**What was eaten in the Middle Ages?**

In the Middle Ages, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, corn, beans, as well as coffee, tea, chocolate, and many other commonly available products today were unknown. However, this does not mean that the food back then was monotonous and unvaried.

On the contrary, during those times, many aromatic, exotic spices, and herbs were used. Various types of bread were baked, meats and fish were prepared in various ways.

The cuisine of the early Middle Ages, when Europe was inhabited by nomadic peoples, was not sophisticated. It was only over time, as people began to lead a more settled way of life, that they began to pay more attention to what they ate.

**Grains and bread on the medieval table**

An important element of the menu at that time was porridge. Several types of porridge were known, often served with bacon. This dish was eagerly eaten both in poorer and wealthier households.

Porridge was also served with butter and oils, roasted and baked, added to soups and meat dishes. Baked goods were also very common. The poor usually ate flatbreads, while the wealthy ate white bread. Bread in the Middle Ages had liturgical significance and played an important role in religious rituals. The popularity of bread is evidenced by the fact that in Krakow already in the 13th century, several types of bread were baked. On the other hand, an indispensable element of wedding receptions were "kołacze" - sweet rolls. It was written by Szymonowicz:

"Kołacze are the foundation of everything, it can be boldly said, Without kołacze, there seems to be no wedding."

**Dairy products were very popular.**

Fresh milk was rarely consumed as it spoiled quickly. Cheese and buttermilk were popular food products among the poorer social classes. Some cheeses, which are quite expensive today, were very common in the Middle Ages, such as Italian Parmesan or Edam cheese produced in France.

**Meat is valued**

However, meat was considered the most valuable food. Therefore, rulers, knights, nobility, and wealthy townspeople consumed it a lot. Meat consumption was limited by fasting. In the past, fasting was observed on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, during Lent when strict fasting was in force, and on dry days (three days per quarter). Not observing fasting during the times of Bolesław Chrobry could result in having teeth knocked out.

Game meat, such as venison, deer, and wild boar, was particularly popular. Roasted bison and bear paws were renowned in Polish cuisine. Various types of birds were also served on medieval tables: quails, partridges, cranes, larks, peacocks, and even swans, although the latter were more for decorative purposes than for taste. Crow's meat was considered a delicacy.

From domestic animals, pork was eaten. They were easy to maintain, and they could even be kept in cities. Beef was not very popular because mainly old animals, no longer useful for work, were slaughtered, and their meat was no longer considered the best.

**Fasting on the table**

Fish served as an alternative to meat during fasting days. Herring was the most consumed among marine fish, as it could be transported over long distances when smoked or pickled in barrels. Freshwater fish were also available to less affluent people and were popular due to their availability: pike, carp, tench, trout, and perch. Fish were salted, dried, smoked, eaten with fruits, or combined with meat.

Vegetables were not popular food in the Middle Ages. The richer part of society ate large amounts of meat. The poorer ones consumed bread, porridge, dairy products, salted fish, and vegetables. Among them, cabbage, turnip, leek, as well as legumes such as beans, chickpeas, or peas were the most popular. In addition, garlic, beets, and onions were eaten.

Fruits were not highly regarded as food, but they were often added to meat and fish dishes. Apples, pears, plums were common, and figs, dates, which were imported, were known. In southern Europe, there were lemons, bitter oranges, quinces, and grapes, from which wine was made.

**Exoticism on the plate**

Exotic spices played a significant role in dishes characteristic of that era. They reached Europe on a larger scale thanks to the Crusades. In wealthier households, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, and very expensive saffron were used. The falsification of saffron was punishable by death by hanging. Pepper was very common and was considered a spice for the poor.

Other now-forgotten spices were also used, such as cubeb pepper, cubeb, grains of paradise. Cubeb pepper was a type of pepper. Fish dishes were seasoned with grains of paradise. Grains of paradise, also known as melegueta pepper, were used as medicine.