



Food & Drink

BARCINO  
PUBLISHES AN  
UPDATED VERSION  
OF THE OLDEST  
RECIPE BOOK -  
WRITTEN IN  
CATALAN, EL LLIBRE  
DE SENT SOVÍ

# Medieval cuisine for 21st century gourmets

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• What did our ancestors eat? How did they prepare dishes and what methods did they use? Does modern Catalan cuisine still have a lot in common with the cuisine of the Middle Ages?

According to an updated version of the medieval classic *Llibre de Sent Soví*, published by Barcino – a fascinating exploration of medieval food habits – most recipes we use today date back to the Middle Ages. Published in an attempt to make Catalan cuisine of those times familiar to large audiences, the book appears at a moment when cookery is a hot topic.

The 72 recipes included in the book (written in Catalan with notes to explain the often incomprehensible medieval text) provide a clear idea of just what and how Catalans used to eat centuries ago. Did you know, for instance, that the common *picada*, *sofregit*, and *bunyols*, are also delicacies in the Catalonia of the Middle Ages? Or that the delicious *ànec amb peres* (duck with pears) is being cooked today much in the same way it was centuries ago?

Edited by philologist Joan Santanach, and with a prologue by celebrity chef Carme Ruscalleda, the book is the most far-reaching testimony we have of Catalan gastronomic tradition. It provides a privileged insight into the cuisine of the territory of the old Aragón crown. "It also



Most of today's recipes date back to the Middle Ages/ MUSEU D'ARQUEOLOGIA DE CATALUNYA-OLÈRDOLA

focuses on the Mediterranean region, especially the Italic peninsula", Santanach writes in the introduction to the book.

"It is a key work for those who want to get to know the medieval world. Nowadays cuisine raises a lot of interest, it has prestige, but there is also an important gastronomic tradition that comes from the Middle Ages that we want to pay tribute to", said Carles Duarte, Barcino's director. He also announced that an English edition of the medieval classic will soon be available.

Meanwhile, Ruscalleda encourages readers to read this work as a recipe book which

"follows a very remote culinary landscape: spit roasted meat or slow-cooked stews in pots hung above wooden fires, slow pot-ages, spicy, thick *picades*, and many more", she mentions.

While most of the recipes are interesting from a historical point of view, at the same time they are less valuable as a source of inspiration for modern cooks. Nevertheless they provide good material for those who may want to use them for a themed menu. Many recipes are slow-cooked dishes such as stews, soups and sauces, but lacking indications about quantities, procedures or the list of and ingredients.



**Llibre de Sent Soví**

Author: Anonymous  
Editorial Barcino/ Barcelona

Far from being the work of one author, the text reflects the references and knowledge of a whole period in history, situated in the origins of the gastronomic history of the country.

## A bit of history

The *Llibre de Sent Soví* is based on a sole surviving manuscript, a copy made in the 15th century and currently held in the Biblioteca Històrica Universitària de València. The work was probably written in the first half of the 14th century, by an anonymous author. Later on, the book received many notes, corrections and additions, by numerous chefs and cooks. The edition published by Barcino is the latter 15th century version.

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