please watch "The Stream" for more information.

If you haven't had a chance to look at the classes for The Grand Thing make sure to check out the website. We have a wonderful selection. -Helga Lomr

Old business:

Review customary. On hold till next month. Achaxe not present.

Financial committee new member selection will be at next meeting.

Open: Archery Marshal, Boffer Marshal, Rapier Marshal, Chamberlain

We have received a Letter of Intent for Chatelaine from Earnan Parthalan. Office needs to be advertised as open for a month. The Baroness was checking how long it's been open.

Events:

Autumn War liaison-there was a question about working with Blatha An Oir as co-autocrat. We decided liaison works better. We're going to ask if Illaria wanted to do t or the other guy.

Grand Thing: Baroness of 3M loaning Chirurgeon. Autocrat needs checks to mail for meat and for site fee. Also needs hay bales for archery targets. Will talk to some other people about it.

Anne Parthalan wanted to plan activities for teens.

Archery Championships and youth will be at the Grand Thing. Need to contact Rodrigo to plan archery competition.

Autocrat made 5 trips out to the site and everything is going well.

Website needs to mention we have covered buildings.

A&S: Bardic at Founding Revel (championships)

Stormgods: Site reserved for Sept. Berengaria is working on budget proposal.

Yule Feast: Alina will go to 3M Council to confer about sites. She will contact Aidan. They picked their co-autocrat and she will meet with them next Tues.

Founding Revel: Looking for bigger and better site.

New business: No equestrian people here tonight. Revised points proposal on contest. Grand Thing and Stormgods will have equestrian.

The Siren: Achaxe did research on it. Talked about electronic Siren. Either everyone will get it free or they must pay for it. List of stuff from Baroness.: 1 page notice to the people that it is going to be free. Remaining subscriptions will be refunded unless the subscriber wants to donate the refund to the barony. Siren will go to quarterly schedule. Black and white free copy can be provided for anyone without email/Internet access.

Irish Feast: Alina: Looking for some local teachers to teach classes.

May meeting notes and reports

Baron's Report

Greetings to the Populace of Stromgard,

We went to a lovely archery and thrown weapons get together this weekend up at the Game of Thrones and Stormgods "The Return of Tiernan" site. Once again I must say how lucky we are to have such a beautiful site for that event.

We are just two days from crown, the official beginning of the tourney season. I hope to see a lot of you there, and hope to get to hang out with you all some.

We are only one week and two days from The Grand Thing. I know we still need volunteers for the event. I will be soliciting volunteers on site if everything is not filled. Let us all pull together and make this a wonderful event. Remember volunteer early volunteer often. -Sir Arnsbjorn Tiernanson CuRigh, Hersir Stromgard

Exchequer Report

May 14, 2008

Greetings everyone:

Sorry to miss the meeting this month. I took the train with my kids to Seattle, and it happened to be this day and night. Here is my report.

FULL DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIALS IS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST TO BARONY/SCA MEMBERS.

We still need volunteers for the event. The Barony needs volunteers for gate shifts, fire/roving watch, water bearing, heralding and marshalling, and more as well as Sat. night feast in the hall. We have about 14 merchants registered for the event as of this writing, blacksmiths, potters, bone carvers, amber sellers, garb sellers, miscellany and Dragon's Breath Espresso will be back.

Sabina MacLlyr, GdS

Gold Key

Greetings,

Nothing new to report. I am organizing everything so it will all be ready for The Grand Thing.

I am planning on hanging as many items on a rack as it is possible to hang. That means that I could use any spare hangers that folks have. Anyone have any wire clothing hangers that they want to be rid of?-Ilaria

Chatelaine

Good Morrow Dear Gentles,

I have to report I have had no emails or calls regarding the SCA or our fair Barony. I have had 3 personal contacts, one of whom attended The Fair in the Grove with me and by his report he had an excellent time. I have received the pamphlets from HL Alistar Kirkpatrick and I will be making additional copies for further distribution. Myself and clan will be attending the Grand Thing so please refer any newcomers to me as I will be very pleased to assist. -Earnan Parthalan

Heavy Marshal Report

Practice continues as normal at the normal location and the normal times.... due to some personal issues I have been unable to be there at the last 2 practices but will be there this week.

I also have not had the time to do the inventory I wished to do and will be doing it this month.-Lord Cærdic Æthelwulf

Web Minister Report

05-08-08

continuing to update the Stromgard web page as information is presented.

New links:

Baronial meeting notes "on the Stromgard websites main page."
Baronial news letter "on the Stromgard websites main page."

Updates that have been made:

Grand thing III event information page on the Stromgard server.
Preliminary event schedule (subject to change)
Class schedule (final)

Please Note:

This is not the official web page for the event. When that web site is available, I will have a link to it added to the Stromgard web page.-Octar

Waterbearer Report

Tourney season is coming up shortly. I will be doing waterbearing at the Grand Thing. Anyone wishing to donate water or food items, please contact me.

I did waterbearing for Dragon's Mist demo at the end of April. It was a nice event with pleasant weather.

Also my term as waterbearer ends I believe at the end of October or in November. I will be stepping down. I would like to use our tourney events, which there are two of this year, to train anyone interested in replacing me. Anyone interested?-Gemma Northwode

Chronicler Report

It was decided last council meeting to move the newsletter to a quarterly schedule, make The Siren free and a web publication, and refund any remaining subscription fees paid to subscribers. If you wish to donate any remainder and have not alerted me, I ask you to kindly contact me so I may let our exchequer know. If you have contacted me already, thank you.

I have gotten caught up with all the past meeting notes from January, February, and March. I have April to do. The print March newsletter was completed and mailed shortly after April council meeting finished. The free version in Word is also on the barony's website. Print copies are available upon arrangement for anyone without email access, in black and white only.

Thank you to all whom have helped me get this off the ground. -Gemma Northwode

Herald report:

Nothing new to report.

Scribal Report:

Please do scribal contest. Details on Stromgard website. -Edeline de Bayonne

Heavy Marshal Report:

Practice continues. -Lord Caerdic Aethelwulf

Lists:

Did lists for Faire in the Grove. Will be at Grand Thing. -Aelfwynn Fiske

Demo Guy Report:

I didn't attend a demo this month. My helm made a trek to Portland outdoor school demo where I heard it made a total grill of itself.

I received a phone call and I am playing phone tag with the financial backer of the Ridgefield library demo. He called from Hooters where he is a talent scout. I sent 5x8" glossies of myself and have not heard back.

Cinetopia's assistant manager called for a demo for the opening of the sequel to Narnia, "Narnia versus the Hooters girls." He called back later and told me that the real manager was in Jamaica and couldn't approve our fee of 2% of the gate, so no go.

Got a request from some church. Will forward. -Raul

A&S:

9 people attended April A&S night. -Helga Lomr

Baroness's addendum:

Kingdom Bardic needs judges in Vancouver, BC. The request came over the Laurels list.

Cooking Guild: No report.

Siting committee: No one present.

Open offices: Waterbearer, Boffer, Dean of Pages, Archery Marshall, Rapier Marshall

Old business: Customary put off for review until Jan. 2009.

Events:

Autumn War

Liaison for Autumn War-email to Illaria did not go through. Illaria said she'll talk to Ed. They may or may not be back from Canada.

Grand Thing

Meant to have event copy done-will have it done soon. Schedule of events 95% done. He will have it done by 10 PM tonight. Post to the Stream. Bardic is set up for Sat. Stanton will run one on Sun. for the barony.

Teen events coordinator asked for funds for teen event. (Anne) Masquerade Ball-needs adult supervisors. There's a form to fill out for reimbursement. Conversation about where the teens will do their activities.

Classes in feat hall and baronial pavilion. Grand Thing lunch done by Bjorvin.

Seneschal: Remind parents about kingdom policy on leaving kids unattended. They're not a babysitter, and there has to be 2 adults with the kids. Policy will be posted on Stream.

Gate will have volunteer list. Autocrat and Jonathan will run gate for one night. Discussion about parking area.

Whole site is huge. 14 merchants signed up for Grand Thing. Pre-reg is not looking good at the moment.

Stormgods

Countess Berengaria will be moving out of the area. Need a new autocrat for event. The site is already set up. Event is Sept 12-14th.

Yule Feast Dec. 13th

Talia is co-autocrat from 3M. She's autocratting Tryggvy's War. They want to use Col. Co. Fairgrounds site for event. \$425.00-\$450.00 for cost. Split with 3M. Only \$25.00 more than last year. 3M would like a cooking contest rather than meat. Donation for OR Food Bank. 3M would like live music and dancing. 5-600 people can fit in there.

Faire in the Grove: Request to play and perform from singer Heather Alexander. Dec. 13th 2nd Sat. in Dec. approve in Crier.

Founding Revel: Nothing new.

New business:

Financial Committee-add members on rotating basis. Only name offered is Alaina. Job is to show up 1 hour before Baronial Council Meeting. They are meeting at Burgerville these days. Illaria said she'd put her name in. Illaria and Alaina will be on Financial Committee.

Canton of Caldor holds archery practice at Col. Co. Fairgrounds. They will do an event in Oct.

Cooking Guild Corner



I'm listing some recipes that I've covered in previous classes, in case someone wants them:

Icelandic chicken (my variant)

Take boneless, skinless chicken breasts, and pound them flat.

Precook several strips of bacon in a pan until crispy, then remove and crumble--save grease. Season the chicken with salt and pepper (lightly, as you're adding bacon), and sauté in bacon fat until golden.

Lay fresh sage leaves atop meat, top with bacon, and cover with a 1/4" thick layer of biscuit dough--I use the canned fridge-kind, flattened, when camping, or you can use piecrust.

Fry these packets on medium heat in skillet until browned.

Koken van Honer (my variant):

Premade double pie crust

3/4 lb. chicken breasts, well-pounded and cut into strips

3 strips bacon, chopped

Pinch saffron (optional)

1 egg yolk

1/4 tsp. cumin

1/8 tsp. pepper

Roll out pastry and cut 6" rounds. Lay chicken strips along one-half of dough, season with spices, and sprinkle on bacon. Paint water along edge of rounds, and fold over half to seal, pressing edges. Paint with egg--and saffron, if using--and bake at 400 F until golden.

Period Dipping Sauces for chicken

1--

1/3 c. orange juice

1 Tb. rosewater

2 Tb. sugar

1 tsp. cinnamon

Cornstarch (approx. 1Tb.) for thickening

Mix in saucepan, and simmer until like sweet 'n sour sauce-thick.

2--

1/3 lb. plums, or sour cherries, chopped (can use canned, and drain)

1 Tb. white wine vinegar

2 Tb. chicken broth

A small sprig each fresh parsley, marjoram and mint, chopped fine
salt to taste. Simmer in saucepan until well-heated, and thickened.

-Recipe submitted by Judith, Cooking Guild Mistress (*Thank you!!-ed.*)

Articles of Interest

(Thanks to Eulalia de Ravenfeld from DM for sharing two articles of interest for the June issue!-ed.)

■

Eating In Persona: Some Questions to Get You Started

By Lady Eulalia de Ravenfeld, with some help from Anne Midwinter

What is the purpose of preparing and eating medieval food? Should historical food be reserved for A&S competitions? I think not. For me, researching and attempting to recreate the food of our period is a way for me to get deeper into the mindset of a medieval person, to truly experience life through the eyes (and tongue!) of my persona. Along these lines, I came up with some questions to ask oneself to gain greater insight into the medieval experience of food. This list is very much a work in progress, and is meant more than anything to get you thinking. If you have questions you would like to see added to this list, or comments generally, please contact me at briwaf at gmail dot com.

When your persona goes through a day, when and what do you eat? Do you have breakfast? When? What is it? How many meals do you eat in a day? About how much food do you eat in a typical day?

Where do you eat your meals? With whom?

Who prepares the food you eat? Does this ever change?

What are the foods that your persona ate every day? Never ate?

Are there some foods you only eat for special occasions, like holidays?

Do children eat the same foods as adults? Are there special foods for pregnant women? What about the elderly?

What makes a food healthy or unhealthy? Are there special foods for sick people?

What kinds of drinks would you have had? Did you drink ale at every meal? Abstain from alcohol?

What determines what you eat now? What factors might have historically? (Ethics/religion, availability, personal preference.)

When you go to the grocery store now, what do you buy even if you don't have a plan for it? What *has* to be in the cupboard or the refrigerator? What are some medieval equivalents, especially ones that today we don't use as much? (Some examples include almonds/almond milk, verjuice, and wheat starch.)

Our tastes vs. period tastes: how should food taste to a historical person?

Available cooking technology: think about the limitations posed by hearth-cooking, as well as the opportunities.

How is eating different when you can't have grapes or March or strawberries in October? What are some other foods affected by seasonal variations? What keeps well all year?

Consider your place and time. Much of our talk about cooking mediievally focuses on time (for obvious reasons), and place in the broadest sense (New World vs. Old World). But what would have been the reality for your persona? Cucumbers may be period, but would you have ever seen one if you lived in 9th century Wales?

Are there surviving recipes from your time period and culture? How about archeological evidence? Even if you haven't tried to recreate any recipes, do you at least have a sense of what they are like?

What were the important attributes of a particular food for your persona? For example, think about the importance of color in a lot of the surviving recipe collections of the High Middle Ages -- imagine what eating is like if you add food coloring to nearly everything.

What foods do you buy and what foods do you make? (Do you buy ale and bread?)

What kinds of spices would you eat? Did you have sugar? Was it expensive?

What kinds of game and fish were eaten regularly, especially that we eat either rarely or never now? Have you (a modern person) ever tried venison, or boar? Do you want to?

Overall: How has the way we eat, not just what we eat, changed?

Resources that you may find helpful:

- The Food Timeline, <http://www.foodtimeline.org/>
- *Food and Feast in Medieval England*, by Peter Hammond
- Cookbooks from your time and place of interest, or close-to. Translations of the Menagier, Chiquart, An Anonymous Andalusian Cookbook, and a few others are available online on the website of Duke Cariadoc of the Bow, <http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Medieval.html>
- Prospect Books publishes a wide variety of resources about food and food history, including the journal *Petits Propos Culinaires*. <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/lane/kal69/shop/system/index.html>

Baking Your Own Plausibly Period Loaf of Bread

by Lady Eulalia de Ravenfeld

Bread was *the* staple food of the Middle Ages. How can we recreate period bread at home?

Medieval bread was:

1. Leavened with sourdough starter or barm (yeasty dregs from brewing)
2. Not made with bleached white flour, dough conditioners, etc.
3. Baked using fire
4. (For city dwellers) Baked by professionals

In my opinion, the most period experience of bread consumption that you can have is to go to New Seasons and purchase a loaf of their sourdough bread, either wheat levain (all whole grain) or their regular sourdough (which is part whole wheat and part white flour, which I believe is similar to the sifted flours used medievally). The ingredients are period, the method is remarkably period (large, "hearth" style ovens), and for most medieval people bread was something you bought, not something you made.

But how can you make a reasonable recreation of medieval bread in your very own home with your very own modern oven? You will need to consider both ingredients and methods, and make some substitutions for both along the way.

Let's start with what is, to my knowledge, the only surviving medieval bread recipe, from Platina:

"Therefore I recommend to anyone who is a baker that he use flour from wheat meal, well ground and then passed through a fine sieve to sift it; then put it in a bread pan with warm water, to which has been added salt, after the manner of the people of Ferrari in Italy. After adding the right amount of leaven, keep it in a damp place if you can and let it rise. That is the way bread can be made without difficulty. Let the baker beware not to

use more or less leaven than he should; in the former instance, the bread will take on a sour taste and in the latter, it becomes heavy and unhealthful and is not readily digested. The bread should be well baked in an oven, and not on the same day; bread from fresh flour is most nourishing of all, and should be baked slowly." [A Short Note on Medieval Bread, see Resources]

This gives us a starting point for both ingredients (sifted wheat flour, water, salt, leaven) and methods (letting the bread rise overnight as well as the note on a sour taste tell us the leaven is sourdough, baked in an oven slowly).

A little more research (see Resources) can pad this out.

First, flours: For the wealthy, sifted wheat flour was used. This cannot be as fine and white as modern white flour, so I usually use a combination of white flour and whole wheat flour (with more white flour or equal parts of each). For lower classes, pure wheat flour was not typically used, rather wheat was used in combination with other grains, especially rye (wheat and rye together are called "Maslin") and barley, and occasionally oats. You could also try using spelt, which is an older form of wheat. For the very poor, you may wish to experiment with adding pea flour to a loaf to make "horse bread". Remember, if you are making peasant food (mixed grain loaves), ingredients like sugar, eggs, spices, dried fruit, etc. are inauthentic. In fact, except when following specific "cake" recipes I don't add anything other than salt to my bread dough for period baking. By the way, I buy my flours from Bob's Red Mill; they have a dizzying array of flours, the quality is high, and I like to believe that buying stone-ground flour somehow makes it more authentic.

Now, on to leavening. I make sourdough starter using equal parts of flour and water, mixed together and placed in a suitable container (I re-use cottage cheese tubs) and left out, covered with a cloth, until wild yeast has taken up residence and begun to multiply. Your starter will start to smell exciting and look bubbly. (If it ever smells more than exciting it's probably time to throw it away.) If you like, you can give it a boost at the beginning by adding either commercial baking yeast or the dregs of a batch of mead, beer, ale, etc.

This barm can also be used on its own as a leavening agent. Baking with barm is basically the same as using sourdough starter. When you make your sponge, you'll mix flour, water, and barm and let them sit until bubbly. I've found that barm is faster than sourdough starter (baking a loaf of sourdough bread is a day-long project) but otherwise the results are very similar. I made bread once using a very hoppy barm and it tasted horrific --- very bitter. I have had a lot of luck, though, baking with mead dregs.

Incidentally, if you're reading this and saying to yourself "It's too bad I hate sourdough bread, I guess I can't make medieval bread," I would like to note that real sourdough tastes almost nothing like the sourdough you buy at the grocery store. "Sourdough" from Safeway (or the like) is pretty much just modern "French" bread with a whole lot of lactic acid added. Too much lactic acid, if you ask me. Proper sourdough is much, much tastier.

Recall that Platina specifically cautions against adding too much leaven and ending up with a sour taste.

Now, how do we actually bake a loaf?

Up until now, we've pretty much been ignoring the fact that I have a modern oven. Someday I am going to build myself a cute little wood fired oven. But since I live in an apartment, and I can only imagine the management's reaction to a project like this, that day is not yet come. In case you've been living under a rock for the last two years, the foodie trend that has taken the world by storm is so-called "no knead bread." I must confess I haven't actually made this (I am opposed on principle to bread that you do not knead -- you must make sweet love to the dough), but I have gleefully adopted what I think is the major innovation of the recipe which is baking bread inside an enameled cast-iron Dutch oven. Not only does this give you tastier bread, I think that it also gives you a more medieval style of bread. Those cute little wood fired ovens have very different physical properties than modern ovens (different heating patterns, more steam is retained, etc.) that I think are somewhat approximated by using the Dutch oven. I'd need to do more research (and especially field testing) to confirm this hypothesis, of course, but for now I am willing to say that putting a Dutch oven inside your regular oven is a better way to go than just using your regular oven.

So, here follows, my process for baking a medieval loaf of bread in a modern kitchen:

Once you have a starter good and ready (usually about a week), or a quantity of barm, pour it into a bowl and add a cup or two of flour and enough water to reach a pancake-batter consistency. You now have a "sponge". Cover the bowl with a cloth and let it stand (an hour or more depending on how warm your kitchen is) until the sponge looks, well, spongy: lots of bubbles. If you reserve some of the sponge, you can keep it going as your next starter. Just put it back in its container and set it aside. Add salt to taste add enough flour to form a sticky dough, then turn it out on a floured counter and knead it several times. Don't worry if it's pretty sticky -- you want the dough to be very moist. Put the dough back in the bowl. Optional: rub oil, grease, or softened butter over the outside of it. Cover the bowl with a cloth and let it rise (usually several hours) until it has doubled in size. Punch it down, knead a few more strokes, and put it back in the bowl, this time with a sheet of baking parchment underneath the dough ball. (Re-greasing the loaf optional.)

Once your loaf has proofed (risen enough that a finger poked into the side of it results in a dimple that stays instead of springing back -- this can take another couple of hours), put your Dutch oven (empty) inside the oven and heat it (the oven) to 450 degrees F. I feel that it is necessary to insert a warning here: *At that temperature, the handle on your Dutch oven is basically guaranteed to fail.* You can order a stainless steel handle from the leading frou-frou Dutch oven maker, or you can do a DIY fix with a cabinet pull and screw. Alternatively, the enamel is optional; you could just use a regular cast iron Dutch oven.

While the oven is heating, use a sharp knife to slash the top of the loaf. When the oven is heated, take the Dutch oven out and CAREFULLY remove the lid and EVEN MORE CAREFULLY use the parchment paper to transfer your loaf to the Dutch oven. Put the lid back on, put the Dutch oven back in the oven, turn the heat down to 425 and bake for 30 minutes. Then remove the lid, turn the heat down to 400 and bake for another 20 minutes (maybe less). When your bread is done, take the Dutch oven out and use tools to get the loaf out. Let it cool for at least 20 minutes (it is still baking during this time) before slicing.

Tada! Bread!

Here is what my finished loaf looked like. This was leavened with a combination of sourdough starter, mead dregs, and cider dregs, and used about equal parts of whole wheat flour and white flour:



Also, here's a picture of my cabinet handle fix on my Dutch oven:



Resources for Further Research:

Much of the historical information in this article was synthesized from my reading of Food and Feast in Medieval England by Peter Hammond.

Information on medieval bread:

"Frequently Asked Questions About Medieval Bread" <http://www.whirlwind-design.com/madbaker/breadfaq.html>

"A Short Note on Medieval Bread" <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~rcull/bread.htm>

Medieval ovens:

"Making a Medieval Style Brick Oven"

<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/brikoven.html>

"Bakers and Ovens in Medieval and Renaissance Art"

<http://www.larsdatter.com/bakers.htm>

Baking with sourdough:

"Sourdough Baking: The Basics" <http://www.io.com/~sjohn/sour.htm>

The infamous no-knead bread article:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/08/dining/081mrex.html>

(If you subscribe to Cook's Illustrated, they have a better version in an article titled No-Knead Bread 2.0 in the Jan/Feb 08 issue.)

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Events

The calendar of events and event copy will no longer appear in *The Siren*. It is time-consuming to repeat information readily available elsewhere. Please go to *AN TIR INFO SCROLL* page for event information, check the barony website, *The Stream*, or your copy of *THE CRIER*.

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If you have any questions, please ask. **Check Stromgard Officers section on page 4 of *The Siren* for contact information.**

Thank you.

Gemma Northwode
Chronicler