

Before Béchamel & Hollandaise an Introduction to Medieval Sauces

Sauces are a means for a culinary artist to add a special flare to ordinary meats and fishes. In the great kitchens of the Middle Ages there was a position specifically for the cook whose job it was to create sauces. He (or she) was called the Saucer. Then the cook would take the sauces prepared by the Saucer and pare them with the appropriate meats or fish. Just what type of sauces did the Saucer create?

Modern Sauces

It is difficult to begin a discussion on medieval sauces without first referencing the sauces that are used in modern cuisine. Many new students into the medieval culinary arts desire to work with methods and ingredients they are familiar with, and the making of sauces is no exception.¹ On her web site, *What's Cooking America*, Linda Stradley states the following:

“Mother Sauces - Also called Grand Sauces. These are the five most basic sauces that every cook should master. Antonin Careme, founding father of French "grande cuisine," came up with the methodology in the early 1800's by which hundreds of sauces would be categorized under five Mother Sauces, and there are infinite possibilities for variations, since the sauces are all based on a few basic formulas.”²

The five mother sauces are Béchamel, Velouté, Espagnole, Hollandaise, and Tomato.³ The earliest evidence of any of these sauces can currently only be traced back to the 17th century.

The cuisine of Europe was undergoing tremendous changes as it emerged from the Renaissance. With the publication of *Le Cuisinier François* in 1656, by François Pierre de la Varenne, French cuisine belonged to the modern era.⁴

Humoral Theory

In order to begin to understand the medieval cook's approach to cuisine, including the making of sauces, it is important to understand the humoral theory as it applies to food. Each food ingredient was categorized on two basic qualities; if it were moist or dry and hot or cold. The qualities of the humors were given a degree of intensity. Intensity ranged from the 1st to 4th degree. In addition the method of preparation would also affect the humoral qualities of the food. Table 1 lists the four basic humors, it's qualities, the season and element associated with it⁵

Table 1 - The Four Humors

Humor	Quality	Season	Element
Blood (Sanguine)	Moist & Hot	Spring	Air
Yellow Bile (Choler)	Dry & Hot	Summer	Fire
Black Bile (Melancholy)	Dry & Cold	Autumn	Earth

¹ This is from personal experience working with individuals just learning about medieval cuisine.

² Stradley, Linda. 2004. *History of Sauces*. What's Cooking America. <http://whatscookingamerica.net/History/SauceHistory.htm> (Accessed July 24, 2007)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Anne Willan discusses this in greater detail in her chapter titled “La Varenne” in *Great Cooks and Their Recipes: From Taillevent to Escoffier*.

⁵ This table is compiled from information found in the translation by Mark Grant of Galen's “On the Humors” in *Galen on Food and Diet* and in Terence Scully's discussion in his chapter titled “The Theoretical Bases for Medieval Food and Cookery” in *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*.

Humor	Quality	Season	Element
Phlegm	Moist & Cold	Winter	Water

The humoral theory of food certainly has its background in the teachings of Hippocrates in the 5th century BCE.⁶ It was further refined in the treatises by Galen in the 2nd century.⁷ Sauces were used to balance out the humors of the food stuff well into the 16th century.

There were two different goals for the medieval cook. For the healthy diner, the goal was to provide a dish (or series of dishes) where the humoral qualities of the ingredients were used to balance each other into a neutral state. For the ill, the goal was to provide a dish (or series of dishes) where the humoral qualities of the ingredients were used to balance the humors of the individual in order to bring him back into a healthy “neutral” state.

“In choosing or in elaborating a sauce a cook accepted an enormously serious responsibility. At this time an ignorance of the humoral complexion of any ingredient could easily lead to a charge of inadvertently undermining someone’s health, or even murder. A cook’s job was in many respects an offshoot of that of a physician; he had almost as much responsibility.”⁸

Medieval Sauces

With the knowledge at hand of the humors of any given ingredient, including spices, the medieval cook can now make a variety of sauces to suit his needs. There were four basic uses for sauces: basting sauces, cooking sauces, serving sauces and dipping sauces. In many of the extant medieval texts on cuisine that is currently available, there are notable sections devoted to the making of sauces. Some sauces were cooked (boiled), some were not (cold). Table 2 lists the variety of boiled and cold sauces found in extant medieval manuscripts.

Table 2 - Medieval Sauces

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
Libro de arte coquinaria ¹⁰	Maestro Martino da Como	Italy, 15 th Century	White Sauce
			Gold of Pleasure Sauce
			Peacock Sauce
			Dried Prune Sauce
			Green Sauce
			Peach Blossom Sauce
			Broom Flower Sauce
			Grape Sauce
			Mulberry Sauce
			Black Cherry or Sour Cherry Sauce
			Cornel Cherry Sauce
			Mustard

⁶ Grant, Mark, trans. 2000. *Galen on Food and Diet*. London. Routledge.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Scully, Terence. 1995. *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*. Suffolk, England. The Boydell Press.

⁹ Sauce names in parenthesis are the translators or my own name for these sauces since one was not provided in the original texts.

¹⁰ Parzen, Jeremy trans. & Stefania Barzini. 2005. *The Art of Cooking: The First Modern Cookery Book*. Berkeley, California. University of California Press.

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
			Red or Violet Mustard
			Mustard that can be Carried in Pieces on Horseback
			Heavenly Summertime Sauce
			Yellow Pepper Sauce for Fish
			White Garlic Sauce
			Violet Garlic Sauce
			Green Verjuice
			Sauce (Grape leaf & Garlic)
			Verjuice with Fennel
			Rose-Apple Sauce
			Sauce for Pullet Pieces
			Sauce for Hare
			Good Sauce
			Lemon Sauce
			Sauce for Marzipan
			Sauce for Every Type of Wild Beast
			Saracen Sauce
			Everyday Sauce
			Northern Italian Sauce
			French-Style Sauce for Partridge, Hen or Other Fowl
			Papal Sauce
			Regal Sauce
			French Mustard
Vivendier ¹¹	Unknown	France, 15 th century	Barbe Robert
			Cameline Sauce
			Cameline Garlic Sauce
			White Garlic Sauce
			Yellow Pepper Sauce
			Hot Black Pepper Sauce
			Jance of Cow's Milk
Viandier of Taillevent ¹²	Guillaume Tirel	France, 13 th century	Cameline Sauce
			Fresh Herring Garlic Sauce

¹¹ Scully, Terence. 1997. *The Vivendier*. Devon, England. Prospect Books.

¹² Scully, Terence. 1988. *The Viandier of Taillevent*. Canada. University of Ottawa Press.

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
			(Almond Garlic Sauce)
			Green Sauce
			A Sauce to Preserve Sea-Fish
			Robert's Beard Sauce
			Yellow Pepper Sauce
			Black Pepper Sauce
			Cow's Milk Jance
			Garlic Jance
			Ginger Jance
			Poitevin Sauce
			Cameline Mustard Sauce
			Marjoram Sauce
Le Ménagier de Paris ¹³	Unknown	France, 14 th century	Mustard
			Sorrel Verjuice
			Cameline Sauce
			White or Green Garlic Sauce for Ducklings or Beef
			Musty Garlic for Fresh Herrings
			Green Spice Sauce
			Green Pickle for Preserving Salt-Water Fish
			Yellow or Sharp Pepper Sauce
			Black Pepper Sauce
			Galentine for Carp
			Saupiquet for Coney, River Fowl or Wood Pigeons
			Calimafrée or Lazy Sauce
			Jance of Cow's Milk
			Garlic Jance
			Jance
			Poitevine Sauce
			Must for Young Capons
			Quick Sauce for a Capon
			Sauce to be put to Boil in Pasties of Halebrans, Ducklings, Little Rabbits and Wild Coneys
			Boar's Tail Sauce
			Sauce for a Capon or Hen

¹³ Power, Eileen, trans. 2006. *The Goodman of Paris*. Suffolk, England. The Boydell Press.

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
			Sauce for Eggs Poached in Oil
De Honesta Voluptate et Valetudine ¹⁴	Bartolomeo Sacchi	Italy, 15 th century	Pepper Sauce for Wild Meat
			Lard Sauce
			Consommé Saffron Sauce
			White Sauce
			Green Sauce
			White Sauce
			Camelline Sauce
			Bright Colored Sauce
			Relish from dried Plums
			Green Relish
			Persian Relish
			Broom-colored Relish
			Relish from Grapes
			Relish from Mulberries
			Relish with Sweet and Sour Cherries
			Mustard
			Red Mustard Sauce
			Mustard Sauce in Bits
			Heavenly Relish in Summer
			Saffron-Seasoned Sauce for Fish
			Garlic Sauce with Walnuts or Almonds
			Rather Highly Colored Garlic Sauce
			Green Verjuice
Vine Tendril Relish			
Verjuice with Fennel			
Rose Bud Flavoring			
Relish from Cornel Cherries			
Libellus de arte coquinaria ¹⁵	Unknown	Denmark, Iceland & Germany, 13 th century.	A Sauce for Lords
			Another Sauce (Honey Mustard)
			Another Sauce (Honey Mustard with Anise)
			Fish in a Sauce Proper to It
			A Sauce of Minimal Cost

¹⁴ Milham, Mary Ella, ed. trans.. 1999. *Platina's On Right Pleasure and Good Health*. Asheville, North Carolina. Pegasus Press.

¹⁵ Grewe, Rudolf & Constance B. Heat ed. trans. 2001. *Libellus de arte coquinaria: An Early Northern Cookery Book*. Tempe, Arizona. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies.

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
			A Sauce Good for Small Fish
			A Sauce Good for Three Days and No More (Green Sauce)
			A Sauce for Fresh Meat
			(Another Green Sauce)
			Onion Sauce
Daz büch von güter spise ¹⁶	Unknown	Germany, 14 th century	A dish (Garlic Sauce)
			Agraz (Sour Sauce)
			Another Condiment (Shallot Sauce)
			A Sauce (Grape & Sage Sauce)
			Agraz (Crab apple & Beet Sauce)
			A Little Sauce (Yellow Sauce)
			A Good Sauce (Wine & Honey Sauce)
Samuel Pepys' manuscript ¹⁷	Unknown	England, 15 th century	Capons in Sauce
			Salmon roasted in Sauce
			Galantine
			Sauce for a Pike
			Sauce for roasted Mallard
A Proper Newe Booke of Cokerye ¹⁸	Unknown	England, 16 th century	A Pyke Sauce
Harleian MS. 4016 ¹⁹	Unknown	England, 15 th century	Sauce Gamelyne
			Sauce Sermstele
			Sauce Oylepeuer
			Sauce Verte
			Sauce Gynger
			Sauce Sorell
			Sauce Galentyne
Ashmole MS. 1439. Sauces ²⁰	Unknown	England, 15 th century	Sauces pur Diuerse Viaundes
			Sauce Alepeuere
			Sauce Galentyne
			Sauce Ginyuer
			Sauce for a Gos

¹⁶ Adamson, Melitta Weiss. 2004. *Daz büch von güter spise (The Book of Good Food)*. Österreich, German. Medium Aevum Quotidianum

¹⁷ Hodgett, G.A.J., trans. 1972. *Stere htt Well*. Adelaide, Australia. Mary Martin Books.

¹⁸ Ahmed, Anne. 2002. *A Proper Newe Booke of Cokerye*. Cambridge, England. Corpus Christi College.

¹⁹ Austin, Thomas, ed. 1996. *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*. Suffolk, England. Oxford University Press.

²⁰ Ibid.

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
			Sauce Camelyne
			Sauce Rous
			Sauce for Stokefysse
			Sauce for Stokfysse in an-other maner
			Sauce for peiouns
			Sauce for Shulder of Moton
			Sauce Vert
			Surelle
			Sauce Percely
			Sauce Gauncile
			Piper for Feel and for Venysoun
			White Sauce
			Black Sauce
			Sauce Newe for Malardis
Diuersa Cibaria ²¹	Unknown	England, 14 th century	Blanc Desire (White Sauce)
			Vert Desire (Green Sauce)
			Suade (Elderflower Sauce)
			Galantine
Forme of Cury ²²	Unknown	England, 14 th century	Sobre Sawse
			Sawse Blaunche (White Sauce)
			Sawse Noyre for Capouns (Black Sauce)
			Galyntyne
			Gyngeuer
			Verde Sawse
			Sawse Noyre for Malard (Black Sauce)
			Sawse Camelyne
			Lumbard Mustard
Libre de Sent Sovi ²³	Unknown	Catalan (Spain), 15 th century	White Sauce
			Lemon Sauce
			White Garlic Sauce
			Fresh Onion Salsa
			Mustard
			Parsley Sauce

²¹ Hieatt, Constance B. & Sharon Butler, ed. 1985. *Curye on Inglysch*. Oxford, England. University of Oxford Press.

²² Ibid.

²³ McDonald, W. Thomas & Cynara McDonald. 2004. *Recipes from Banquet dels Quatre Barres*. Richmond, Virginia. Thomas McDonald.

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
			Esquabey Sauce
Libro de Cozina ²⁴	Master Ruperto de Nola	Catalan (Spain), 16 th century	White Sauce
			Sauce with Apples
			Lemon Sauce
			Vinagre
			Sauce for Graylag Goose
			Light Sauce for Wild Poultry
			A Dish Called White Sauce
			Light Sauce for Roast Doves
			Another Light Sauce for Roast Doves
			Light Sauce for Roast Poultry
			Lights Sauce for Partridges or Roast Chickens
			Light Sauce of Bitter Pomegranate Juice
			Almond Sauce for Invalida
			Another Almond Sauce for Invalids (Weak)
			Another Almond Sauce for Invalids (Fever)
			White Light Sauce
			Sauce Gironfina
			Sauce Camelline
			White Sauce Camelline
			Smooth Sauce for Poultry
			Granada Sauce
			Dark Sauce
			Rosemary Sauce
			Agalura Sauce
			Garlic Sauce
			Mustard
			French Mustard
			Another French Mustard
			Sauce of Horseradish and of Clary Sage
			Good Sauce Galantine
Pepper Sauce			
Bastard Camelline			
Parsley Sauce			
Sauce Called Cinnamon Must			

²⁴ Cuenca, Vincent F., trans. 2001. *Libro de Cozina*. St. Louis, Missouri. Vincent Cuenca

Source	Author	Place & Time	Sauces ⁹
			Emperor's Sauce

Table 3 lists various meats & fish with the desired cooking method as well as the appropriate sauce to accompany the dish.²⁵

Table 3 - Sauces for Meats & Fish

Main Ingredient	Cooking Method	Serving Sauce(s)
Pork	Roasted	Verjuice Onions, wine & verjuice
Pork	Baked in pie	Verjuice
Veal	Roasted	Spice Powder Cameline Sauce
Veal	Baked in pie	Verjuice
Mutton	Roasted	Fine salt Cameline Sauce Verjuice
Goat, kid or lamb	Roasted	Cameline Sauce Green Verjuice
Goose	Roasted	White Sauce Green Garlic Sauce Black Pepper Sauce Yellow Pepper Sauce
Mallard	Roasted	Drippings, lard, wine, verjuice & parsley
Chicken	Roasted	Cameline Sauce, Green Verjuice Grape Mash Cold Sage Sauce
Chicken	Baked in pie	Sharp verjuice
Capons	Roasted	Must Sauce Poitevine Jance Sauce
Capons	Boiled	Wine Verjuice
Rabbits & hares	Roasted	Cameline Sauce Saupiquet
Rabbit & hares	Baked in pie	Cameline Sauce Verjuice
Partridge, pheasant, pigeons, doves, peacock & small birds	Roasted	Fine salt
Swan	Roasted	Yellow Pepper Sauce
Venison	Boiled	Cameline Sauce
Venison	Roasted	Cameline Sauce

²⁵ This table is compiled from information found in various chapters D. Eleanor & Terence Scully's *Early French Cookery*.

Main Ingredient	Cooking Method	Serving Sauce(s)
Fresh boar	Boiled	Cameline Sauce Sharp Pepper Sauce
Salt boar	Boiled	Mustard Sauce
Anchovies	Roasted	Mustard Sauce Wine Sauce
Barbel	Boiled	Sharp Pepper Sauce
Barbel	Roasted	Verjuice
Barbel	Fried	Jance
Bass	Boiled	Green Sauce
Cockles	Fried	White Garlic Sauce
Crayfish	Boiled	Vinegar
Eels	Boiled	Green Garlic Sauce
Eels	Baked in pie	White Garlic Sauce
Gurnard	Fried	Cameline Sauce
Gurnard	Roasted	Verjuice
Herrings	Fried	Garlice Sauce
Loach	Boiled	Mustard Sauce
Lobster	Boiled	Vinegar
Fresh mackerel	Roasted	Cameline Sauce Vinegar & spice powder
Salted mackerel	Boiled	Wine & shallots Mustard Sauce
Mussels	Boiled	Vinegar Sharp Verjuice Green Garlic Sauce
Oysters	Boiled & Fried	Garlic Sauce
Pickrel or Pollack	Fried	Green Sorrel Verjuice with white almond sops
Rayfish	Fried	Cameline Garlic Sauce made with ray liver
Salmon	Roasted	Cameline Sauce
Sole	Fried	Sorrel Verjuice with Orange Juice
Turbot	Fried	Green Sauce

The Medieval “Mother” Sauces

Unlike the modern mother sauces that are used as a basis for a vast variety of sauces, these medieval “mother” sauces appear in almost all the cuisines I’ve studied. These sauces can be found in almost all the cuisines of the Middle Ages. They are Cameline Sauce, Green Sauce, White Sauce, Yellow Pepper Sauce, Black Pepper Sauce and Mustard Sauce.²⁶

²⁶ It is my personal conclusion to identify these sauces as a set of medieval “mother” sauces.

Thickening Agents

Not all medieval sauces were thickened, some sauces described were simply a dressing of verjuice. Many of the sauces, however, were thickened. For some sauces the main flavor ingredient itself could be the thickening agents, as in the case of mustard. Some sauces used reduction as a means to thicken it. Other sauces used an ingredient whose sole purpose was to thicken the sauce. In the modern mother sauces mentioned previously, a common thickening agent was roux.²⁷ However, currently there is no evidence of roux being used prior to the 17th century. The predominant thickening agents used in medieval sauces are: breadcrumbs, eggs, milk, almonds and almond milk. There is evidence that eggs were tempered prior to being introduced to a boiled sauce.²⁸

The Recipes

Cameline Sauce

Source: *Le Viander de Taillevent*²⁹

Prenez gingembre, canelle et grant foison, girofle, grainne de paradiz, mastic, poivre long qui veult; puis coullez pain trempé en vin aigre, et passez, et saluez bien a point.

Take ginger, plenty of cassia, cloves, grains of paradise, mastic thyme and long pepper (if you wish). Sieve bread soaked in vinegar, strain [through cheesecloth], and salt to taste.³⁰

1 cup breadcrumbs	8 tsp ground cinnamon
4 cups red wine vinegar	8 tsp ground thyme
8 tsp ground ginger	4 tsp ground pepper

Soak bread crumbs in vinegar, add remaining ingredients. Adjust vinegar or add water until desired consistency is reached.

Mustard Sauce

Source: *Le Ménagier de Paris*³¹

...Item, et se vous la voulez faire bonne et à loisir, mettez le senevé tremper par une nuit en bon vinaigre, puis la faictes bien broyer au moulin, et bien petit à petit destremper de vinaigre. Et se vous aves des espices qui soient de remenant de gelée, de claré, d'ypocras ou de saulces, si soient broyées avec et après la laissier parer.

Item, if you would make good mustard and at leisure, set the mustard seed to soak for a night in good vinegar, then grind it in a mill and then moisten it little by little with vinegar; and if you have any spices left over from jelly, clarry, hippocras or sauces, let them be ground with it and afterwards prepare it.³²

Hippocras: Take four ounces of very fine cinnamon, two ounces of fine cassia flowers, an ounce of selected Mecca ginger, an ounce of grains of paradise, and a sixth [of an ounce] of nutmeg and galingale combined. Crush then all together. Take a good half ounce of this powder and eight ounces of sugar [(which thus makes Sweet Powder)], and mix it with a quart of wine.

²⁷ Roux is made using equal amounts of flour and some sort of fat cooked into a paste.

²⁸ Santich, Barbara. 1996. *The Original Mediterranean Cuisine: Medieval Recipes for Today*. Chicago, Illinois. Chicago Review Press.

²⁹ A 14th century collection French recipes.

³⁰ Translation by James Prescott as noted in *Le Viandier de Taillevent*.

³¹ A 14th century collection French recipes..

³² Translation by Eileem Power as noted in *The Goodman of Paris*.

1 ½ cups mustard seeds	¼ tsp pepper
1 ¾ cups white wine vinegar	pinch nutmeg
1 tsp cinnamon	pinch galingale
½ tsp ginger	2 tsp sugar

Soak mustard seeds overnight. Place all ingredients in blender and process. Add more vinegar or water until desired consistency is reached.

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