

Marauding Mongols: Borrowing the Best from Your Neighbours' Cuisine

by THL Natal'ia Vladimirova 'doch

1. Who were the Mongols?
 - a. Ethnic group from Central Asia who were known as herdsmen, trappers, and traders
 - b. Extremely tribalistic
 - c. Nomadic (but often within specific regions)
 - d. Unlike common portrayals, early period Mongolians were not lawless, wild men who could not be contained. Like with many tribal nations, the Mongolian Tribes had accepted practices and were only brutal to those who had not lived in the hostile environments of the Mongolian Steppes.
2. What did they eat before the Great Mongolian Horde?
 - a. Each year we gather more information on the diet of the earlier period Mongolian diet. Currently belief is that it was quite similar to the diet of nomadic Mongolians today.
 - b. That is to say that they ate primarily from their herds and stuck to a white and red season for food variety.
 - c. Those who could not supply their food needs with their herds would supplement their food with hunting (either by snare or bird), fishing, or gathering.
3. A quick introduction to the Great Mongolian Horde that swept Asia and Eastern Europe.
 - a. In the 13th century, Temujin was born into a family of herd men who were wealthy and influential. This does not mean that they were untouchable. It did mean that Temujin could be used to bring connections with other powerful families. On a trip to visit a rival tribe, Temujin was betrothed to a young lady from another tribe. Soon after, Temujin's father was poisoned and died. After his father's funeral, Temujin and his family woke to their herds and 'productive' members of the tribe missing.
 - b. Temujin is set on a life course that sees him poverty struck, a slave, disowned, and then the beginning of a military mastermind. He uses his skills through his hard life and begins to unite the disgruntled tribes. They then take over Mongolian. From here they branch out.
 - c. During this time, Temujin becomes known as Cinggis Qan (Genghis Khan).
4. Temujin's early life and its impact on Mongolian cuisine.
 - a. *The Secret History of the Mongols*. This is a saga written years after the original telling and translated into English. It exalts Temujin and his family to that of a near god. So, we need to be careful of using it as the definitive of society in the Mongolian past, but it is a good indication of what was important in the story that is Genghis Khan— sections 74 – 75.
 - b. This 'living off the land' style of eating would eventually turn the great qan to a richer diet and a near refusal of fish and vegetable when possible.
 - c. The evidence of 'expensive' herd food has been found in excavation of Mongolian city middens. Many sites indicated a heavy meat diet.
5. The Way to World Domination.
 - a. The Horde had an interesting domination structure. When they came to overtake a new land, they tried to do it as peacefully as possible. This included leaving the societal structures in place where they could be and leaving a tax collector and small military force if needed.

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- b. This exposed the Horde members (often fairly senior members) in the new region.
 - c. Guests (captives by another name in some cases) were invited to travel with the Horde.
 - d. There is evidence that this mixing Mongolian and neighbours lead to a mixing of cultures, including food culture. It is during this time that we begin to see the foodways of Mongolian begin to change and documents of food and feast begin to start including spices from Turkey and Persia to the west and Chinese flavours from the South/East.
6. After Genghis Khan went to ride the pale horse in 1227, a succession of sons and grandsons took over the Horde. Areas were lost and the Great Horde began to break up forming other military driven populations (such as the Golden Horde in Russia). These units became self-sufficient but they still held their ties back to the main branch of the Horde.
- a. Fast forward to the early 14th century and a book called *Yin-shan cheng-yao* (*Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor's Food and Drink*) by Hu Szu-hui (YSCY)
 - i. A translation and examination can be found in *A Soup for the Qan* by Paul Buell and Eugene N. Anderson.
 - b. Authored by Hu Szu-hui
 - i. Court therapist and dietitian in China during the Yuan Dynasty.
 - ii. Is credited with being the first to use scientific measure to discover, describe, and treat nutritional deficiencies and the diseases associated with.
 - c. Extensively YSCY is a Mongol era Chinese Dietary Medical text.
 - d. Manuscript believed to have first been presented in court in 1330, but the knowledge goes back to Kublai Khan's court.
 - e. Influences include Mongolian, Han Chinese, Turkic, and Persian.
7. Why do we not see a mingling of Russian flavours?
- a. At this point, I cannot give you a substantive answer. Perhaps there is a mixing that has not been brought to light yet. Early Russian cooking (flavours and dishes) are not well documented at this point in the literature available to English-speaking researchers.

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Other Resources:

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Facebook Groups:

Lochac Cooks Guild

SCA Cooks

Central Asian Food Research – SCA

The Honorable Clover