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Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe

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Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe

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Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe

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Introduction

Introducing the Project “Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe”

Marta Krejčíčková

This project aims to make monastic food culture accessible to a broad public. Our key focus is on the culinary heritage of the Cistercians, as well as the landscapes they shaped and the products they created through their distinctive approach to land cultivation and resource management.

Why the Cistercians? Because this monastic order was not only concerned with matters of the soul: Guided by the principle of ora et labora – pray and work – and their order’s ingenious economic rules, they strove for the greatest possible self-sufficiency and left their mark not only on the landscape they cultivated, but also on the plate.

Thanks to the project, original recipes and their modern adaptations are being shared with a wide audience. One result is this cookbook, which contains examples of historical recipes interpreted for our times. In addition, the Historical Recipe Database of Salzburg University contains the original versions of the historical recipes, along with a selection of modern adaptations, free for everyone to use.

To bring the past to life, we developed 3D visualisations of monastery kitchens and dining halls. These models are available to schools and the general public for educational purposes through the CISTERSCAPES international network, which has been awarded the European Heritage Label.

Monastic landscape of Ebrach
Photo: Aerial image archive / Wolfgang Rössler

Our work is guided by a simple idea: encouraging creative engagement with culinary heritage while building a network of people who care about the living legacy of regional traditions, local resources, and self-sufficiency.

The following organisations contributed to the project: Landkreis Bamberg, lead partner of the European Cisterscapes network (Germany); Paris Lodron University of Salzburg, with its expertise in research and gastronomy (Austria); and the local action group MAS Rozkvet as the project lead partner, representing the active Cistercian Abbey of Vyšší Brod (Czech Republic) and its monastic landscape.

Cooperating with other Cistercian monasteries and inviting the public to taste-test the updated recipes proved vital to the project’s success. Each cooking demonstration, and the tastings that followed, attracted great interest. With the help of the database and the recipes in this book, you can set out on your own culinary journey of discovery. We wish you many delightful finds in the Cistercians’ kitchen – and bon appétit!

Introduction

Monastic landscape Kostanjevica na Krki
Foto: photo-archive Gemeinde Kostanjevica na Krki

Pray and Work – and Enjoy!

At table with the “Grey Monks”

Annette Schäfer

Across Europe, Cistercian monasteries have long been places where spiritual life and physical labour came together in harmonious balance, true to the maxim of Saint Benedict of Nursia: *ora et labora* – pray and work. The Cistercians took this simple yet all-encompassing rule of life to heart, making it the guiding principle of their order. Spirit and body were regarded as equally important, and living a balanced life was considered an obligation under the Benedictine Rule. It is therefore no surprise that Cistercian tradition has always been concerned not only with spiritual and religious needs, but also with physical well-being. Eating, in this light, is never just about food – it is a way of nourishing both body and soul.

The “Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians” project seeks to carry forward the holistic outlook of the “Grey Monks” and to share their food traditions with a wide international audience. It achieves this through research, education and digital formats that bring the subject to life in ways that are vivid and appealing to the senses.

This book documents the project’s activities of the past 36 months. But more than that, it aims to spark curiosity and encourage readers to discover (or rediscover) the monastic landscapes, products and recipes – to taste, explore, and enjoy!

“Unnatural food only serves to increase hunger.”

Bernhard von Clairvaux

Moderation and self-control were the hallmarks of monastic life, especially under the Benedictine Rule, which later was adopted by reform orders such as the Cistercians. Of course, this discipline extended to physical pleasures as well. Overindulging in food and alcohol were frowned upon, though allowances were sometimes made for beer and wine. Fasting periods were strictly observed, and for much of the year, meat was served only on special occasions. In the Middle Ages, a literal reading of the Rule of Benedict even banned meat altogether – except for the sick, who were thought to need it to regain their strength.

The diversity of Cistercian agriculture is still visible today in the typical food products we associate with them. Their vast European network was, quite literally, the cherry on the cake: from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, from the Baltic to the Alps, local landscapes and traditions all left their mark on the monastic table. Diversity within unity became a hallmark of the Cistercian order, reflected in every aspect of their cultural achievements.

For example: Did you know that although the Cistercians started out as the strictest of ascetics, a few centuries later their feasts could feature as many as seven different kinds of meat? Or that they helped establish viticulture in many places as their influence spread across Europe? The monks of Cîteaux and their successors were nothing if not ingenious: wherever they settled, they harnessed the natural resources of the land and cultivated them to their benefit. In doing so, they reshaped the landscapes surrounding their monasteries according to their ideas, bringing fertility to regions that had previously been left uncultivated. What they produced

"The garden of paradise is not entered with the feet, but with the heart."

Bernhard von Clairvaux

also found its way to their own refectory tables. The Cistercians followed principles that appear strikingly modern: regionality, seasonality, sustainability. In harmony with nature and the cycle of the year, they developed a food culture that can inspire us to look afresh at local origins and authenticity.

The Cistercian culinary heritage is as varied as the regions it originates in. What the monks ate depended on the land around them and what it produced. Wine and beer, fish and fruit, tea and herbs – each product had a local origin, but thanks to the Cistercians' vast European network, recipes and traditions travelled far and wide. For centuries, these were passed on by word of mouth within the monasteries. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that cookbooks began to give us a clearer picture – with one important exception: the *Clergy Cookbook* of Bernhard Buchinger, Cistercian kitchen master and later abbot of Maulbronn, written in 1672. We extensively tested his Baroque dishes, some of which may seem a bit exotic to modern tastes, and the best of them are included in this book.

These recipes enable us to enjoy the sensory richness that the monks once knew. They guide us through the seasons and their occasions: simple dishes for times of fasting and reflection, more sumptuous fare for feast days, and sweet desserts from the Czech and Austrian traditions.

Join us, then, on a journey through the landscapes of Central Europe, seeing them through Cistercian eyes: forests, rivers, and fields stretching from the hills of Burgundy to the plains of the Lower Rhine, from the shores of the Baltic Sea to the rugged beauty of the Slovenian Alpine foothills.

This book invites you to rediscover the cultural landscapes of Central Europe shaped by the Cistercians as places of spiritual depth, agricultural creativity, and culinary tradition. It tells the story of monasteries and their history, and of a way of life in which work, faith, and nature come together in harmony. The recipes presented here are more than cooking instructions. They embody a centuries-old culture of moderation, mindfulness and attunement to the natural cycle. This book is not simply a collection of recipes, but an invitation to explore the roots of a sustainable way of life.

Cistercian monks at work, detail from the so-called Bernardi altar, Jörg Breu the Elder (1500–1502, Zwettl Abbey Church)

Connected Across Europe

Following the centuries-old paths of the Cistercians

Annette Schäfer

Imagine stepping into a world of peace, beauty, and deep spirituality. Founded in the late eleventh century, the Cistercian order grew into one of the most influential monastic communities in Europe. Throughout the order's history, its members sought simplicity, reflection, and a close connection with the natural world.

Cistercian monasteries are famed for their striking architecture and picturesque locations. They are both centres of spiritual life and masterpieces of design. Their clear and simple style reflects the values of the order: humility and a focus on the essentials. To this day, visitors can sense the atmosphere of calm, inviting reflection and inner stillness.

When choosing a site to build a new monastery, the Cistercians always looked for seclusion, selecting rural, often remote places that provided space for prayer, work and self-sufficiency. Typically, Cistercian monasteries were built among gentle hills, in broad river valleys or tucked away in pristine landscapes. Today, these settings strike us as ideal places for walking, cycling, or simply pausing to marvel at the view. Strolling through a monastic landscape, you can still see traces of the monks' labour woven into the beauty of nature itself.

"(…) multiplicata est sicut stelle celi et excrevit in immensum cisterciensis ordinis religio sanctimonialium (…)", "as countless as the stars in the heavens, they multiplied without end within the Cistercian order."

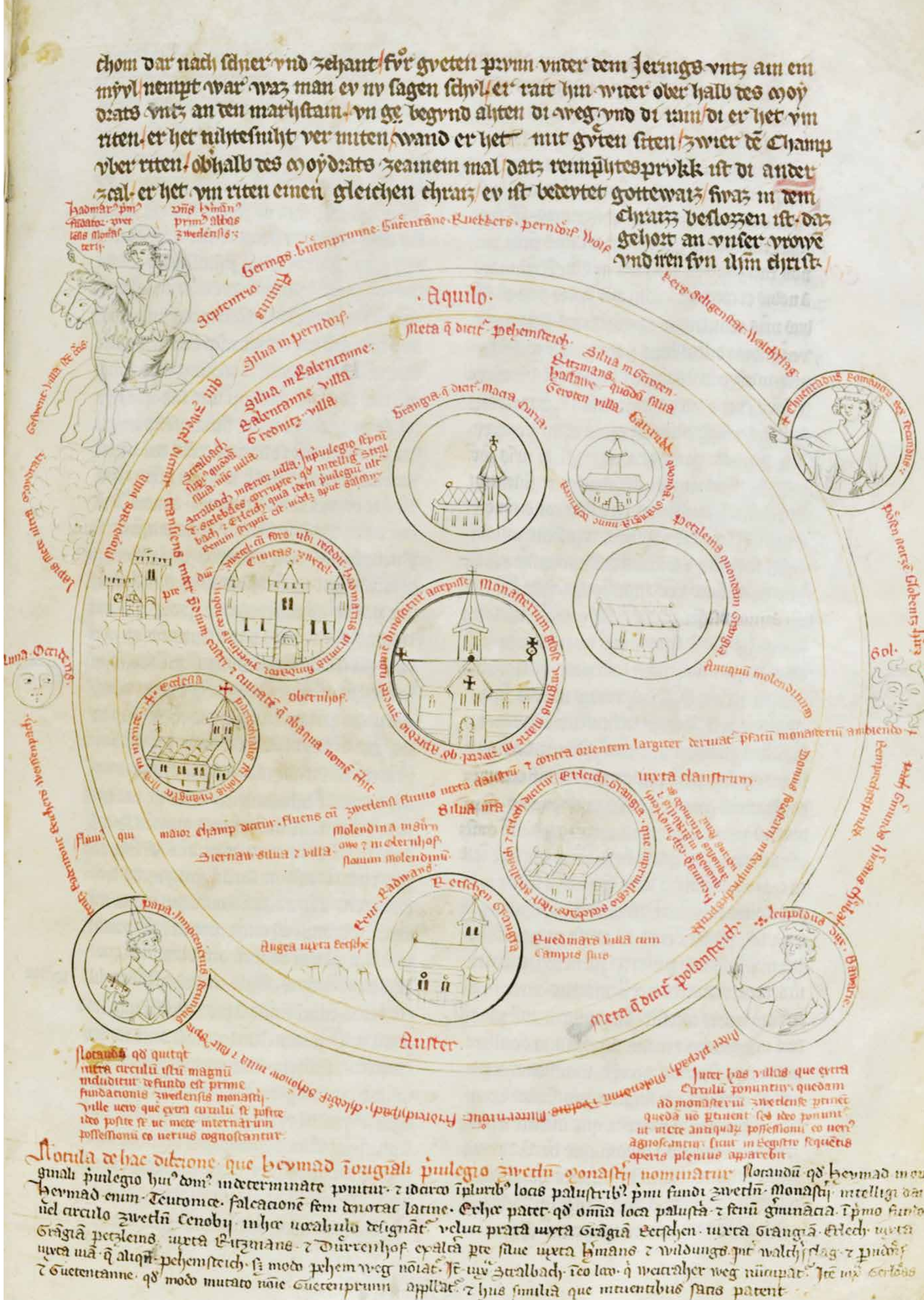
Jacques de Vitry Historia occidentalis, c. 1220, describing the spread of Cistercian convents

The Cistercians spread quickly across Europe thanks to a carefully organised system of filiation. Within only a few decades, they founded daughter houses across regions now belonging to France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, and beyond. From the small group of monks who established the mother abbey of Cîteaux around 1089, the order grew to around 340 abbeys and 11,000 members in just fifty years – an unprecedented expansion. Once a monastery was firmly established, twelve monks would set out to found a new daughter house and thus gain territory for the order. In this way, the Cistercians spread not only a spiritual lifestyle of humility and deep faith, but also a pioneering economic strategy. Agriculture and self-sufficiency were central to the Cistercian ethos, and their sustainable land use shaped the landscapes of many regions throughout Europe.

Around each monastery, the monks built a sophisticated agricultural system supported by advanced technical infrastructure.

Economic independence and self-reliance were the central tenets of the Cistercian philosophy of life. The monks became experts in water engineering, constructing canals, mills, and ponds; they established vineyards and cultivated woodlands. Traces of their efforts can be found to this day. By selling surpluses in nearby towns and by operating their own trading posts, the Cistercians generated income and strengthened their economic influence, supported by a Europe-wide network of contacts.

Many of the economic practices of the Cistercian monks were adopted by their female counterparts. Nuns, too, farmed for self-sufficiency and sold surpluses locally. Cistercian convents quickly gained popularity among noble families, who saw them as safe places for unmarried daughters, sisters, and aunts. Endowments not only secured the future of the convent but were also seen as contributions to the family's salvation. The nuns lived in strict enclosure, with only the abbesses exercising limited contact with the outside world. They relied on outside help to run estates and carry out heavy labour, and in spiritual matters remained under the authority of Cistercian priests from neighbouring monasteries. Yet history also records many remarkable abbesses, women of strength and vision who guided their convents through tumultuous times and gave stability to their communities.



The so-called *Bärenhaut* (bear skin), the founding document of Zwettl Abbey from the early 14th century. It provides the earliest surviving depiction of the typical land management system of a Cistercian monastery: various granges arranged in a circular pattern around the monastery.
Photo: Zwettl Abbey

To preserve the Cistercian monastic landscapes, the "CISTERSCAPES" project was launched, led by the district of Bamberg. Today, it links 17 monasteries in five European countries and was awarded the European Heritage Label in 2024.

The Cistercians thus wrote a long and formative chapter in Europe's history, still visible in the landscapes they shaped. To preserve and celebrate this legacy, the "CISTERSCAPES" project was launched, led by the district of Bamberg. Today, it links 17 monasteries in five European countries and was awarded the European Heritage Label in 2024. In this way, the centuries-old network continues into the present, now less spiritual in character but centred on the typical landscapes that remain as a shared cultural heritage. For anyone drawn to history, architecture, art, or spirituality, Cistercian monasteries offer a world of fascination. Let yourself be inspired by the peace and beauty of these places, and discover the deep bond between people, nature and faith that has shaped the Cistercian tradition for centuries. Whether still active or preserved as a historical site, visiting a monastery is more than a journey into the past – it is an invitation to experience a unique place and its surrounding landscape, shaped by centuries of monastic tradition.

Saint Bernard praying at harvest: "O Lord, in your mercy, grant me the strength to mow". Stained glass from the cloister of the former Cistercian nunnery of St Apern in Cologne; now set in the sacristy of Cologne Cathedral, c. 1525.
Photo: AKG Images

Where the Cistercians Cooked and Ate

Kitchens and refectories – architectural expressions of order and the monastic rule

Martina Schutová

Spaces and their functions were defining elements of Cistercian life. Buildings and rooms were not just a backdrop to their spiritual striving but instrumental in shaping it. Each room had a defined location, purpose and significance. The kitchen and refectory (dining hall) were especially important, as they structured the rhythm of daily life: places of silence, work, and reflection where bodily needs met spiritual discipline.

The kitchen – the heart and hearth of the order

Cistercian kitchens were located right next to the refectories – one for the monks, the other for the lay brothers *(conversi)*. Instead of doors, serving hatches were used to limit the spread of smells, smoke and noise. The centre of the kitchen was dominated by a large open hearth with a flue, where meals simmered in ceramic pots, cauldrons, and pans supported on tripods – all prepared in accordance with the monastic rules. Like every space in the monastery, the kitchen was governed by strict rules. There were no hired cooks or servants, as the brothers themselves took turns on a weekly rotation. They cooked, cleaned, served food and maintained the equipment. The cellarer supervised overall operations of the kitchen and storerooms, including supplies and accounts. Thus, the Cistercians' sense of order showed itself even in these mundane tasks.

Hearth at the Monastery of Odivelas in Portugal
Photo: Michael Brauer

The refectory – a place of silence, order and community

The monastic dining hall carried both practical and symbolic weight. Projecting prominently from the south wing, its size and architectural design underlined the importance of communal meals. The refectory was no place for idle chatter. The monks ate in silence while one brother, standing at a raised lectern, recited passages from sacred texts. This lector would dine later with the brothers on kitchen duty. Meals were simple – vegetables, porridge, bread, dairy products – but prepared with care and eaten with solemn respect.

Some monasteries had two refectories: a larger one for summer and a smaller, more easily heated one for winter. The refectory's significance was so great that it was counted among the five essential rooms to be included whenever a new monastery was founded or an existing one was relocated.

The abbot's kitchen served the abbot and honoured guests while the infirmary kitchen provided special meals for the sick.

Additional kitchens – for the abbot, the sick and the poor

Beyond the main kitchen for the monastic community, monasteries often maintained additional cooking spaces. The abbot's kitchen provided meals for the abbot and honoured guests. The infirmary kitchen prepared special food for the sick, who were exempt from strict fasting and allowed broth or even meat. This kitchen also served a charitable role, doling out leftovers to the poor and to pilgrims every day. At the monastery gate, they usually received beer, bread, and cabbage, with more substantial fare on feast days. Of course, food provisioning relied not only on the kitchens, but also on a wider infrastructure of storerooms and granaries.

Archaeological finds – silent witnesses of culinary culture

Physical evidence of monastic kitchens is rare, as most were altered or lost over time. A notable exception is the medieval kitchen at Velehrad Abbey, uncovered by archaeologists in 2019. Its surviving hearth with a stone flue base offers a rare glimpse into a space where the monastic rule was put into practice. At Žďár nad Sázavou, a Baroque malt kiln associated with the monastery brewery survives intact. In some monasteries, the original location of kitchens or cooking spaces can still be recognised.

Baroque hearth with tiled flue at the Monastery of Alcobaça in Portugal
Photo: Wikipedia

Verena Deisl

Products and their Landscapes

Monastic landscape of Bronnbach
Photo: Rainer Schmidt

Products and their Landscapes

What appeared on Cistercian tables was no matter of chance. Monastic meals followed a careful plan set out in the Rule of St Benedict, the order's spiritual guide.

The Pilgrimage Church of St John of Nepomuk above the former monastery of Žďár nad Sázavou.
Photo: Turistické informační centrum (TIC) Zámek Žďár

Fish Farming

Fish and Fasting Among the Cistercians

The Rule and how it was applied in reality

What appeared on Cistercian tables was no matter of chance. Monastic meals followed a meticulous plan set out in the Rule of St Benedict, the order's spiritual guidebook. Fasting seasons were particularly interesting in this regard – above all in the question of how fish came to be regarded as appropriate fasting fare.

Chapters 35–41 of the *Regula Benedicti* laid out the precise rules of when, how often, and under what conditions the monks were permitted to eat. In summer, with its long days and demanding fieldwork, they either ate twice – at midday and in the evening – or only once on Wednesdays and Fridays, the traditional fast days. In winter, a single daily meal was customary, and during Lent it was taken after dusk, but before total darkness, as artificial light was not permitted at the table.

The Rule aimed to cultivate moderation and spiritual focus. Fasting times were an opportunity for the monks to go beyond their usual discipline: pray more, sleep less, speak less – and, of course, eat less. It was a time of inner purification and preparation for Easter and other feast days. And yet, abstinence was not absolute: while meat from "four-legged animals" (beef, pork, lamb) was forbidden, fish did not count as meat in the strict sense.

A Cistercian monk frying fish in the monastery kitchen. Painting on the tiled stove in the summer refectory of Salem Monastery, Rudolf Kuhn, 1733.
State Palaces and Gardens of Baden-Württemberg, Salem Palace; Photographer: Hermann Böhne

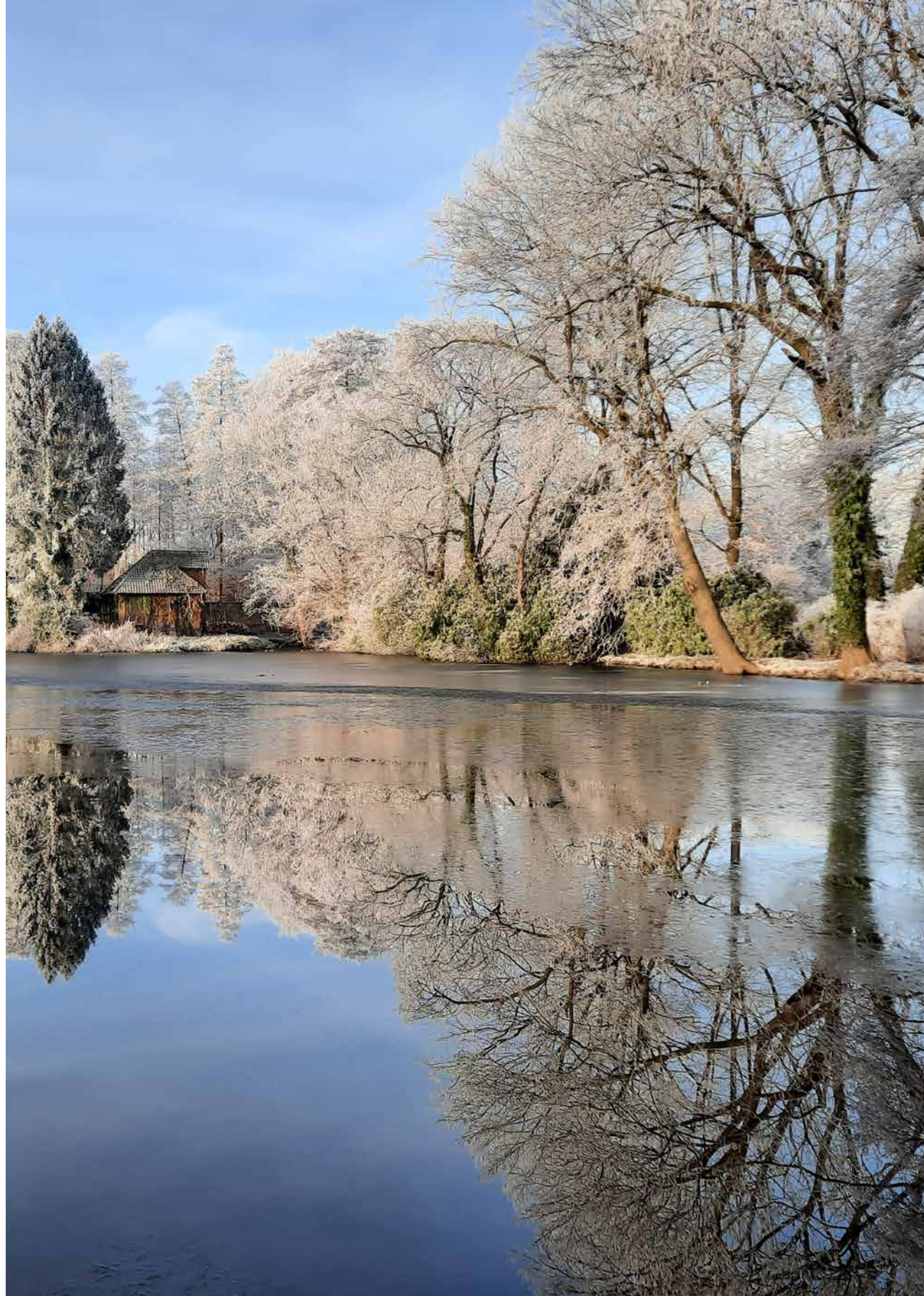
(right) Illustration of Cistercian pond management from the Model Book of Rein, early 13th century.
Photo: Stift Rein

Products and their Landscapes

In summer, with its long days and demanding fieldwork, the monks either ate twice – at midday and in the evening – or only once on Wednesdays and Fridays, the traditional fast days.

The *Fischhof* (fish farm) pond of Waldsassen Abbey.
Photo: Stadt Waldsassen

In winter, a single daily meal was customary, and during Lent it was taken after dusk.



The *Brauteich* (brewery pond) of Loccum Abbey.
Photo: Birgit Birth

This is where monastic creativity came into play: fish were simply reclassified as "river vegetables," a term that set them linguistically apart from the animal world. Even beaver – sometimes only its tail – occasionally appeared on the table, classed as a "water animal" thanks to its scaly tail and aquatic habitat. Such reinterpretations reveal that, strict as the Rule may have been, its application could be quite pragmatic.

Fish was not only permitted, but indeed a pivotal part of monastic life. Early on, the Cistercians established their own fishponds to secure supplies for themselves and to meet the demands of the general population during fasting seasons. Monasteries such as Maulbronn developed full-fledged fish economies. The carp, pike, and eel they raised either ended up on the market or the monks' own table.

Thus, fish brought not only variety to the menu but also income to the monastery coffers. Monastic discipline did not translate to culinary monotony, but was tempered by creativity, pragmatism, and judicious interpretation of the Rule. One principle, however, always held firm: any additional personal sacrifice, such as depriving oneself of even more food, sleep, or other comforts, required the abbot's consent. Even in matters of personal asceticism, order reigned supreme.

In this way, the monastic diet reflected Cistercian spirituality: moderate and austere, yet never rigid beyond reason. Fish became an emblem of this attitude, poised between abstention and practical wisdom.

Monastery Ponds Through the Ages

The Cistercians and their enduring fish-farming tradition

Meat was scarce in medieval monastic life – at least the kind from four-legged animals. The Rule of St Benedict prescribed strict abstinence, especially in times of fasting. Fish, however, was permitted and became an indispensable staple of the monastic diet. To meet this demand, the Cistercians developed ingenious systems of aquaculture that reshaped entire landscapes. Maulbronn and Waldsassen are two striking examples of this practice.

The *Aalkistensee* is the largest surviving pond in the monastic landscape of Maulbronn
Photo: Naturpark Stromberg-Heuchelberg/Dietmar Denger

Maulbronn – medieval water management with a plan

Cloister garden and well house at Maulbronn Monastery
Photo: Günther Bayerl

In the hilly borderland between the Kraichgau and Stromberg regions of south-west Germany, the monks of Maulbronn Abbey (founded in 1147) built an intricate network of waterways and ponds, of springs, streams, channels, and reservoirs, that has left its mark on the landscape to the present day. Their goals were threefold: to regulate the flow of water, to prevent flooding, and to breed fish.

At the heart of the system were two bodies of water: the *Aalkistensee*, the region's largest pond at around 13 hectares, and the *Tiefe See*, which dammed the stream just before it reached the monastery. Other ponds, such as the *Rossweiher* and *Hohenackersee*, were also used for fish farming. Though much of the medieval system has disappeared, the names survive as nature monuments, hiking destinations, and quiet witnesses to Cistercian ingenuity.

The ponds were fed by springs and rainwater, interlinked through a channel system. Seasonal springs known as *Hungerbrunnen* helped regulate water levels. These ponds provided perfect conditions for carp, eel, and tench, species that were considered nourishing, easy to preserve – and unobjectionable from a theological point of view.

Not all the fish bred in these ponds ended up on the abbey's refectory tables. Surpluses were sold or sent to neighbouring monasteries during fasting times. Fish thus became both a staple food and a marketable commodity, as well as an impressive example of how the Cistercians used the gifts of nature without compromising their faith.

The monks sold their fish at markets, pioneering a practice that foreshadowed modern sustainable farming.

The so-called *Teichpfanne* (pond pan) in Tirschenreuth
Photo: Stadt Waldsassen

Waldsassen – a region shaped by pond management

At Waldsassen, founded in 1133, fish farming played a central role, especially in the *Stiftland*, the Bavarian part of the monastic landscape. Here, the monks found ideal conditions for their endeavour: water-rich hollows, rolling hills, and an abundance of springs. They created a sophisticated network of fishponds, parts of which remain in use today.

Pond management at Waldsassen was closely linked to the abbey's granges, outlying farmsteads often worked by lay brothers. They tended the ponds, maintained the dams, and netted the fish at regular intervals. Demand rose sharply during Lent, both within the monastery and among the local population. The monks sold their fish at markets, pioneering a practice that foreshadowed modern sustainable farming.

The nutrient-rich waters were mostly populated by carp and pike. The pond management system was so successful that it became a cornerstone of the abbey's economy – and a defining feature of the cultural landscape to the present day.

A lasting legacy

What may look like idyllic nature to the modern eye is often the result of centuries-old design. Cistercian fishponds were feats of engineering with a spiritual purpose, providing sustenance while embodying the monastic ideal.

At the Czech monastery of Žďár nad Sázavou, Baroque fish-holding tanks survive to this day. These elegantly crafted basins, adorned with angels, once were used to store live fish for the table and for sale at market. Fed by the convent pond, these Fischkalter are no longer in use, but they bear witness to a long history of monastic aquaculture.

Self-sufficiency through manual labour was a hallmark of Cistercian life, and fish farming was an integral element of this philosophy. Ponds were laid out with great care, sometimes even before the monastery itself was built. This practice shows the key role water played both in site selection and in the routines of daily life.

That so many ponds survive to this day is no accident. Maintained, adapted, and valued over generations, many are now protected habitats, bearing witness to a time when fish were not only food, but an emblem of the monastic art of living.

(top) Exterior view of the Basilica of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and St Nicholas (former monastery church)
Photo: Turistické informační centrum (TIC) Zámek Žďár

(bottom) Vápenice Pond amid the Žďár forests in the monastic landscape of Žďár nad Sázavou
Photo: Turistické informační centrum (TIC) Zámek Žďár

Fish Sale at Zwettl Abbey

Tradition meets a modern pond-to-plate philosophy

Fish farming has a long pedigree in Central European monasteries, including at Zwettl Abbey in Lower Austria, where it is practised to this day. Once a means of ensuring self-sufficiency in times of fasting, it now combines centuries of know-how with contemporary quality standards.

An entry in the abbey's foundation book (the *Bärenhaut*, or bear skin) suggests that carp-pond farming in the Waldviertel region goes back almost 900 years. The region's traditional carp pond culture has been recognised as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, placing Zwettl within a living cultural heritage that blends regional excellence with global significance.

In the ponds around the abbey, carp and trout are bred sustainably on a pond-to-plate basis with a clear regional focus. Raised slowly in near-natural waters without intensive farming methods and with careful regard for the environment and animal welfare, these table fish are of the highest quality and fully traceable.

Across roughly 90 hectares of ponds, carp and trout are reared in 15 ponds, with secondary species including pike, zander, and tench.
Photo: Stift Zwettl

Rudmannser Pond
Photo: Stift Zwettl

An annual highlight is the autumn pond-side fish sale, where customers can buy fresh carp and trout (whole or filleted) alongside smoked fish and specialities such as the ever-popular smoked carp pâté.

Thus, Zwettl Abbey keeps an ancient monastic tradition alive while offering a model of regional food production that puts quality before quantity.

It started with a squabble

The Ratschenhof is first mentioned in the context of a dispute dated between 1141 and 1144. Pilgrim of Zwettl, a brother of the monastery's founder, Hadmar I of Kuenring, urged Abbot Hermann I of Zwettl Abbey to grant him lifetime rights to farm the abbey's lands, including the Ratschenhof. In his Latin letter, Pilgrim boasted that he would manage the orchards, beehives, and ponds (vivariis) "immeasurably better." His use of the term vivarium, the etymological root of German Weiher, indicates that the fishponds encircling the Ratschenhof like a necklace already existed by the mid-12th century.

Products and their Landscapes

For the Cistercians, brewing was all about self-reliance. Wheat and barley were grown in the abbey's own fields while hops were cultivated in special hop gardens. Some Cistercian houses, especially the wealthy ones in Bohemia and Moravia, ran professionally organised breweries.

Beer Brewing

Photo: AdobeStock

Cistercians and their Beer

God bless our hops and malt!

For the Cistercians, brewing was not some idle pastime, but serious business. From the Middle Ages onwards, producing beer was an integral part of monastic daily life and a vital economic asset.

What began as a way of keeping their own barrels filled soon grew into a significant branch of production with a real impact on society at large. For the Cistercians, brewing was all about self-reliance. Wheat and barley were grown in the abbey's own fields while hops were cultivated in special hop gardens. Some Cistercian houses, especially the wealthy ones in Bohemia and Moravia, ran professionally organised breweries. Here, brewers, clerks, inspectors, and stewards worked together to ensure high quality and yield. Batches were meticulously documented, taste-tested, and distributed in a remarkably advanced management system.

During times of fasting, when solid food was restricted, the monks gladly turned to beer as nourishing "liquid bread." In taste and texture, medieval beer differed markedly from today's brews: it was unfiltered, thick, and had to be stirred before drinking to lift the sediment. It was not only a drink, but also a base for soups, sauces, and porridges: an indispensable staple of everyday life. By adding herbs and spices such as juniper, fennel, or sage, each monastic brewer crafted his own signature variety.

Photo: AdobeStock

What's the connection between Trappist beers and the Cistercians?

The Trappists are a reform branch of the Cistercian order that arose in 17th-century France. Like the Cistercians, they live by the Benedictine Rule of ora et labora, or pray and work. Trappist beer is still brewed in monasteries under the supervision of monks, especially in Belgium and the Netherlands. The proceeds support both the monastic communities and various charitable causes. In this way, beer remains a living part of monastic culture, and Trappist brews carry the Cistercian heritage into the present day.

The brewing process itself showed remarkable technical skill. From malting and kilning through grinding, lautering, boiling the wort, and cooling it, each stage was carefully managed. Woven willow screens were used to separate the malt from the draff. Malt was produced by letting grain, usually barley, germinate briefly and then drying it with hot air. It is essential to the brewing process, as it provides the necessary enzymes for modifying the grain's starches into the various kinds of sugars that later turn into alcohol. When the liquid wort is separated from the solid malt during lautering, an insoluble malt residue called draff remains. Although its role in the brewing process is over, draff is far from worthless: it is used as a nutrient-rich animal feed and even to make food for human consumption, such as bread.

After undergoing fermentation in large vats, the finished beer was tapped into barrels, often in special cellars or brewhouses. Some of these buildings have been preserved as historical monuments, but several monastic breweries have operational through the ages while others have been restored after centuries in an effort to revive the Cistercian tradition.

Aldersbach Abbey

Monastic beer with a storied history

Aldersbach Abbey in Lower Bavaria is home to one of the oldest operational breweries – a living testament to the Cistercian brewing tradition.

Founded around 1146 by monks from Ebrach Abbey, Aldersbach went on to play a leading role in monastic, economic, social, and cultural life for centuries. The first evidence of a brewing operation on the site dates to 1268, giving Aldersbach more than 750 years of brewing history. This long tradition was honoured in 2018 with a big anniversary celebration.

For centuries, the abbey brewery produced beer for sale as well as for its own needs. Its position on trade routes and the fertile lands surrounding it encouraged a flourishing brewing economy. Early on, the monks did not only produce simple wheat and barley beers, but also top-fermented styles with a range of flavour profiles, each adapted to local resources, the seasons, and consumer demand. Records of strong sales show that Aldersbach beer was enjoyed far beyond the monastery walls.

The operation was carefully regulated. Only qualified brewers who passed an examination and proved their competence were allowed to work at Aldersbach. Every batch was checked, documented, and approved in a remarkably advanced system of quality assurance. Economic records reveal details on prices, ingredients, and distribution networks, giving us a clear picture of how monastic beer evolved from a staple food into a regional commodity.

Products and their Landscapes

Historical group photo in front of enormous beer barrels
Photo: Brauerei Aldersbach

The brewing tradition survived the secularisation of the abbey in 1803, when the operation was privatised and continued as the *Aldersbacher* Brauerei. The brewery is still located on the historic monastery site, explicitly embracing this pedigree in its architecture, its history, and a beer line that references the abbey's past. Aldersbach is thus both a historic place and a living part of Bavarian beer culture rooted deeply in Cistercian heritage.

Beer and Power

The brewing tradition of Vyšší Brod Abbey

The Cistercian Abbey of Vyšší Brod (Hohenfurth) in southern Bohemia was not only a centre of religious life but, for centuries, a major brewing hub. The monastery brewery is first mentioned in 1380. At first the monks brewed beer for their own needs in simple fashion, often using open pans or kettles, but this household craft gradually evolved into a well-organised economic enterprise.

Remarkably, we even know the names of some 15th-century brewers: Mikuláš, Jakub, and Friedrich. In 1524, Abbot Christophor Knoll, together with town lord Johann of Rosenberg, granted a momentous privilege to the market town of Vyšší Brod, stipulating that only the monastery held the right to sell beer within half a mile. This was a classic example of the *Meilenrecht*, the "mile right", which prevented competing breweries from setting up shop nearby.

Such arrangements were quite common. Across South Bohemia, monasteries and secular lords alike sought to secure lucrative brewing rights. Beer was nourishing, durable, and relatively cheap to produce – and demand was high. In the 16th century, two *Heller* (about one-seventh of a *Groschen*) bought you either a pint of beer or a loaf of bread. At Vyšší Brod, the monks mainly brewed dark barley beer for everyday consumption while the lighter wheat beer – the so-called "white beer" – was usually reserved for the abbot or honoured guests.

Abbey and market town of Vyšší Brod
Photo: Kloster Vyšší Brod

Beer was a major economic factor for the abbey. In 1712, the brewery produced 489 barrels, more than any other brewery in the region. Vyšší Brod's privilege, however, was repeatedly challenged, sometimes by the princes of Eggenberg, sometimes by local citizen-owned breweries. In 1669, the dispute escalated dramatically when the prince of Eggenberg ordered the destruction of the abbey's brewery at nearby Skláře, dealing a heavy blow to monastic operations. Yet despite such setbacks, the abbey long remained the largest brewery in the Český Krumlov district.

Vyšší Brod thus exemplifies the interplay between monastic brewing rights, secular power politics, and economic calculation. The quarrels over brewing rights and revenues show that beer in early modern Bohemia was not merely a beverage, but a source of power, profit, and prestige.

Vorkloster: A Taste of History

For those who want to experience monastic brewing tradition in the present day, few places compare to Předklášteří (Vorkloster) in South Moravia. In the historic buildings of Porta Coeli, a Cistercian nunnery, the old brewery has been carefully restored, preserving impressive technology, evocative architecture, and a keen sense of atmosphere. Here, the *genius loci* meets the crisp taste of freshly tapped beer, creating an experience that appeals to connoisseurs and casual drinkers alike.

Located about 20 kilometres northwest of Brno, Vorkloster offers both classic Cistercian styles and inventive variations such as ruby and amber lagers. Its signature brew is the Kloster-Zwickl: unfiltered, naturally cloudy, and full of spicy character. The taproom, lovingly designed and charming in its simplicity, feels like a small miracle of secular culture. And for those who prefer the outdoors, the idyllic beer garden offers peace and conviviality framed by centuries-old walls.

Vorkloster is a living continuation of Cistercian brewing – not a museum, but a place where history lives on in every sip.

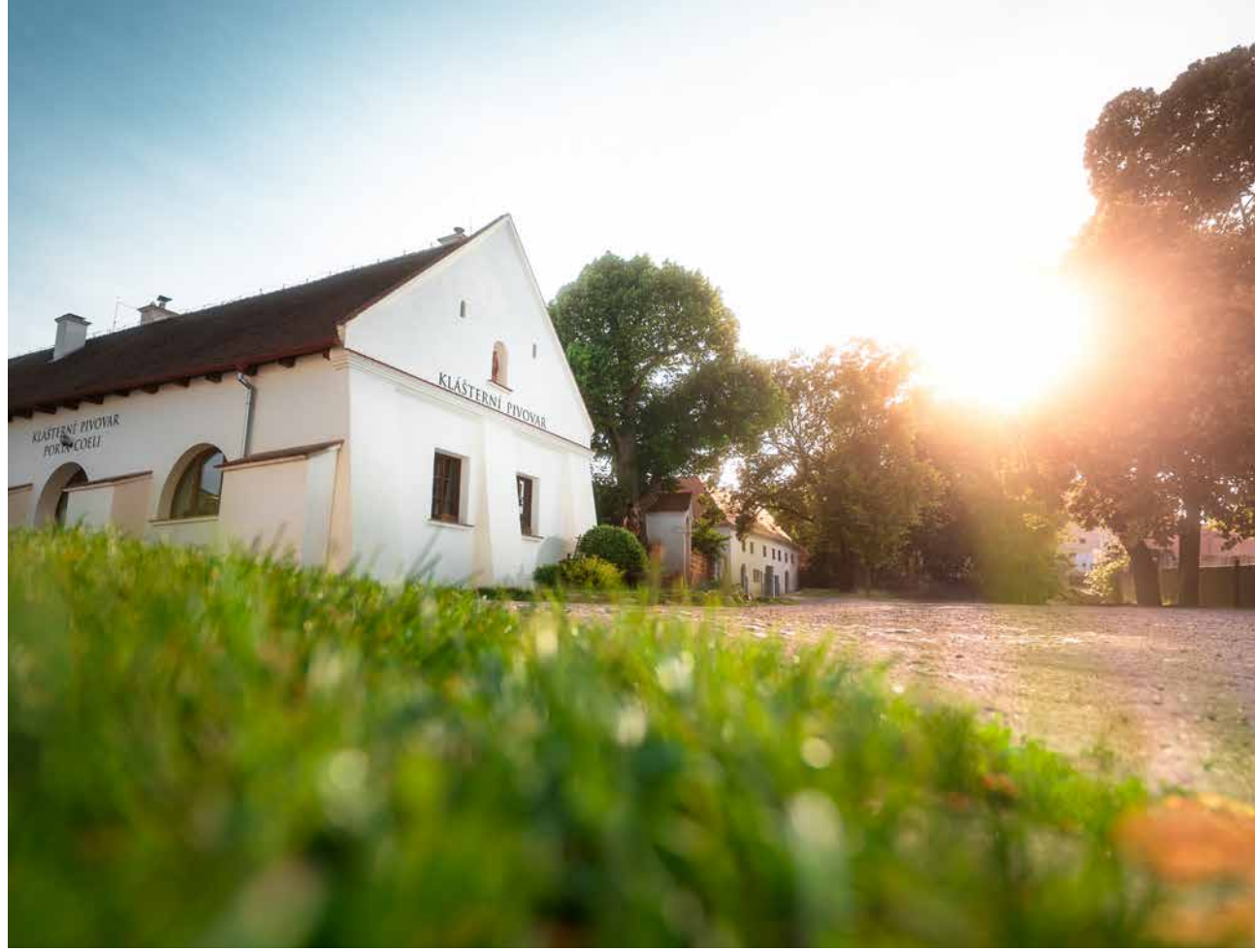


Photo: Klášterní pivovar Porta Coeli

Products and their Landscapes

„Qui bon vin boit, Dieu voit“
(Drink good wine, glimpse the divine)

Viticulture

Castle Sternfels
Photo: Naturpark Stromberg-Heuchelberg, Dietmar Denger

Wine – A Divine Drink with a Down-to-Earth History

Raising a glass of Chablis, Pommard, or Pinot Noir from the Steinberg vineyard at Eberbach Abbey, one may not realise that many of Europe's most celebrated wines trace their origins not to secular estates, but to monasteries. In the Middle Ages, the foundations of professional viticulture were laid not by princes or merchants, but by monks, above all the Cistercians, whose influence on Europe's wine culture is still visible – and tastable.

From the late 11th to the 13th century, hundreds of Cistercian monasteries spread across European from their mother house at Cîteaux (founded in 1098) in Burgundy. Wherever the geological and climatic conditions were favourable, the monks cultivated grapes and made wine – planting vines systematically, recording yields, studying soils and weather patterns, and developing principles that still shape viticulture today.

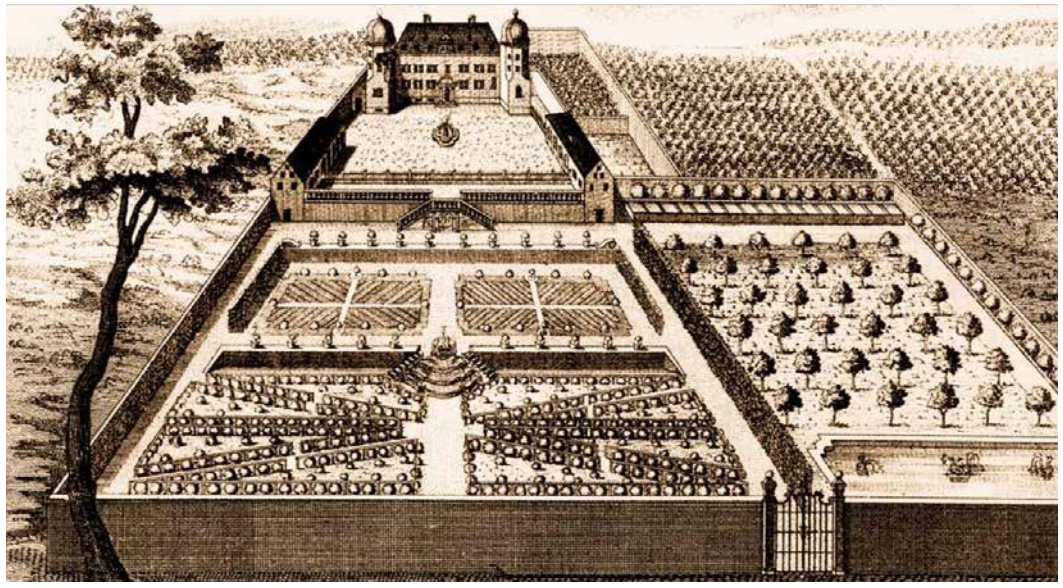
One of their greatest contributions was the idea of cru or terroir: the insight that a wine's character depends not only on the grape variety, but also on where it is grown, on the interplay of soil, slope, sun, climate, and microclimate. The notion that each vineyard has its own unique "expression" was revolutionary. The Cistercians tested locations, compared vintages, and meticulously recorded what thrived where, laying the groundwork of modern vineyard classification.

Eberbach Abbey
Photo: www.rheingau.com, Filmagentur Rheingau

A prime example is Clos de Vougeot in Burgundy, a walled vineyard that served as a living laboratory. Here the monks studied soils, refined planting patterns, and developed a keen sensitivity to the nuances of even the smallest parcels of land. Their observation and experience provided the framework for the Burgundian classification system that still defines quality wine today.

The Cistercians' impact stretched far beyond Burgundy. In the Rheingau, they founded Eberbach Abbey in 1136 and established the Steinberg vineyard, planting varieties such as Pinot Noir (then called *Noirien*) and Pinot Gris (*Fromenteau*). Their methods of soil management and vine training spread throughout Central Europe.

They are also credited as pioneers of terraced viticulture. In the 12th century, they created the Dézaley vineyard, today the oldest parcel within the UNESCO World Heritage site of Lavaux on Lake Geneva. And they helped usher in the rise of quality wine. One example is the Silvaner grape, now inseparable from Franconian viticulture. Its exact origins remain unclear, but there were several parties who spread and promoted it.



Ebrach Abbey's Amtshof at Mainstockheim, 1738: idealised view from the east with ornamental and orchard gardens, as well as Baroque staircases on the central axis of the main building. To the north and west lie vineyard parcels still cultivated today, along with former common pastures (now a biotope).
Image credit: copper engraving by Balthasar Gutwein after a drawing by Lucas Schmidt, in Brevis Notitia (1738), via WIEMER.

The Ebrach estate at Mainstockheim was one of the abbey's centres of viticulture. The vineyards are still cultivated today.
Photo: Reinhard Hüßner

Two main contenders claim credit for bringing the *Silvaner* to Franconia: The Cistercian Abbey of Ebrach, founded in 1127 as the first filiation of Morimond in Burgundy east of the Rhine, with its Abbot Alberich Degen (1625–1686), and the Franconian noble house of Castell. Both base their claims on historical records. The most likely scenario, however, is that Silvaner took root in several Franconian locations at the same time, especially around Würzburg.

As for the Silvaner's birthplace, there is no definitive answer. Linguistic and botanical clues point to a region somewhere between present-day Styria and Slovenia. Well into the nineteenth century, the variety was simply known as "the Austrian." It is plausible that the grape reached Franconia via the Cistercian abbeys of Rein (near Graz) or Stična (in present-day Slovenia). Rein was founded as a daughter house of Ebrach, and Stična was a daughter of Rein. This Cistercian connection suggests that the *Silvaner* travelled into Franconia along the order's monastic network.

Products and their Landscapes

The Benedictine Rule allows a personal daily ration of about 0.27 litres of wine – "with the weaker brothers in mind."

Monastic rules struck a fine balance between austerity and pleasure. The Benedictine Rule allows a personal daily ration of about 0.27 litres of wine – "with the weaker brothers in mind." This odd amount goes back to the *hemina*, a historical unit no longer in use. Monks who gave up wine altogether were promised a "special reward," while those who had to go without by necessity were told not to grumble. The ideal was moderation, not total abstinence. A full understanding of wine's history thus begins in the medieval monasteries, whose vineyards, cellars, and spiritual practices laid the foundations of European viticulture.

What is a hemina?

The *hemina* was a Roman liquid measure, about half a *sextarius*, or roughly 0.27 litres. This unit found its way into medieval monastic life, where it was commonly used for allocating rations of food and drink such as wine or oil. Though its exact volume varied somewhat by region, the *hemina* served as a practical standard in monastic regulations.

Viticulture at Salem Abbey

Precision, planning, and pioneering spirit

The Lake Constance region is one of Germany's southernmost and most dynamic wine regions – and Salem Abbey played a decisive part in shaping its success. From the 12th century onward, the Cistercian monks applied foresight, systematic methods, and striking innovation to harness the land's potential to produce quality wine.

The first vines were planted shortly after the abbey had been founded in 1134 by monks from Cîteaux in Burgundy. Over the following decades, the brothers steadily expanded their vineyards. They focused not only on scale, but above all on location, selecting south-facing slopes near the lake or sheltered hillsides shaped by glacial deposits. The region offers ideal conditions for producing quality wines: gravelly, sandy soil that stored heat and promoted ripening, as well as an exceptionally high number of sunshine hours.

With their characteristic practicality and empirical mindset, the Cistercians developed Salem's vineyards into a renowned centre of wine production. Grapes were processed immediately after harvest in the abbey's own facilities. The prelature cellar and pressing house were equipped early on with advanced installations: large wine presses, well-ventilated fermentation and storage cellars, and massive wooden casks. Some of these spaces can still be visited today, ranking among the most impressive surviving testimonies to pre-modern viticulture in Central Europe.

Cistercian monks cutting vines. Painting on the tiled stove in the summer refectory of Salem Monastery, Rudolf Kuhn, 1733.
State Palaces and Gardens of Baden-Württemberg, Salem Palace; Photographer: Hermann Böhne.

(right) Salem Monastery and Palace Complex
Photo: AdobeStock

This large wine press, the so-called *Torkel*, was used to crush the grapes. The historical press beam at Salem is nearly 11 metres long. State Palaces and Gardens of Baden-Württemberg, Salem Palace; Photographer: Hermann Böhne.

A milestone in Salem's wine history came in 1495, when Margrave Christoph I of Baden issued the first German wine ordinance, establishing clear standards for purity, origin, and quality. Salem's wines thrived under this new framework for centuries to come. Valued for its varietal purity, reliability, and good ageing potential, "Salem White Wine" was traded far beyond the region, finding its way to Austria, Bohemia, and France.

Wine was a major economical factor for the abbey. Beyond supplying the monastic community, it served as a key commodity for trade and exchange that was sold, gifted, or bartered for other goods. A significant share of the profits flowed into building projects, educational institutions, and hosting pilgrims and guests. So efficient was Salem's viticulture that its vineyards were worked intensively for centuries without any notable decline in quality.

Cistercian monks harvesting grapes. Painting on the tiled stove in the summer refectory of Salem Monastery, Rudolf Kuhn, 1733. State Palaces and Gardens of Baden-Württemberg, Salem Palace; Photographer: Hermann Böhne.

The abbey's mark on the region is still visible today. Many of the prime parcels first developed by the Cistercians are still in use, some now cultivated by the Baden Margravial Wine Estate. Though grape varieties have changed over time, many are direct successors of medieval plantings at Salem. For example, the cultivation of Riesling in the region can be traced back to Cistercian experiments, as can the introduction of varieties such as Pinot Gris ("Grey Monk") and Pinot Noir.

Salem is a striking example of how strategic planning, close observation, and long-term strategizing could result in a professional and thriving wine economy in the Middle Ages. Monastic viticulture was far more than a sideline of religious life: it was a carefully organised, technically advanced agricultural enterprise whose influence endures to this day.

Freigut Thallern

Vibrant wine culture with roots in the 12th century

Freigut Thallern in Gumpoldskirchen is one of Austria's oldest and most storied wine estates. Gifted to the Cistercians by Margrave Leopold IV in 1141, it has since been run by the monks of Heiligenkreuz Abbey – a continuity rare even in Europe.

Modelled on Burgundy's Clos de Vougeot, the estate unites rich history with a contemporary visitor experience, including guided tastings and vineyard tours, overnight stays in elegantly restored rooms, and regional specialities served in the courtyard restaurant. The wines themselves are still carefully hand-crafted with a focus on site, climate, and grape variety, true to the Cistercian philosophy of viticulture.

Day trippers, wine lovers, and history enthusiasts alike will find much to enjoy at Freigut Thallern, where monastic tradition and modern hospitality meet with effortless grace.

Foto: AdobeStock

Products and their Landscapes

From the very beginning, the Cistercians took care to preserve and pass on their horticultural knowledge. Newly founded houses were supplied with seeds, cuttings, and time-proven garden plans, allowing varieties and techniques to spread swiftly across Europe.

Fruit Cultivation

Fruitful Monasteries

Cistercian orchards and orangeries

As a reform branch of the Benedictine order, the Cistercians were renowned not only for their austere yet graceful churches and a secluded life shaped by prayer and work *(ora et labora)*, but also for their remarkable accomplishments in horticulture. Their spirit of innovation was particularly evident in fruit cultivation. Monastery gardens became centres of purposeful experimentation, hubs for distributing new varieties – and sometimes, unlikely new homes for exotic fruits.

The Cistercians designed their gardens according to time-tested patterns. Fruit, vegetables, and herbs were grown in separate plots, which were often aligned along a watercourse for easy irrigation. A description of Clairvaux Abbey from the early 13th century notes the course of the river Aube through the grounds, first passing through the orchard, then past the herb garden, and finally reaching the vegetable beds. These meticulously planned gardens were typically tended by lay brothers, as the choir monks often were tied up with liturgical duties.

From the very beginning, the Cistercians took care to preserve and pass on their horticultural knowledge. Newly founded houses were supplied with seeds, cuttings, and time-tested garden layouts, allowing varieties and techniques to spread swiftly across Europe. Fruit was enjoyed in season, but also processed for storage and used for medicinal purposes. Preserved or dried fruit such as apples, pears, or cherries were staples of the monastic kitchen.

View of the herb garden at Bronnbach Monastery
Photo: Frank Mittnacht

Alongside everyday varieties, the monks also cultivated ornamental fruit such as flowering quince and bitter oranges, which were valued for their lovely blossoms or unusual fruit but usually inedible. Such extravagant plants were usually reserved for representational spaces, such as the abbots' gardens or along prominent walkways.

As practical cultivators and careful custodians of knowledge, the Cistercians left a lasting mark on the horticultural landscape of Central Europe. Their orchards, their clear separation of useful and ornamental plantings, and the exotic splendour of their orangeries were elements of a meaningful, carefully designed whole. Many historic monastery gardens are reviving this legacy today, demonstrating just how deeply the monastic heritage continues to shape the present.

Cistercian Orangeries

Shining examples of monastic horticulture

Orangeries were among the most striking achievements of monastic horticulture. These sheltered structures, some equipped with heatable walls, enabled the monks to grow citrus fruits such as bitter oranges and lemons or other warmth-loving crops such as pomegranates even north of the Alps. Though yields were modest, the mere fact of such magnificent fruit thriving in cool climates was astonishing evidence of horticultural mastery. An orange in a Central European winter was more than a botanical curiosity – it was a testament to the far reach of Cistercian expertise.

A striking example comes from Ettenheimmünster Abbey in south-west Germany, near the French border. Archival records show that even two years after the monastery's dissolution in 1803, around ninety orange trees were still growing there in iron tubs. Though many were in poor condition, having gone years without being repotted, their sheer number illustrates the importance attached to the orangeries. Caring for these plants required considerable expertise, from watering and repotting schedules to proper ventilation – knowledge that the monks carefully preserved and passed on in their plant nurseries.

Cistercian orangery culture extended well beyond south-west Germany. Oliwa Abbey near Gdańsk is considered the northernmost Cistercian house with a documented orangery. In general, orangeries were a widespread phenomenon north of the Alps, and many still survive within the Cisterscapes network: at Zwettl and Rein (Austria), at Bronnbach (Germany) and at Vyšší Brod (Czech Republic), to name but a few.

Even smaller monasteries maintained orangeries, proving that they were not merely a courtly fashion but part of a wider cultural model. For the Cistercians, cultivating these fruits was less about ostentation than about technical mastery and botanical curiosity. Their orangeries were horticultural laboratories, places of learning, and, not least, subtle prestige projects within a Europe-wide network of monastic expertise.

Orangery at Bronnbach Monastery
Photo: AdobeStock

"Hesperide fruits"

Citrus trees became especially fashionable in the Baroque era. Beyond their appeal as exotic delicacies, they also reflected the humanist education of their patrons, as citrus featured prominently in classical literature. Citrus fruits were sometimes called "Hesperide fruits" – a reference to the mythical nymphs who guarded a tree of golden apples in Greek legend.

An Apple for Europe

Pforta Abbey and the Borsdorfer variety

Shaded by the Gothic walls of a Cistercian monastery, an apple variety once took root that would earn fame far beyond its region: the Borsdorfer. Its origins are thought to lie at Pforta Abbey near Naumburg, an influential Cistercian house with ties across Europe. Legend has it that monks first developed the variety at the abbey's Postendorf grange, experimenting with grafting and careful selection. Today, the Borsdorfer remains one of Central Europe's oldest surviving apple varieties.

As early as the 13th century, Pforta Abbey appointed a *magister pomerii:* an orchard master to oversee planting, nurture new varieties, and maintain the orchards. By the mid-16th century, the abbey ground contained three large orchards which, in good years, yielded up to thirty tonnes of apples, pears, cherries, and even walnuts – impressive evidence of the Cistercians' advanced horticultural expertise. Fruit and nut trees also grew in the vineyards, with tenant vintners obliged to deliver a share of their yield to the abbey as payment in kind.

The Borsdorfer apple soon became a cultural property, having all the qualities of an excellent table apple: it ripened in late autumn, kept well in store, and offered a finely balanced sweet-sharp flavour. It was cultivated to meet the abbey's own needs, but also for sale. Its spread can be traced well into the 19th century, as it entered the pomological literature and was used to create hybrid varieties.

Illustration of the Borsdorfer apple
Christian Eduard Langethal: Deutsches Obstcabinett (1840)

Pforta, aerial view from the east
Photo: Marcell Varadi

That such a modest fruit travelled so far owes much to the horticultural and organisational skills of the Pforta monks. In sum, the Borsdorfer apple is a shining example of monastic innovation – "fruitful" in every sense. And of course, apples are not only for eating: apple wine is already mentioned in medieval sources and is still highly popular in many European regions today, including the Czech town of Žďár nad Sázavou, home to a Cistercian abbey.

The importance attached to cultivating fruit and creating new varieties is also reflected in the pomological cabinets of the 18th and 19th centuries, which featured exact wax replicas of fruit varieties. Notable examples include the collection of Heinrich Arnoldi's and Viktor Dürfeld's models after Wilhelm Lauche, preserved at the German Horticultural Museum in Erfurt (400 specimen, late 19th century), as well as the F. J. Bertuch Collection (193 specimen, 18th century) at the Natural History Museum in Bamberg.

Delightful Preserves from the Monastery Cellars at Stams Abbey

At Stams, a Cistercian abbey at the foot of the Lechtal Alps in Austria, Brother Franz has dedicated himself to the art of preserving fruit. A baker by trade, he crafts jams, jellies, and fruit brandies in the monastery cellar. His work is guided by a simple philosophy: use the best fruit, go easy on the sugar – and never add artificial preservatives.

Brother Franz processes more than a tonne of fruit every year. His "light jams" contain only half the usual sugar and use apple pectin instead of conventional gelling sugar. The resulting spread is intensely fruity yet lower in calories. Apricot is the bestseller, followed by raspberry, tart cherry, lingonberry, and beloved combinations such as strawberry–rhubarb and elderberry–plum.

He also distils fine fruit brandies from premium mash, including a cherry eau-de-vie made only from flawless fruit. Since the abbey's own orchard cannot meet the demand, additional fruit is sourced locally. Brother Franz works in small batches throughout the year to ensure the fresh flavour and natural character of his products. His specialties are available only in the monastery shop – authentic handmade products firmly rooted in monastic tradition. Insider tip: every Wednesday and Friday, freshly baked loaves from Brother Franz's stone oven are also on offer.

Photo: Stift Stams

Products and their Landscapes

Monastic Variety

Other Cistercian products

Freiamt
Photo: Schwarzwald Tourismus, C. Keller

Grey Poppy Seeds from the Waldviertel

A protected origin product from the monastery garden

Few plants are as intertwined with the history of the Austrian Waldviertel region as the grey poppy – and the Cistercians played a key role in shaping that history. From the Middle Ages onward, monks cultivated poppies in their gardens not for pastries, but as a remedy for pain, insomnia, or anxiety.

Oil pressed from the seeds also fed the "eternal light" that burned in churches. Poppy cultivation in monastery gardens is mentioned as early as 1280 in the Zwettl *Urbar*, the abbey's land and tithe register. In the Waldviertel, poppy has been grown for hundreds of years, peaking in the first half of the twentieth century when "Zwettl Grey Poppy" was even traded on the London exchange. Cultivation declined sharply after the Second World War but has seen a revival since the 1980s, when farmers and local initiatives rediscovered and refined the tradition.

Today, Waldviertel Grey Poppy (PDO) grows on more than 1,000 hectares, thriving in the region's natural conditions. Its aroma profile is enriched by a bracing climate with strong day-night temperature contrasts and heavy dews. The soil composition is also ideal: sandy to loamy, low in weeds, yet rich in nutrients, it gives the poppyseeds their fine texture and nutty flavour.

Poppy seed capsules
Photo: Gerhard Geisberger

Its superior quality, however, owes as much to time-honed skill as to nature. Cultivation follows strict specifications under the EU's Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) scheme. Waldviertel Grey Poppy is prized for its large, grey-blue seeds with an oil content of up to 48 per cent. Their comparatively thin seed coat helps preserve both flavour and valuable compounds – a hallmark of quality that makes this poppy variety a popular ingredient not only in the kitchen, but also in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

More than just a local specialty, Waldviertel Grey Poppy (PDO) is a thread connecting the present to monastic cultural history. Each July, for about three weeks, the fields erupt in purples, whites and reds, transforming the Waldviertel into a sea of blossoms. It is the perfect time to visit the "poppy village" of Armschlag and explore the many facets of this remarkable plant.

Bernhard, Bees, and Benedictions

The honey-sweet splendour of the Cistercians

Bernard of Clairvaux never kept bees, but he could have. The Cistercian Order's greatest preacher was renowned for his sweet, flowing voice and words of spiritual depth – so much so that his contemporaries called him *Doctor mellifluous*, the "honey-tongued teacher". The nickname stuck. Even today, a little angel licking honey from its fingers adorns the minster at Salem Abbey, a sweet tribute to Bernard's warm eloquence. But for the Cistercians, honey was more than a metaphor or a symbol: it was part of daily life and of their highly specialised agriculture.

From the order's foundation in 1098, the Cistercians were, for centuries, "creators of fertile landscapes". Success began with the choice of site – and nothing was left to chance. Many houses even changed location, enough for this to count as a typical pattern. Despite the legend of "foundation in solitude," Cistercian monasteries were often located near important routes (Ebrach), along rivers (Vyšší Brod), or at the borders of lordships or natural regions. The latter offered real advantages: access to varied soils, resources, and raw materials, and a safeguard against crop failure in any single line of production.

Foto: AdobeStock

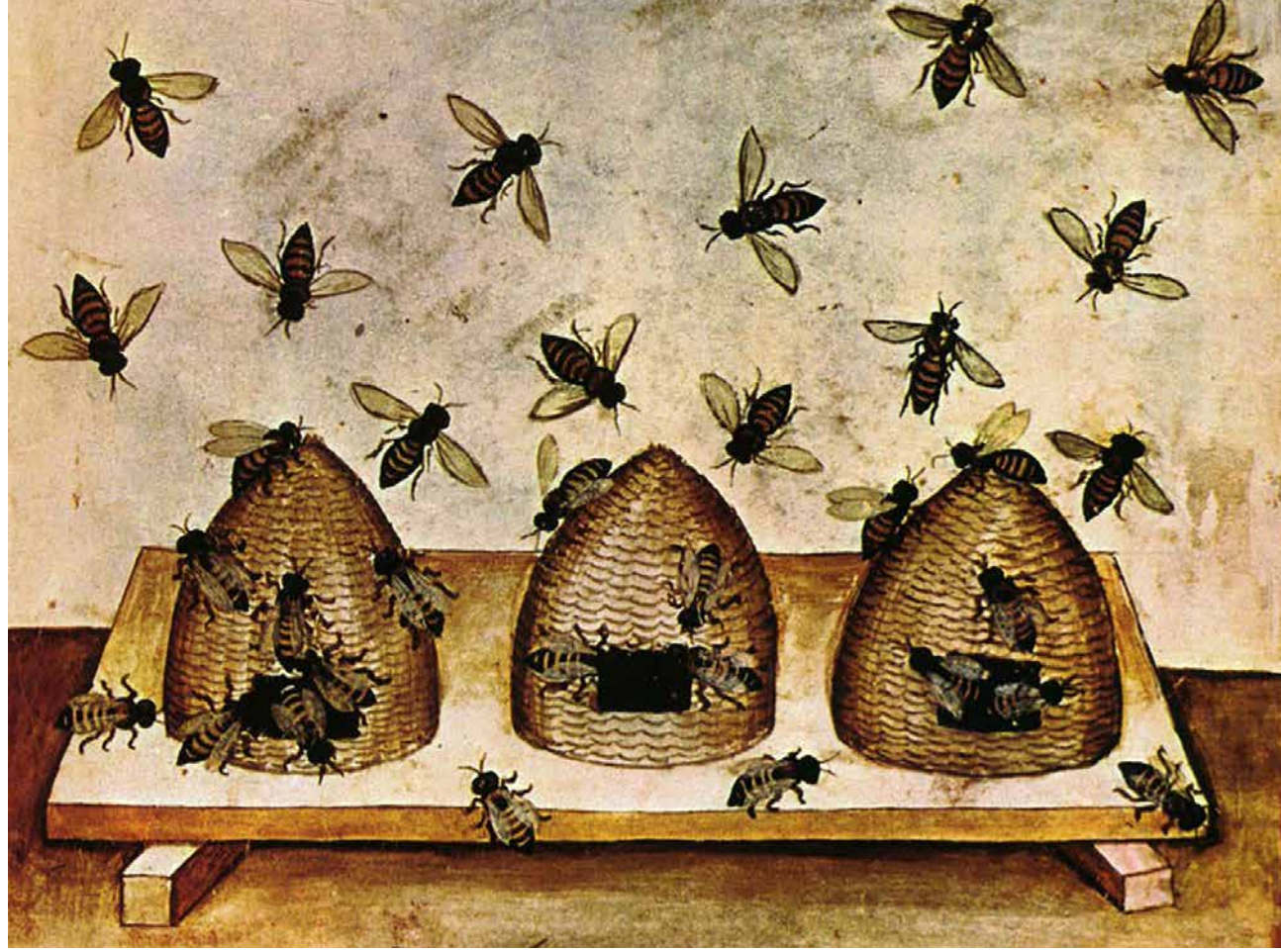
Bernard of Clairvaux himself spoke of the "wax of contemplation" and the "honey of preaching." To him, the bee was a model for monastic living: quietly industrious, useful, orderly. While medieval monks preserved the knowledge and craft of apiculture, the symbolism of honey lived on in art.

Such fertile landscapes were ideal for keeping bees. In the pre-industrial world, honey was far more than a sweetener: it was a preservative, a medicine, a source of wax, and a prized raw material for liturgical instruments such as candles, salves, and even communion wafers. Small wonder, then, that the humming of bees was music to the monks' ears.

In many monasteries, among them Maulbronn, Schöntal and Salem, hives were a fixed part of agricultural infrastructure. Honey was harvested, wax rendered, and colonies multiplied with care. At Salem, traces of this legacy survive. A Baroque tiled stove depicts monks at various kinds of work, including beekeeping, proving that the Cistercians were not only theologians and farmers, but also skilled apiculturists.

Honey also held deep symbolic meaning. It stood for God's goodness, the sweetness of Scripture, and the "land flowing with milk and honey." Bernard of Clairvaux himself spoke of the "wax of contemplation" and the "honey of preaching." To him, the bee was a model for monastic living: quietly industrious, useful, orderly. While medieval monks preserved the knowledge and craft of apiculture, the rich symbolism of honey lived on in art.

In 2023, this monastic tradition was revived in Baden-Württemberg. The State Palaces and Gardens launched a project to reintroduce beekeeping at historic monasteries and palaces. Under the poetic name *Landesgold* ("the state's gold"), hives now produce honey in the gardens of Maulbronn, Bebenhausen, Wiblingen, Alpirsbach, Salem, and other sites. Each location yields honey with its own local character: just as terroir shapes wine, so the landscape leaves its unique imprint on the taste of honey.



Bee hives in the 14th century
From: Tacuinum sanitatis (Wikipedia)

This newly branded "monastery honey" is not only a delicious nod to a golden past, but also an ecological statement. Partnerships with local beekeepers and the cultivation of nature-friendly gardens promote biodiversity. Historic orchards, multilayered hedgerows, and spacious monastic grounds provide safe havens for insects and stand as living reminders of a great monastic tradition.

That honey should once again play such a prominent role would surely have pleased *Doctor mellifluus*. On his feast day, 20 August, one might commemorate St Bernard not only with spiritually nourishing sermons at Salem Minster, but also with a spoonful of *Landesgold*. Sometimes the divine can be found on the tip of one's tongue.

Dairy, Divinely Refined

The Cistercians and their cheese

Imagine having too much milk but no refrigerator.
For most of human history since the Neolithic Revolution,
this was a real challenge, and the Cistercian monks
of Chiaravalle, south of Milan, were no exception.
Their solution was nothing short of ingenious.

Selection of regional cheeses presented at the *Schöffenmahl* at Rein Abbey.
Foto: Michael Brauer

They heated excess milk in large copper cauldrons, skimmed off the curds, and pressed them into large, compact wheels. The result was a cheese that kept well, nourished the community, and supported monastic self-sufficiency. Officially it was known as *caseus vetus* – "old cheese" – but since not everyone spoke Latin, another name caught on: *Grana*, inspired by the fine, grainy texture of the cut. By the 13th century, the cheese appeared in the trading records of Genoa, far from its place of origin. Over the following centuries it spread across Romagna, Piedmont, Tuscany, and the Mediterranean coast. In time, it evolved from a simple food to genuine currency. Those great golden wheels, so easy to store and transport, were used to pay taxes, rents, and dues of any kind.

Today, this monastic creation remains one of Italy's great exports. Under the name *Grana Padano*, it is produced across thirteen provinces of northern Italy, from Piedmont to Veneto, according to time-honoured principles: made of part-skim raw milk, using natural rennet, and aged for at least nine months. Since 1996, it has carried the EU's PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) seal, guaranteeing both provenance and quality. That the fathers of this culinary classic were quiet, unassuming men of prayer is often forgotten.

North of the Alps, Cistercian cheesemaking also flourished, notably at Schlierbach Abbey in Upper Austria. Dairy farming had been practised there since the 17th century, but the real breakthrough came in the early 1900s. Brother Leonhard, trained in cheesemaking at the Bavarian Archabbey of St Ottilien, brought his expertise to Schlierbach and, in 1924, created the first *Schlierbacher* Schlosskäse: a soft, aromatic red smear cheese that remains one of Austria's best-known organic varieties. In 2024, the abbey marked a century of cheesemaking, celebrating a range of premium products whose reputation extends far beyond its cloister walls.

Meanwhile, the Cistercian mother house at Cîteaux in Burgundy faces rather worldly challenges: crumbling buildings and costly restorations. Yet where resourceful monks pray, solutions tend to appear – in this case, a particularly delicious one. By selling 1,000 wheels of their raw-milk cheese, the monks hope to fund the restoration of their *definitorium*, the historic building once used to manage the vast Cistercian network. For 35 euros a wheel, buyers take home a taste of Burgundy – and help preserve a piece of Europe's living monastic heritage.

An Herb for Every Occasion

The Cistercian art of healing and cooking

"Where there's a monk, there's a garden" – a turn of phrase that could well describe the medieval monastic landscape. The surviving structures of Cistercian monastery gardens testify to the order's enduring engagement with nature.

When Theodor Fontane visited Lehnin Abbey in the 19th century, he was deeply impressed. From "wild, marshy land," he wrote, the monks had created "a place of fertility through work, faith, and order." And at the heart of it all stood the herbary – a kitchen garden, pharmacy, symbol, and spiritual space all in one. Herbs such as black cumin, savoury, celery, leek, coriander, dill, garlic, parsley, and chervil were staples of the monastic kitchen, adding flavour to simple dishes and aiding in food preservation. Home-grown herbs were used in great quantities, as spices imported from the orient were expensive luxuries.

But the Cistercians' love of herbs did not end at the cooking pot. Many plants growing in their herb gardens also found their way into tisanes and remedies: wormwood aided digestion, mint eased colds, agrimony soothed sore throats. Bitter tansy was used to expel worms – though sparingly, as the monks knew well how thin the line between remedy and poison could be. Calendula, fennel, anise, and lavender also thrived in the meticulously arranged garden beds. As early as the 9th century, the monk Walahfrid Strabo had created a systematic monastic botany. His *Liber de cultura hortorum*, one of the Middle Ages' most important botanical texts, described not only the plants themselves, but also their cultivation and practical uses.

Herb garden at Bronnbach Monastery
Photo: Frank Mittnacht

Making tisanes was a straightforward affair: leaves, blossoms, or roots were simply infused with hot water. Yet their effect reached far beyond the physical. Cistercian life was structured by silence and prayer, and a strengthening fennel infusion or a calming cup of lavender in the evening was a quiet ritual to end the day.

The herb garden itself was steeped in religious symbolism. Its layout often followed that of the *hortus conclusus* – the enclosed garden, a biblical image of purity and devotion to Mary. White lilies stood for the Virgin, as did the thornless rose. That these same plants could also soothe the skin and calm the nerves seemed only to affirm the deeper truth the monks perceived in all aspects of creation: the harmony of the natural and the divine.

Over the centuries, the monks collected and preserved their knowledge in medical manuscripts and library collections. Some of their advice may seem curious today – the Lorsch Book of Remedies, for instance, recommends dripping cabbage juice into the nose to cure headaches – but much of it has stood the test of time. A cup of chamomile tea for an upset stomach or a sage infusion for a sore throat are still trusted home remedies, just as they were in Cistercian monasteries in the twelfth century. Stepping into the calm atmosphere of an herb garden remains a rewarding experience. Former Cistercian houses such as Walkenried, Bebenhausen, and Fontane's Lehnin welcome visitors to their historic grounds – places of quiet and reflection where the medieval bond between nature and spirituality can be felt.

Michael Brauer / Verena Deisl

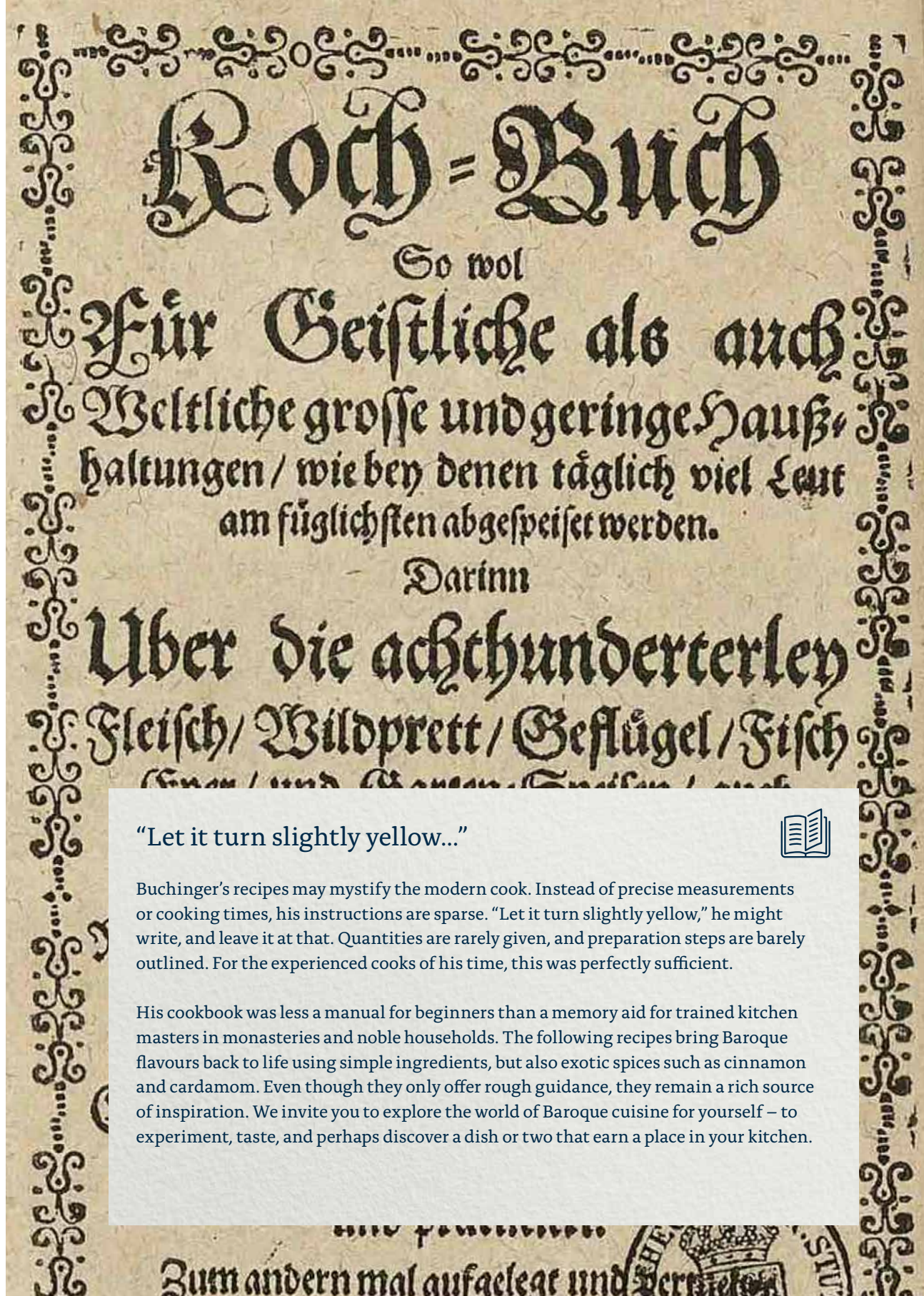
The Cistercian Art of Cooking

Bernhard Buchinger: Baroque Cuisine Behind Monastery Walls

Bernhard Buchinger (1606–1673) was a Cistercian monk, theologian, philosopher – and master cook. Born in Alsace and educated at Lützel Abbey in France, he combined spiritual devotion with practical industriousness. As head of the monastery kitchen, he oversaw the preparation of communal meals – a demanding position that required both culinary expertise and considerable organisational skill.

During the Thirty Years' War, Buchinger left the ravaged abbey of Lützel and became the abbot of Maulbronn in 1642. This post was short-lived, however, as the monastery was secularised and taken over by Protestant state administrators in 1648. In 1654, Buchinger returned to Lützel, where he devoted himself to restoring both its spiritual life and its buildings.

Buchinger's cookbook, printed in 1672, reflects his eventful life. Titled *Cookbook for Spiritual and Secular Households Great and Small" (Koch-Buch so wol für Geistliche als auch weltliche grosse und geringe Haußhaltungen)*, it combines Baroque culinary flair with practical monastic knowledge. Notably, it features a generous number of meat dishes – a clear departure from the monastic Rule, yet reflective of actual practice inside the monastery walls at the time. Fish also played a key role: reinterpreted as a "river vegetable", it was permitted even during periods of fasting.



Title page of Bernhard Buchinger's cookbook, 1672.
Image: Württemberg State Library (Public Domain)

Buchinger's cookbook in the Historical Recipe Database of Gastrosophy

"Let it turn slightly yellow..."

Buchinger's recipes may mystify the modern cook. Instead of precise measurements or cooking times, his instructions are sparse. "Let it turn slightly yellow," he might write, and leave it at that. Quantities are rarely given, and preparation steps are barely outlined. For the experienced cooks of his time, this was perfectly sufficient.

His cookbook was less a manual for beginners than a memory aid for trained kitchen masters in monasteries and noble households. The following recipes bring Baroque flavours back to life using simple ingredients, but also exotic spices such as cinnamon and cardamom. Even though they only offer rough guidance, they remain a rich source of inspiration. We invite you to explore the world of Baroque cuisine for yourself – to experiment, taste, and perhaps discover a dish or two that earn a place in your kitchen.

The Cistercian Art of Cooking

Fasting Fare

By keeping things simple, fasting fare promoted inner reflection and prepared the community for the great feast days. The recipes that follow show that such dishes can still be varied and satisfying.

Crayfish Dumplings

Cray-Fish Dumplings

Take crayfish / boiled, picked and minced / add some good flour / salt / eggs / apples or pears / chopped and roasted in lard / raisins / cinnamon / saffron / parsley / marjoram / grated gingerbread / and make thereof small dumplings / and boil in pea broth, or fry in lard.

From: A Clergy Cookbook / Koch-Buch für Geistliche (1672), 0659.

Cray-Fish Fritters

Or: make good crayfish fritters from this same composition / only omitting the flour / and fry in lard as described above: To this one may add sugar / and almonds / peeled and finely chopped.

From: A Clergy Cookbook / Koch-Buch für Geistliche (1672), 0660.

Modern version:

Crayfish
Flour
Salt
Eggs
Apples or pears
Raisins
Cinnamon
Saffron
Parsley
Marjoram
Gingerbread
Almonds

Mix cooked, peeled, and chopped crayfish with some flour, salt, eggs, and chopped apples or pears roasted in lard. Add raisins, cinnamon, saffron, parsley, marjoram, and grated gingerbread.

Shape mixture into small patties or balls and cook them in pea broth, or fry them in lard. You can also make crayfish fritters by leaving out the flour and frying the mixture as described above. A touch of sugar and some finely chopped almonds make a fine addition.

Tip: To suit modern palates, the recipe may also be prepared with your choice of fish or shellfish.

Roux Cabbage Soup (Lenten Soup)

For roux soup / take flour and roast it in lard / then pour hot water / add salt / and let it simmer a while. One may add something sour / and serve it over diced bread.

Or: take small rolls of bread / roast them in lard / pour water / add salt / and then add white cabbage / green cabbage / spinach / chard / sorrel / parsnips / carrots / or other roots / parsley herb and root / leeks etc. previously blanched / or other ingredients as can be found at no. 666 / let all boil well / and season with a little pepper. One may also add fresh butter / as with common soups / or serve it on stuffed white bread, no. 635 / or on toasted slices of bread / and sprinkle with nutmeg.

From: A Clergy Cookbook / Koch-Buch für Geistliche (1672), 0669.

Modern version:

Flour
Lard
Vinegar
Bread
White cabbage
Green cabbage
Spinach
Chard
Sorrel
Parsnips
Carrots
Parsley herb
Parsley root
Leek
Pepper
Butter
Nutmeg

Roast some flour in lard, then add hot water and salt and bring to a gentle boil. Add a little vinegar or other acidic condiment to taste (optional) and serve with diced bread or croutons.

Alternatively, toast slices of bread in lard, pour water over them, and add salt along with a mix of blanched vegetables: white cabbage, green cabbage, and the following blanched ingredients: white cabbage, green cabbage, spinach, chard, sorrel, parsnips, carrots or other root vegetables, parsley herb and root, leeks, or any other vegetables you have on hand.

Let everything simmer until well cooked, then season with a pinch of pepper. You can also stir in fresh butter, as was customary with simple soups. For a richer version, serve the broth over toasted slices or stuffed white bread and finish with a little grated nutmeg.

Tip: A splash of white wine rounds out the flavour beautifully.

Chard with Egg Filling

Chard
Take good-sized chard leaves / blanched / and fill them with a mixture / as described above / then set them on the embers / in a pan or shallow dish / with fresh butter / a little water / spices / one may also add chopped fresh chard to such a filling / and breadcrumbs.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0816.

Common egg filling
Take green or dried onions finely chopped / or green chives / parsley / savoury herbs / sweat all in lard / add eggs / salt / ginger / pepper / or yellow spice / and stir the filling over the fire until it thickens.
Or take parsley only / roast it in hot lard / stir in eggs / salt / nutmeg / or mace / yellow spice or saffron / and cook it properly over the fire / this makes a good filling for everything.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0584.

Modern version:

Swiss chard leaves
Onions or chives
Parsley
Herbs
Eggs
Salt
Ginger
Pepper
Turmeric
Nutmeg or mace

Blanch large Swiss chard leaves and set aside.
For the filling, sauté finely chopped onions or fresh chives, parsley, and any other herbs you like in clarified butter or lard. Add eggs, salt, ginger, pepper, or turmeric. Stir the mixture gently over low heat until it begins to thicken.

Alternatively, you can make a simpler version using only parsley: heat it in hot clarified butter with eggs, salt, nutmeg or mace, turmeric, and/or saffron until the mixture has reached the desired consistency. Optionally, stir in finely chopped fresh Swiss chard and a few breadcrumbs. This mixture makes an excellent filling for various dishes.

Place the stuffed chard leaves in a baking dish or on a tray with fresh butter, a little water, and a sprinkle of spices. Bake until tender.

Tip: Not only ingredients have changed over time, but also methods of preparation. What was cooked „on the embers“ in earlier times would probably be covered and placed in the oven today.

Foto: AdobeStock

The Cistercian Art of Cooking

Sweets and Desserts

With the spread of cane sugar in the early modern period, sweet dishes became popular across Europe – including in Cistercian monasteries. These ranged from long-familiar favourites to more exotic desserts.

Foto: AdobeStock

Stuffed Baked Apples

Take good, firm apples / peeled or unpeeled / cut off the tops / hollow them out / stuff them with chopped apples roasted in lard / crushed almonds / sugar / saffron, ginger, and cinnamon / close them again / and roast them in lard with a little wine / honey / and cinnamon.
Or: they may be skewered and roasted on a grill.
Or: one may skewer several apples / and roast them on the grill / then sprinkle them with sugar.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0688.

Or: one may stuff them with pears or quinces chopped and roasted / sugar / cinnamon / pepper / and steam them in lard.
Or: with raisins / sugar / cinnamon / saffron / and scraped liquorice/ this being an excellent cure for coughs and congestion of the chest.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0689.

Modern version:

Firm apples
Almonds
Sugar
Saffron
Ginger
Cinnamon
Wine
Honey

Cut the tops off firm, good-quality apples (peeled or unpeeled) and hollow them out. Finely chop the removed flesh and roast it in lard with crushed almonds, sugar, saffron, ginger, and cinnamon. Fill the apples with this mixture, replace the “lids,” and fry them gently in lard. Add a splash of wine, a little honey, and a dusting of cinnamon.

You can also thread the stuffed apples onto skewers and roast them over a grill. Or simply roast whole apples on a skewer and sprinkle them with sugar while hot.

Another variation calls for a filling consisting of chopped and roasted pears or quinces, sugar, cinnamon, and pepper. Steam the apples in lard. You can also try a mixture of raisins, sugar, cinnamon, saffron, and grated liquorice. Try this version if you are fighting a cough or shortness of breath.

Today, we would bake the apples in a casserole dish in the oven instead of roasting them over embers.

The medicinal addendum may seem curious to modern readers, but it reflects the medical understanding of the time: food was regarded as both nourishment and remedy. Buchinger‘s cookbook therefore often includes recommendations for therapeutic use.

Foto: AdobeStock

Rice Cakes with Sweet Wine Sauce

Take rice and boil it in a pan with milk, but without salt, until thickened /
and once cooled / cut into small cakes / roll them in flour / and bake them.
Then make a sweet sauce of roasted flour / boiled wine / ginger / pepper / cinnamon /
and serve warm. One may also add raisins / or chopped almonds to such a sauce.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0859.

Modern version:

Rice
Milk
Flour
Clarified butter

Boil rice in milk without salt until it thickens, then spread the mixture on a plate or tray to cool. Once firm, cut it into small slices.
Roll each slice in flour and fry it in clarified butter.

Sweet sauce:
Wine
Ginger
Pepper
Cinnamon
Raisins
Almonds

For the sweet sauce, prepare a light roux and add some wine.
Let simmer gently, seasoning with ginger, pepper, and cinnamon.
You may also add raisins or blanched almonds.
Pour the sauce over the fried rice cakes and serve immediately.

Tip: For easy handling, spread the cooked rice on a well-greased or parchment-lined baking tray.

Manus Christi Wafers (Confectionery)

Manus Christi Wafers.
Boil clarified sugar / with a third of rose water added /
until the sugar has thickened / then pour onto a marble or pewter plate
using a confectioner's spoon to make wafers.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 1017.

Modern version:

Sugar
Rose water

Boil clarified sugar with about one-third rose water until the mixture thickens enough to be poured. Using a confectioner's spoon, pour small portions onto a marble or pewter plate to form delicate wafers.

Of course, you don't need marble or pewter for this today – baking paper works perfectly well.

"Manus Christi" (Latin for "hand of Christ") was the name given in the Middle Ages and early modern period to a particularly fine white sugar confection. Considered precious, healing, and almost sacred, it was thought to restore strength and comfort the heart. At a time when sugar was an expensive luxury, its pure white colour and gentle sweetness were seen as symbols of the divine. These wafers were cherished not only as a delicacy but also as a remedy for faintness, weakness, or melancholy.

Tip: For a touch of Baroque splendour, decorate your Manus Christi wafers with gold leaf, dried flowers, or fine spices such as violet sugar or lavender.

The Cistercian Art of Cooking

Holy feast days called for festive meals – and Cistercian monasteries were no exception. Roasts and pies were particularly popular, often enhanced with the distinctive flavour of imported Asian spices.

Festive Dishes

Sweet-and-Sour Roast Chicken à la Cistercian

To make a sauce for roast chicken / take its own drippings / or a rich broth of meat / or fresh butter / salt / ginger / pepper / or yellow spice, cinnamon, etc. / and pour it over the roasted chicken.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0273.

Or: add to such broth / fresh butter / peels of lemons, limes, or bitter oranges / or capers / or unripe grapes or gooseberries / salt / ginger / pepper or mace / and a little vinegar to taste / and let it boil.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0274.

Or: one may sweeten this same broth with sugar / and add chopped almonds / sea grapes / and cinnamon / let it boil / and pour over the roast chicken.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0275.

Modern version:

Meat broth
Ginger
Pepper
Turmeric
Saffron
Cinnamon
Butter

Zest of lemons, limes, or bitter oranges
Capers
Grapes
Gooseberries
Mace
Vinegar

Sugar
Almonds
Raisins
Cinnamon

An excellent sauce for roast chicken can be prepared in several ways: collect the juices from the roast or use a rich meat stock as a base. Season to taste with salt, ginger, pepper, yellow spice (turmeric or saffron), and cinnamon.
Finally, “cream” the sauce by stirring in cold butter until smooth and glossy. It can also be thickened with egg yolk.

Variations: Season the stock with the zest of lemons, limes, or bitter oranges, or add capers, unripe grapes, or gooseberries, along with salt, ginger, pepper, or mace. A little vinegar enhances the flavour. Bring the sauce to a boil and finish again with cold butter.

For a sweet version, make a light broth with sugar, blanched almonds, small raisins (“sea grapes”), and cinnamon. Bring to a boil and pour it over the roasted chicken.

With this recipe, Buchinger demonstrates the remarkable variety of monastic cuisine – far from the plain and monotonous fare we might imagine today. The generous use of spices and especially the bold combination of sweet and sour flavours may seem downright exotic to modern palates, yet it was an established feature of early modern cookery. Cooks of the era delighted in experimenting with contrasting flavours and combinations that are seldom found in Central European kitchens today.

Fish Pie

To make a good and common dough for pies / put several handfuls of good flour on a workbench / form a hollow in the middle / and put in fresh butter / or, if unavailable, unsalted lard / known as Ancken / salt / lukewarm water / and knead the dough very well, then form pies / round or oblong.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0321.

This is a pastry dough for all purposes / to be filled with all sorts of meat / game / poultry / fish / and shaped / as one sees fit.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0322.

Pike may likewise be baked in pies / adding fresh butter / or unsalted lard / salt / lemons or bitter oranges / or lime peel / capers / or unripe grapes / ginger / pepper / mace / a few whole cloves / and chopped parsley.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0400.

Modern version:

Flour
Butter
Salt
Water

Zest of lemons, bitter oranges or limes
Capers
Grapes
Ginger
Pepper
Mace
Cloves
Parsley

For a good and simple pastry dough, place several handfuls of good flour on a work surface and form a hollow in the middle. Add fresh butter or, if no butter is available, unsalted lard (known as Anken) along with a pinch of salt and some lukewarm water. Knead the dough thoroughly, then shape it into round or oblong patties.

This serves as a basic pie dough for all types of meat, game, poultry, fish and other savoury pies, which may be formed in any shape.

Pike made a good pie filling, combined with fresh butter or unsalted lard, salt, the zest of lemons, bitter oranges, or limes, capers or unripe grapes, ginger, pepper, mace, a few whole cloves, and chopped parsley.

The Upper Crust of Baroque cuisine

In Buchinger's time, covered pies were a universally esteemed and beloved food. They could be adapted to any occasion, from a practical form of dealing with leftovers to lavish creations filled with tender birds – or even fireworks for festive banquets! Pies could be served hot or cold and prepared well in advance.
The dough was easy to make, the preparation largely straightforward, and the filling kept well under the protective pastry crust. A widespread and popular staple for centuries, pies have all but disappeared in Austria, Germany, and Czechia today, though they remain beloved in Great Britain.

Tip: To ensure the pastry dough turns out well, we recommend this basic shortcrust pastry recipe: Take 250 g flour, 125 g cold butter, 2 eggs, and a pinch of salt. Sift the flour onto a pastry board, then chop the cold butter with a knife and add to flour. Add eggs and salt, then quickly knead everything into a smooth dough. Shape it into a ball and let it rest in the refrigerator for about an hour. Any leftover dough can be used to decorate the pies.

Roast Venison in Pepper Sauce or Apple Sauce

Take venison / and boil it in equal parts wine and water with a little vinegar /
skim well / add salt and thicken with a good quantity of well-roasted or burnt flour /
add ginger and pepper / and boil until tender.
Upon serving / sprinkle with roasted bits of bacon and a little ginger.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0155.

Apple sauce.
Take sweet apples / chopped / and roasted well in lard with a little flour /
add meat broth / a little wine / ginger / cinnamon / sugar / saffron / bring to a boil /
then serve over venison / game / or hare / for an excellent broth or sauce.
One may also mix in chopped almonds / sea grapes / or raisins.

From: A Clergy Cookbook (1672), 0690.

Modern version:

Venison
Vinegar
Ginger
Pepper
Bacon bits

For the apple sauce:
Sweet apples
Flour
Wine
Ginger
Cinnamon
Sugar
Saffron
Almonds
Raisins

Cook the venison in equal parts wine and water with a little vinegar. Skim the liquid continuously and season with salt. Thicken the sauce with a dark roux made from flour browned in fat. Season generously with ginger and pepper to create a rich, spicy sauce.
Let simmer until the meat is tender. Before serving, sprinkle with crispy bacon bits and a little freshly grated ginger.

Apple sauce:
Chop sweet apples and fry them well in lard with a little flour. Add meat stock, a splash of wine, ginger, cinnamon, sugar, and saffron, and bring the mixture to a boil. You may also add peeled almonds and/or raisins.

This makes a fine, aromatic sauce that pairs well with any kind of game, especially venison or roast hare.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, the Cistercians sought to distinguish themselves from the Benedictines and from clergy leading more worldly lives by rejecting hunting, luxury, and ostentation. Later sources, however, reveal that certain forms of hunting were indeed practised in some monasteries. Monks were permitted to catch game for their own use, provided they used traps or nets rather than weapons. They were also allowed to protect monastery lands from damage caused by wild animals or to delegate hunting to lay brothers or hired hunters from outside the community.

Photo: AdobeStock

Public Engagement

Žďár Street Food Festival

Michael Brauer

The first public event of the European cooperation project on the culinary heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe set standards for a great future. Held in September 2023 at Žďár nad Sázavou (Czech Republic), visitors of a street food festival had the opportunity to experience the Cistercian culinary heritage with all their senses. Alongside delicious dishes, they were also served enlightening glimpses into history.

More than 200 guests were invited to sample four dishes prepared on site, inspired by recipes from the 1672 cookbook created by Cistercian abbot Bernhard Buchinger. Based on the scanty information provided by the author, local chef Jan Novák skilfully (re-) created dishes that delighted modern palates and were a big hit with those in attendance. On the menu were fried carp, sweet-and-sour chicken, Swiss chard with an egg filling, and a mushroom ragout that owed its golden colour and subtle spiciness to turmeric. The Salzburg team provided historical context: Michael Brauer and Julian Bernauer shared background information on monastic food culture, fasting practices, and the ingredients and spices of the time. Humorous anecdotes added extra flavour to their presentation, which was held in German and translated simultaneously into Czech.

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Scenes from the Žďár Street Food Festival
Photos: Michael Brauer

Hundreds more festival visitors stopped by the shared booth of all Cistercian monasteries involved in the international CISTERSCAPES network, sampling products from Vyšší Brod (South Bohemia, CZ), the Zwettl region (Lower Austria, AT), Bamberg (Upper Franconia, Bavaria, DE), Velehrad (Zlín region, CZ), and Žďár nad Sázavou (Vysočina region, CZ).

Show cooking and tastings proved especially effective for engaging with the diverse audience at the Street Food Festival. Some visitors were already well acquainted with monastic life while others knew little or nothing about it; most had come simply to enjoy the food trucks and listen to the rock bands on the main stage. In such a setting, food offers an ideal gateway to deeper themes: it is easily accessible, engages all the senses, and is, quite simply, a pleasure. And who knows – perhaps some visitors left not only well-fed, but also inspired to visit a nearby Cistercian monastery for their next outing.

Public Engagement

Cistercian Heritage and Baroque Delights: Project Meeting in the Monastery Landscape of Ebrach

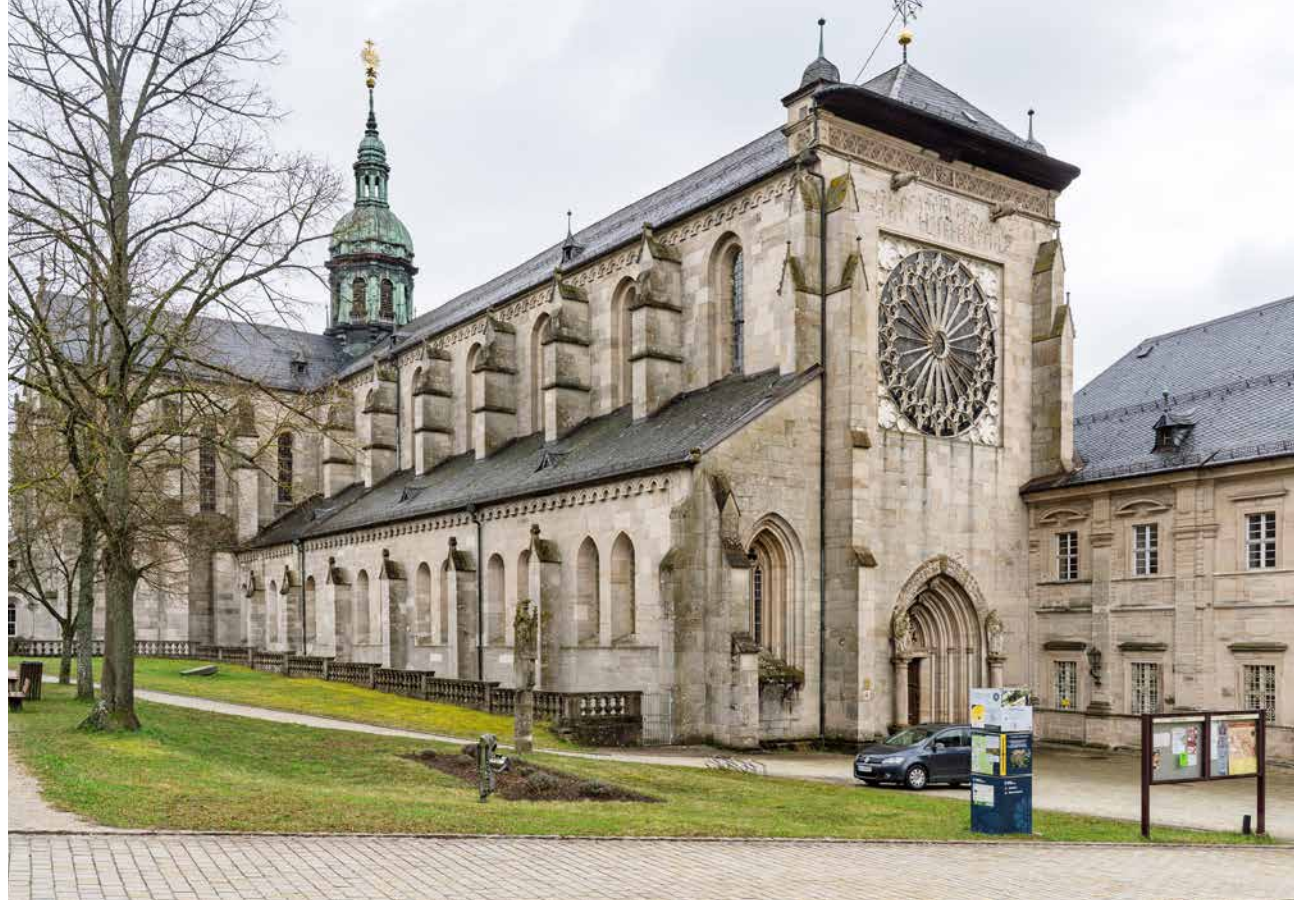
Michael Brauer

View of the pilgrimage basilica of Vierzehnheiligen, a late Baroque landmark built under the abbots of the Cistercian monastery of Langheim.
Photo: Michael Brauer

The Ebrach monastery landscape provided the setting for the 2024 internal project meeting, which combined visiting sites with culinary explorations – all in the name of historical research, of course. Starting from the Bamberg District Office, the official headquarters of today's Cisterscapes network, the group first travelled to the former Cistercian abbey of Ebrach, where few buildings are accessible to the public besides the abbey church. The monastery complex now belongs to the Free State of Bavaria and houses the Ebrach correctional facility.

In the nearby village of Sulzheim, the group visited the *Amtsschloss*, a grand Baroque palace that once served as the administrative seat for the abbey's extensive holdings – an imposing reminder of former claims to power. Next to it stands a late 17th-century granary, the so-called *Schüttboden*, now converted into an event venue. Its impressive size conveys the scale of agricultural production and storage in those days. The perfect setting, then, for a culinary exploration of Baroque-era Cistercian recipes.

The current owner of the palace, Armin Pöter, proved both a generous host and an accomplished cook. With curiosity and enthusiasm, he adapted the proposed recipes to modern tastes, even creating vegan variations along the way. Most of the dishes followed the theme of "Cistercian fasting fare," though anyone expecting an austere evening was pleasantly surprised.



(top) Former abbey church at Ebrach
Photo: Michael Brauer

(bottom) *Schüttboden* of the *Amtsschloss* at Sulzheim
Photo: Michael Brauer

Baroque-era fasting dishes may not have been as lavish or elaborate as those served on feast days, yet with their fried pastries and hearty fillings, they ensured lasting satisfaction. By the end of the meal, the modern-day diners were reassured that the medieval monks were safe from starvation during the fasting season.

Several of the recipes tested that evening in the elegantly restored Schüttboden have found their way into this book. Among them were a roasted cabbage soup – simple yet flavourful – and a generously filled fish pie with pleasantly exotic notes of ginger, mace, and cloves.

The following day, a visit to Langheim Abbey provided a fitting conclusion to the project meeting. The programme began with a tour of the pilgrimage basilica of the Fourteen Holy Helpers *(Vierzehnheiligen)*, which had been built under the supervision of the Langheim abbots. Afterwards, the group explored the monastery's surviving farm buildings, which still hint at the scale of its former operations. This place is an embodiment of the link between spirituality and economic power that fascinates us about the Cistercians to this day.

Mushroom quiche
Photo: Michael Brauer

From the Monastery Kitchen to the Wider World

The *Schöffenmahl* at Rein Abbey in September 2024

Michael Brauer

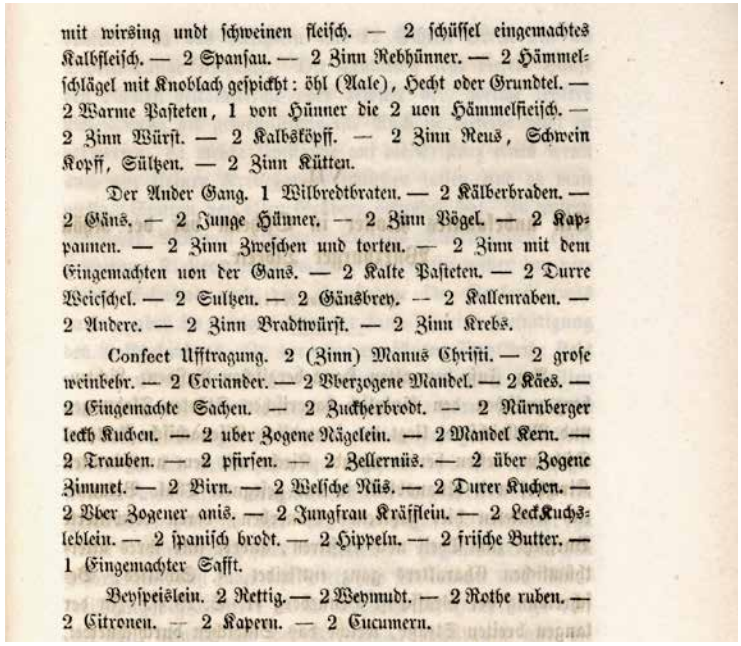
What food might you have been served as a secular guest at a monastery table? And what did a multi-course meal of true monastic hospitality look like? These were the questions that inspired the Salzburg team to recreate a historical *Schöffenmahl* ("jurors' banquet") for the annual project event in September 2024.

The menu was modelled on an annual banquet hosted by the Cistercian abbey of Ebrach from 1525 onward as a gesture of gratitude to the Würzburg city court for its support during the Peasants' War. One of these occasions erupted into scandal, however: in 1547, the princely chief magistrate, Bastian Wagner, accused Father Amtmann Philipp Hellerling of serving too little food, prompting a formal complaint to the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg, Melchior von Zobel.

It is thanks to this legal quarrel that we know of the Schöffenmahl at all. Additional records of banquets held in 1570, 1586, and 1653 provide further insights, including guest lists and menus. The most lavish of these, the 1653 banquet, provided the blueprint for the 2024 reinterpretation.

Stone Hall at Rein Abbey
Photo: Michael Brauer

Because the historical menus recorded only the names of dishes but no recipes or lists of ingredients, the Salzburg team went into detective mode, matching them with period sources.



mit wirsing undt schweinen fleisch. — 2 schüssel eingemachtes Kalbfleisch. — 2 Spansau. — 2 Zinn Rebhünner. — 2 Hämmelschlägel mit Knoblach gespickht: öhl (Aale), Hecht oder Grundtel. — 2 Warme Pasteten, 1 von Hünner die 2 uon Hämmelfleisch. — 2 Zinn Würst. — 2 Kalbsköpff. — 2 Zinn Reus, Schwein Kopff, Sültzen. — 2 Zinn Kütten.

Der Ander Gang. 1 Wilbredtbraten. — 2 Kälberbraden. — 2 Gäns. — 2 Junge Hünner. — 2 Zinn Vögel. — 2 Kappaunen. — 2 Zinn Zweschen und torten. — 2 Zinn mit dem Eingemachten uon der Gans. — 2 Kalte Pasteten. — 2 Durre Weieschel. — 2 Sultzen. — 2 Gänsbrey. — 2 Kallenraben. — 2 Andere. — 2 Zinn Bradtwürst. — 2 Zinn Krebs.

Confect Ufftragung. 2 (Zinn) Manus Christi. — 2 grose weinbehr. — 2 Coriander. — 2 Vberzogene Mandel. — 2 Käes. — 2 Eingemachte Sachen. — 2 Zuckherbrodt. — 2 Nürnberger leckh Kuchen. — 2 uber Zogene Nägelein. — 2 Mandel Kern. — 2 Trauben. — 2 pfirsen. — 2 Zellernüs. — 2 über Zogene Zimmet. — 2 Birn. — 2 Welsche Nüs. — 2 Durer Kuchen. — 2 Vber Zogener anis. — 2 Jungfrau Kräfflein. — 2 LeckKuchsleblein. — 2 spanisch brodt. — 2 Hippeln. — 2 frische Butter. — 1 Eingemachter Safft.

Beyspeislein. 2 Rettig. — 2 Weymudt. — 2 Rothe ruben. — 2 Citronen. — 2 Kapern. — 2 Cucumern.

Excerpt from the *Schöffenmahl* held in 1653 (Edition Heffner)
Image: Archive of the Historical Society of Lower Franconia and Aschaffenburg 16/2, 3 (1863), p. 317]

An invaluable reference was Bernhard Buchinger's *Cookbook for Clerical and Secular Households, Large and Small* (1672), an encyclopaedic collection of 1.017 recipes, including about 300 meat dishes, for large monastic and secular households.

Fortunately, all of Buchinger's recipes had previously been digitised in the Historical Recipe Database of Gastrosophy by students and researchers, which facilitated thorough and systematic research. Based on this information, the team devised a menu that balanced historical authenticity with modern practicality.

On 27 September 2024, the banquet was finally brought to life at Rein Abbey in Austria – a dignified and fitting venue. Founded in 1129 and continuously inhabited by a Cistercian community ever since, Rein is the order's oldest surviving monastry worldwide – and a daughter house of Ebrach Abbey, home of the original *Schöffenmahl*.

The abbey opened its splendid Stone Hall for the festivities and collaborated with a local caterer to prepare the recipes selected and carefully adapted by the Salzburg team. Guests included network partners from the Czech Republic, Germany, and Austria, along with regional politicians and cultural dignitaries. The event echoed the historic banquet at Ebrach in every detail – except for the 1547 food quarrel, which was humorously re-enacted as a staged reading.

The *Schöffenmahl* proved a delightful gateway into the monastic Baroque kitchen. Following the practice of the era, the meal was served in several *Trachten* (courses), each offering an array of (main) dishes presented simultaneously.

The first *Tracht* included several soups, a mushroom quiche, fish, and sausages specially prepared by a local butcher according to the original recipe, refined with chopped orange peel. The second course offered two elegant meat dishes – roast venison and chicken in horseradish sauce – alongside inventive vegetable sides. The third course, also known as the "confectionary course," featured fresh and candied fruit paired with a selection of cheeses.

The Salzburg team guided diners through the evening, augmenting the culinary experience of each course with impeccably researched cultural and historical context. The dishes themselves revealed a wealth of insights: the era's widespread fondness for sweet-and-sour combinations, the use of imported spices for both flavour and health, fish and crayfish as creative fasting fare, game as food fit for nobles and princes, pumpkin as a cultural nod from the New World, and much more.

Unlike the Street Food Festival in Žďár nad Sázavou in 2023, which was aimed at a broad audience, the banquet at Rein welcomed guests from politics and cultural heritage institutions, many of whom brought considerable expert knowledge to the table.

The 2024 *Schöffenmahl* showed that Cistercian culinary traditions are not merely historical curiosities, but can indeed offer rich inspiration for today's fine dining. And while ancient traditions came alive in Rein's venerable hall, new connections were being forged.

Educational Programmes and Activity Events

Martina Schutová

As part of the culinary heritage project, we developed and tested a range of educational programmes designed for different audiences and settings.

A format titled **"Exploring the Monastery Kitchen"** invites groups of children and parents or grandparents with children to step into the world of Cistercian monastic life. The programme can be implemented in familiar environments such as schools, local libraries, or community centres, or offered as an outdoor activity event. Focusing on food and culinary culture, the programme offers glimpses into daily life at a medieval monastery. In interactive units, children are encouraged to smell, taste, and imagine what life was like centuries ago.

Together with the course instructor, they explore practical questions pertaining to monastic life: Did monks eat meat? Did they drink alcohol? Were they allowed to eat seafood or fresh figs? How did they sweeten their food? In what ways was the monastic diet different from that of the secular world? And could we live by their rules today?

The programme is primarily based on the research study conducted for the project Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe by Martina Schutová, complemented by additional sources listed in the project bibliography.

Starting from the mother house of Cîteaux, four daughter houses were founded – the so-called primary abbeys
Commentary on the Apocalypse by Alexander, f 113 r (Cambridge University Library)

Several versions of the educational programme were tested with children aged six to twelve in kindergarten and primary schools (grades 1 and 2), as well as with secondary school students from various regions of the Czech Republic.

Versions aimed at families and the interested public were tested in the Czech Republic and Austria as part of community or adventure events. Depending on the group's age and size, each session lasted about 60 to 90 minutes.

To engage the senses, the programme relied on simple materials. Bowls filled with dried herbs and fragrant spices, as well as morsels of everyday foods such as bread, raisins, figs, and dried apples invited participants to discover history through smell and taste. Children worked with age-appropriate activity sheets titled "Monastic Kitchen Steward" and "Design Your Own Monastic Kitchen," using simple craft supplies such as coloured pencils, glue, and scissors.

Structure and topics (aligned with learning goals and principles of group dynamics):

1. Introduction (indoors or outdoors)
The session opens with an introduction to the Cistercian order and daily life in a monastery. Children are introduced to key terms such as *monk, monastery, silentium,* fasting, and monastic rule in ways they can relate to in their own lives.
Activity: A short exercise in *silentium* (silence).

2. Exploration and discovery
Participants learn about the economic life of a medieval monastery: the cultivation of grain, fruit and vineyards, fish farming, pond management, brewing, and more.

Activities: A smell test with fresh seasonal herbs or jars filled with typical herbs and spices such as lavender, caraway, fennel, and nutmeg, followed by a taste test with foods like bread, raisins, figs, and dried apples.

Participants are introduced to the monastery layout, locating the kitchen and the refectory for monks and lay brothers, and explore the rules that governed meals in the cloister.

Activity: Marking the rooms on a ground plan of the monastery or creating a life-size outline of a refectory with sticks and string.

3. Creative phase
Filling out the worksheets (depending on participants' ages)

4. Conclusion and reflection

A second educational programme, **"The Culinary Art of Cistercian Monasteries,"** was designed for sites where monastic buildings have been preserved. Structured as a guided tour through the basilica, the paradise courtyard, and the cloister, it immerses visitors in the daily life of Cistercian monks during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, with a particular focus on Central Europe. Drawing on the Order's Rule, the regulations governing monastic life, and the architectural layout of the monasteries themselves, the interactive tour invites participants to explore the economic and culinary practices of Cistercian communities. The programme is aimed at adults, young adults, and all those with an interest in the subject.

Its primary source of information is once again the study Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe, supplemented by additional literature from the project's context.

The 90-minute programme uses a variety of materials, such as a chart illustrating the daily rhythm of monastic life and *veduta* – large-scale, highly detailed paintings – of monasteries, including some houses of the European CISTERSCAPES network – Vyšší Brod, Žďár nad Sázavou, Velehrad, Plasy (CZ), Zwettl, Rein (AT), Stična (SI), or Waldsassen (DE). Participants are also introduced to dried herbs and spices, smoke-blackened pottery, books, photographs, and transcriptions of historical menus and recipes.

Structure and topics:

1. The Basilica (30 minutes)
Introduction to the programme, the Cistercian order, and the rhythm of monastic life. The Cistercian monastery as a self-sufficient economic unit that shaped the surrounding landscape.
A day in the life of a Cistercian monk with a focus on monastery meals.

2. The Paradise Courtyard (20 minutes)
The medieval monastic kitchen: cultivation of crops, management of fishponds, herb and kitchen gardens, service buildings.
Sensory experience: smelling flowering lavender in summer or jars of typical herbs and spices such as lavender, caraway, fennel, and nutmeg.
Identifying the locations of the kitchen and refectories (for monks and lay brothers) on the monastery ground plan.

3. The Cloister (40 minutes)
Types of cooking and eating utensils of the time; production and materials
Example: smoke-blackened pottery.
Participants can handle the vessels and guess their function.
Eating customs for different occasions (fasting periods, feast days, when hosting guests or celebrating holidays).
Menu examples from Czech monasteries such as Vyšší Brod (18th century) and from Austrian houses, including the Benedictine Abbey of Salzburg (18th century).
Historical cookbooks and photographs of refectories.

4. Final discussion

The educational programmes were developed by Martina Schutová and Adéla Tlustošová (MAS Rozkvět, z. s., Czech Republic).

These introductory modules laid the groundwork for the next step: activities using 3D glasses. By the time participants entered the virtual space, they were well prepared — ready to immerse themselves completely in a new, multisensory experience of the Cistercian kitchen.

Digital Access to Hidden Spaces

Methodological notes on the 3D interpretation of Cistercian culinary culture

Tomáš Pleva

The project of digitally reconstructing a Cistercian monastery kitchen and refectory was motivated by several factors. Above all, the goal was to provide access to a space that, in its medieval form, has largely vanished – or remains closed to the public. In active monasteries, kitchens have long since been modernised and are reserved exclusively for the needs of the community. Original medieval kitchens, meanwhile, have often disappeared entirely or survive only as fragments, having been remodelled during the early modern and Baroque periods. The smoky Gothic kitchens of the Middle Ages simply did not hold up to the changing standards of hygiene and kitchen practice.

At the same time, the culinary aspects of monastic life continue to capture the public imagination. Eating is something we all share, a universal human experience. Yet within monastic life, there are deeper layers of meaning and different frameworks to be explored, from fasting rules and the role of silence and recitation during meals to the question of how meals and the various tasks relating to them were organised. The project therefore sought not to simply reconstruct these spaces, but to create a **digital experience** that would bring deeper understanding of their cultural code.

The research team documented the three active Cistercian monasteries of Rein, Zwettl, and Stična.

The digital environment also offers new opportunities for participatory interpretation. Instead of presenting a single, linear narrative, it enables different groups of users to explore at their own pace, choose their own paths of discovery, and take an active role in communicating with history. This approach reflects current trends in the presentation of culture and cultural heritage.

Research and documentation: What has been preserved

Phase one of the project centred on identifying and documenting what remains of **Cistercian culinary spaces and objects**. The research team surveyed three active Cistercian monasteries – Rein, Zwettl, and Stična – where much of the traditional layout has been preserved. These living communities also have retained select everyday objects that proved ideal for digital modelling, allowing the creation of an interior that is both spatially convincing and faithful in its functional details.

Parallel to this fieldwork, the team conducted an extensive literature review and examined archaeological reports. From this research, two key spaces emerged as central to monastic life: the kitchen and the refectory. These spaces were closely interconnected not only logistically and functionally, but also spiritually. The insights gathered at the active monasteries confirmed that while Cistercian kitchens were equipped much like those of other orders, what set them apart was their rigorous approach to selecting ingredients and their elaborate dining rules.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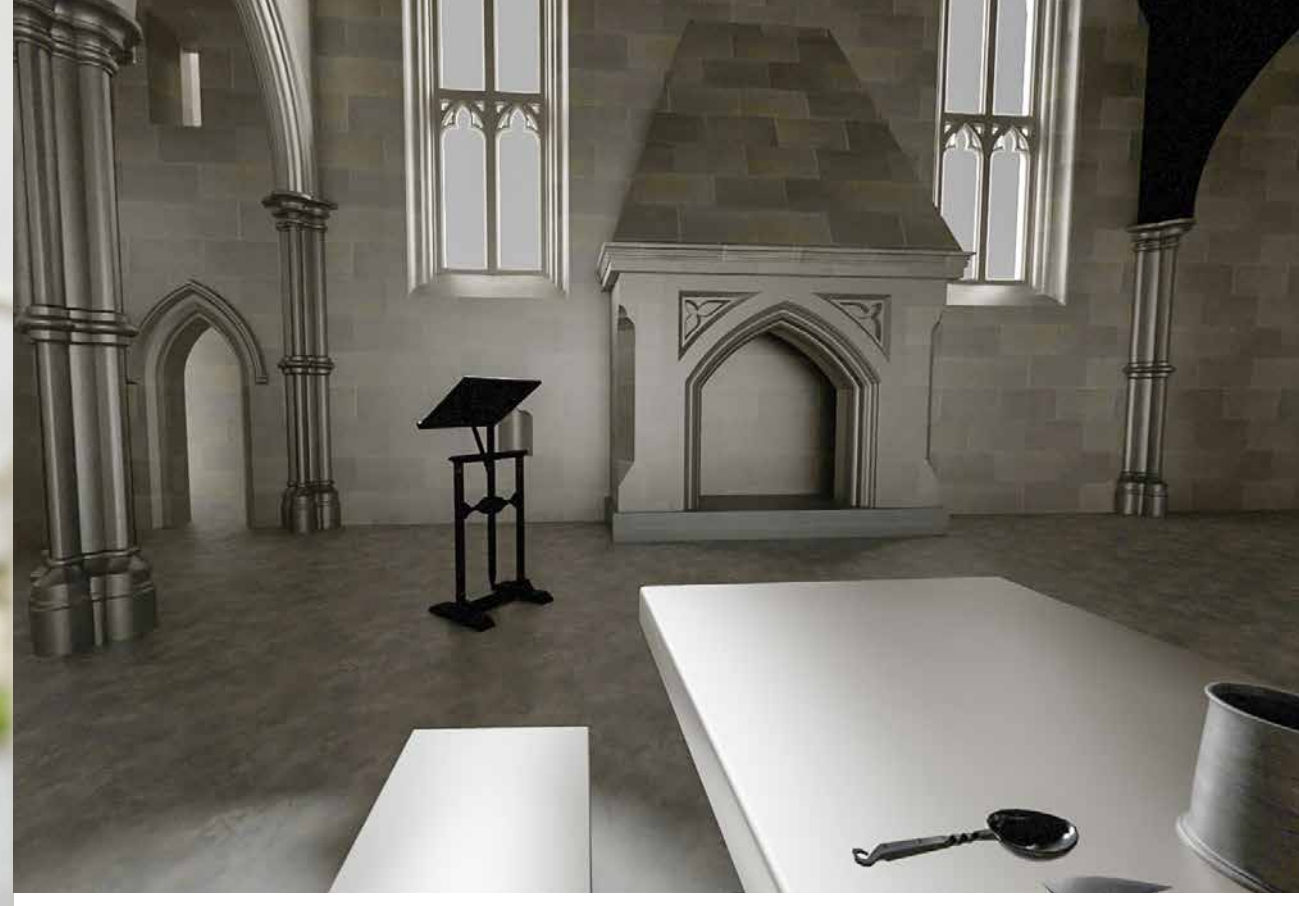
NOVÉ MĚSTO NA MORAVĚ
Mgr. Tomáš Pleva



In the Gothic period, food was prepared on open hearths using simple tools, and the brothers took turns cooking and serving according to a weekly rota. The refectory was a place of quiet contemplation, where communal meals were accompanied by regular spiritual readings.

Attention was also given to the spatial arrangement of the monastery complex, which proved to be remarkably consistent across sites. The kitchens were directly connected to storage and serving areas, and the refectory opened onto the cloister, its position reinforcing both unity and discipline within the community.

Two eras, two approaches

The digital reconstruction focused on two historical periods: the **High Middle Ages** (Gothic) and the **Baroque** era, each representing a distinct approach to food and its preparation. In the Gothic period, food was prepared on open hearths using simple tools, and the brothers took turns cooking and serving according to a weekly rota. The refectory was a place of quiet contemplation where communal meals were accompanied by regular spiritual readings. By contrast, the Baroque era introduced a clearer division of functions, more refined tableware – and a far greater diversity of ingredients, as goods imported from newly "discovered" lands overseas gradually found their way into monastic kitchens.

These two periods were not selected to establish a continuous historical timeline, but to enable comparison. Juxtaposing them reveals how kitchen tools, but also culinary customs and attitudes towards food evolved over time. In the Baroque period, the range of ingredients expanded, dining habits became more elaborate, and serving practices more comfortable. More broadly, these developments illustrate how monastic rules both shaped and in turn adapted to the realities of daily life.

In autumn 2024, the first test run of an experience-oriented prototype took place at Rein Abbey. Inside a 360-degree environment, visitors moved through the reconstructed spaces and followed the simulated daily routine of a monk.

Both digital models were developed using open-source tools: Blender for detailed spatial modelling, and Unity for the interactive experience. Together, these tools made it possible to create a simulation that is not only visually convincing but also fully functional: a simulation capturing daily routines, the movement of people, and the rhythms of monastic life.

Test run and feedback

In autumn 2024, the first test run of an **experience-oriented prototype** took place at Rein Abbey. Inside a 360-degree environment, visitors moved through the reconstructed spaces and followed the simulated daily routine of a monk. They were free to navigate independently and to discover the underlying logic of monastic operations.

The primary goal, however, was not to test the technology itself, but **to observe user behaviour.** Participants' reactions, movements, questions, and patterns of interaction were carefully analysed. The result confirmed a strong interest in the topic – perhaps unsurprisingly, as food is a universal human need. At the same time, it became clear that the 3D environment should not be overloaded with explanations, but enriched with meaningful activities. What users wanted was a truly immersive experience.

From the outset, two main user groups were identified: school classes and the general public.

This **appetite for interactive depth** – for active participation rather than passive viewing – became a key insight for the next development phase. The forthcoming version will be more sophisticated in terms of customisation, branching responses, and dynamic roles.

Output as an educational tool

From the outset, **two main user groups** were identified: school classes and the general public. For schools, the 3D environment functions as an extension of the educational programme. It is not a substitute for teaching, but a spatial complement to it, transforming learners from passive listeners into active explorers. The plan for general audiences is to provide online access via VR headsets. Within the broader framework of the *Culinary Heritage of the Cistercians in Central Europe* project and its educational programmes, the 3D environment functions as a form of museum education that enhances understanding by engaging multiple senses. While this output represents an independent unit, its purpose is not to draw attention away from the other educational programmes, but to support them in meeting their educational goals.

Conclusion: interpretation, not reconstruction

The digital model is not intended to replace the experience of the physical site itself. Rather, it offers a **scenario** that helps users grasp how a monastic kitchen once functioned. It does not present a definitive image of the past but stages it as a spatial experience. Users are guided, but not constrained.

By combining research, educational practice, and digital technology, the project demonstrates a sustainable approach to unlocking aspects of cultural heritage that cannot easily be conveyed through traditional means. In this concept, the kitchen and refectory are not merely reimagined historical spaces, but places of discovery.

In conclusion, it can be said that the project has yielded both an innovative tool of interpretation and valuable methodological insights into working with a subject that is at once ordinary and universal, yet deeply shaped by specific cultural contexts. It is precisely the connection between these two dimensions – everyday experience and monastic life – that makes the subject of Cistercian dining such a compelling gateway to exploring the spiritual and practical dimensions of life in the past.

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