

Food and Medicine in the Time of the Epicureans in Ancient Greece and Rome

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 23, 2022 at 3:56 AM

Ancient Honey Cakes! And Birthday Cakes!

Excerpt from a website with a [recipe \(but this one has nuts\)](#):

Quote

One of the foods mentioned several times in my novel are honey cakes, which are offered up to the gods in thanks. I was intrigued by the idea of these cakes and how I could recreate them today. What were their origins? Why did the ancients offer up cakes to their deities?

If any of the ancient myths are to be believed, the gods of ancient Greek and Roman antiquity loved a bountiful meal. The stories left to us by Ovid, Herodotus, Virgil, Homer and others are ripe with stories of grand feasts enjoyed by the gods, or the gods meddling in mortal banquets such as the feast of King Midas in which all of the food tragically turned to gold. In fact, for centuries beyond ancient times, the wedding celebrations of Cupid and Psyche and Peleus and Thetis have been common artistic subjects for vases, frescoes and paintings of the great masters.

The feasts on Mount Olympus were similar to those enjoyed on earth save in abundance, superior taste, luxury and perhaps the addition of the divine ambrosia. A traditional ancient Roman banquet would have begun with eggs and ended with fruit, and the final course was often accompanied by sweet desserts such as cake.

Cake is a dish that has been around for thousands of years, and was enjoyed by the ancient Egyptians well before the Greeks and Romans had their fill. Paintings in the tomb of Pharaoh Ramesses II, who ruled from 1304 to 1237 B.C.E. show what archaeologists think might be a type of folded honey cake, likely made from flour, eggs, honey, dates and nuts. The Egyptian specialty feteer meshaltet, which is a thin folded pastry (and might even be the precursor to the French croissant), is descended from these cakes.

One of the first printed recipes for honey cake appears in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, published in Greece in 180 B.C.E.. It is called *Enkhytoi* and the book describes it as a flat, molded cake made from honey, fine flour and eggs. Like many recipes of the time there were no proportions listed, but modern recreations of these cakes show us that

the consistency is that of a sponge cake.

Birthday cakes are also ancient, as the first century poet, Ovid, wrote about in his elegiac letters, titled *Tristia*,..."

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Logic might have it that honey cakes very well could have been eaten at the monthly 20th celebrations? Just an idea that is fun to think about. I do wonder if there are recipes without the nuts.