Blancmange

By Sheryl Boyle

A pure white dish called Blancmange that consisted of five ingredients was served as a part of the Quattrocento Italian sensory banquet. As a recipe, it was derived from a medieval dish called mortrews, or mortar1.

Blancmange is a simple dish, strikingly so amidst the complex and colorful banquet tables of the late medieval and early Renaissance era. In the first Italian Renaissance cookbook called The Art of Cookery written by the famous Italian chef, Maestro Martino (circa 1450) the five ingredients for blancmange are almond milk, chicken breast, sugar, white bread and rose water. Served during the first or second formal service of a typical four-course banquet, blancmange would have been served alongside dishes such as pork livers, meats with relish, tortes and pies, sausages, roast veal, chicken, rabbit and fowl dressed in their skin or feathers and golden tortes.2

Consistent with Humanist ideas of improving upon the ideas of the ancients before them, the banquets of the early Italian Renaissance embraced traditions from the past, including medieval cookery and constructed an improved version of eating and health. Foremost in this literature is Bartolomeo Sacchi’s treatise in Latin entitled De honesta voluptate et valetudine (On Right Pleasure and Good Health) first printed in 1474.3 Sacchi, commonly known by the name Platina, had met Martino in the summer of 1463, and likely received a copy of The Art of Cookery, which was printed in vernacular Italian. In De honesta, Platina constructs a treatise of ten parts that he writes in Latin, the primary language of knowledge dispersion in Europe among the elite. De Honesta directly borrows approximately ninety-five percent of Martino’s text and to it adds a theoretical pretext laden with ancient, medieval and Renaissance theoretical concepts. Platina is described by the French scholar Raybaud as being

1 In Food in History, author Reay Tanahill describes the dish known as frumentry as “a salt-neutralizing accompaniment - a pudding made from whole wheat and almond milk was a side dish for venison. Later it became known as mortrews from the mortar that it was made in (boiled and pureed meat, stock, eggs, pepper, ginger).” (New York: Random House, 1988), p 182.
2 Claudio Benoprat, Storia della gastronomia italiana (History of Italian Gastronomy) (Milan: Mursia, 1990), pp 74-75.
3 De Honesta was Sacchi’s first major publication, following upon a short treatise called Contra Amores (Against Love Affairs) in 1471. Mary Ella Milham’s translation to Platina’s On Right Pleasure and Good Health is prefaced by her thorough introduction to the Life and Works of Platina, wherein she deduces that Platina’s text was likely composed in the summer of 1465 (p.15 Milham) and published in about 1470 (p. 25 Milham). He is most noted for becoming the first librarian of the new Vatican Library in 1475 and his ensuing publication of Vitae Pontificum (The Lives of the Popes) in 1479.
“consumed...in trying to reconcile Aristotelianism with Platonism, Epicureanism with Stoicism, the contemplative and active lives...”

In both Martino and Platina, there is repeated attention to blancmange and its recipe, with great care taken to emphasize the importance its whiteness, the absence of texture and its perfected form in the Renaissance.

Can the theory of the senses in the Quattrocento better illuminate our understanding of blancmange and of mortar and vice-versa? In banquets described as entirely sensory experiences it is strange to have such a plain white dish included amongst colorful and elaborate compositions. Building mortar would also have been a pure white material as well, but do their similarities end there? Are there deeper links between blancmange and mortar that go beyond their whiteness? In the early Italian Renaissance, sensory theory was in transition from an Aristotelian view that had survived through the Middle Ages to an emerging Platonic view that elevated vision and hearing above the other “lower” senses of smell, taste and touch.

François Quiviger is a librarian at the Warburg Institute and a teacher in their Cultural and Intellectual History and Reception of the Classical World graduate programs. His current research in Medieval and Renaissance studies is focused on sensory perception. In his book, The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art, Quiviger presents a collection of observations on representation of the non-visual senses in the Italian Renaissance, beginning with a description of sensory theory and how it is made manifest in various artistic practices, including banquets. He clearly notes that the representation of non-visual sensation in art must involve the imagination of sensation, since for example, painting can only present visual information. The Renaissance banquet was the exception. By presenting a multi-sensory event of color, taste, music and display, the banquet engaged the senses directly, and was a practice that engaged Humanist theories of sensory perception and health.

Quiviger presents a clear depiction of the Aristotelian theory of sensation that identified the head as containing three ventricles which each oversaw receiving, processing and storing of sensory information. These ventricles were depicted as three “spaces” located at the front, center and back of the head. The “common sense” was situated, like a filter, in the front section of the front ventricle. The eye perceived color to which the common sense then added figure, size, number, movement and rest. Once processed, images were passed along to the larger ventricle space of phantasia or imagination that constructed the impression that informed the second ventricle, estimation (recognition) that then passed the image on to the third ventricle.

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4 Milham, p45.
5 In book VI, recipe 41 of de Honesta Voluptate, Blancmange is described by Platina as better than the dish of the ancients (by Apicus) stating that “even if we are surpassed by them in nearly all the arts, nevertheless in taste alone we are not vanquished, for in the whole world there is no incentive to taste which has not been brought down, as it were, to the modern cooking school, where there is the keenest of discussion about the cooking of all foods.”
6 François Quiviger, The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art. p 15.
7 The map of the head was supplied by Galen. Though it could certainly not have matched his discoveries through dissection, it did correspond with the parts of Aristotle’s theory that he agreed with.
memory. The Aristotelian world appears through multi-sensory impressions initiated by seeing color. Artists (or cooks) construct images in their mind that are then made visible through their art which were best made with multi-sensory aspects or references.

The emerging Platonic definition of the senses and their hierarchy is depicted by Quiviger through the drawing entitled “The Hierarchy of the Five Senses” (published in 1574 by Achille Bocchius). The drawing shows an obelisk with five steps, the lowest being touch (hands), then taste (mouths), smell (nose), hearing (ears) and finally sight (eyes). Platonic philosophy separated the intellectual/higher senses of sight and hearing which did not require direct contact to be perceived from the lower “animal” senses of smell, taste and touch. Ficino later defined the higher senses by their ability to contain harmony, grace and proportion.

On the chapter dedicated to smell, Quiviger notes that subtle smell contributed to perceived innocence. He notes that Venus and the Virgin are both associated with the rose, rather than being opposed to each other as good and bad. Stench was associated with death. Miasma, the poisonous odors emanating from decaying bodies that were understood as life threatening rather than the decaying matter itself. Flowers and their image evoked the sense of smell, a key part of the Renaissance banquet. Quiviger notes that Platina recommends scattering seasonal flowers on banquet tables and he presents the image by Giulio Romano of The Horae Scattering Flowers on the Table of the Gods where a pure white banquet tablecloth is scattered with fragrant flowers. He further notes that Platina recommends herbs to scent the table when flowers are not available in the winter months.

The anticipated chapter on banquets by Quiviger is disappointingly only fourteen pages long. He notes that the Italian banquet holds much potential for expanding the discourse on sensory theory through its total engagement with the senses, and yet seems lost when searching for connections due to the lack of material written on the topic. He states that analogies between painting and gastronomy were not a part of artistic literature due to their humble association with the lower senses – a point this paper hopes to disprove. He focuses on a broad range of associated topics relating to the concepts of variety and abundance. Banquet elements such as the furniture, the art of folding napkins and the associated paintings of senses are discussed but little about the food and the ritual of the banquet itself. Of interest to this paper, Quiviger points out the use of scented water used by diner guests to wash their hands between the courses of the meal.

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8 Quiviger, p 18.
9 Quiviger, p 22-23.
In his introduction to the translation of Maestro Martino’s De arte coquinaria (The Art of Cookery), Luigi Ballerini gives us an account of the world of early Italian Renaissance food through Martino and the emergence of his recipes via Platina’s Latin transcription and treatise. Ballerini is an accomplished poet, professor of Italian literature at UCLA, and a historian of gastronomy. His account of the cook and his recipes traces the life of Platina through whom Martino was discovered. He clearly attributes the contributions of Martino and Platina as critical in moving beyond the political functions of the banquet towards one of gastronomy that combined health with the hedonism typically associated with the banquet. He quotes Massimo Monanari, the founder of the Slow Food movement in his description of later 15th century banquets as a spectacle demarking the power of the host, rather than the tastes of the dishes served. Ballerini sees Platina in contrast to this, as a true Humanist, “envisioning every aspect of his life as an expression of Renaissance ideals, including the manner in which he dined, the persons with whom he broke bread, and the foods that were prepared. No dish was served at his table casually: each recipe and formula had a unique place in the humanist culinary hierarchy. Some foods had symbolic meaning; others were intended to balance the humours of his fellow revelers...”

Platina’s reorientation of the topic of food away from issues of bodily pleasure and excess and towards medical concerns and health was endorsed by the church. Ballerini goes further to state that the art of culinary pleasure in the early Renaissance was on par with other arts (such as pleasure derived from an excellent painting, building, music, pottery etc.) and that pleasure was the ultimate goal of all artistic research. While neglecting to provide the reader with a reference for this broad statement, the reader is convinced of the important role of De Honesta in Humanist theory and practice.

Ballerini notes that Martino’s text was unique in its time in clearly naming ingredients and disseminating the specific techniques for preparing the food. He also notes Martino’s obsessive treatment of blancmange in the text, and lists it as one of the two instances where medieval cookery ideas appear. He describes typical medieval cookery as associated with a desire for visual gratification and traces its roots through Catalan to Arab cookery.

Other unique elements in the text noted by Ballerini are Martino’s specific mention of texture including notes designating the size of cut ingredients as well as the use of traditional mortar and pestle, and the the use of the medieval stamine or sieve. Ballerini notes that the Art of Cooking is laced with alchemical subtleties, unique small details and gestures although he does not elaborate on what these might be.

This paper proposes that the careful selection of the five ingredients for blancmange and their symbolic origins were mirrored in the etymological connection to building mortar. It will further argue that the art of alchemy will help illuminate a connection to the five senses, with a

10 Ballerini, p 4.  
11 Ballerini, p 7  
12 Ballerini, p11  
13 Ballerini, p 29.
focus on the corporeal (lower) senses of smell, taste and touch and a corresponding muting of the intellectual senses of sight and sound.

Blancmange and the Renaissance banquet illuminate the confluence of sensory theories in the Italian Renaissance, the roots of our modern vision-based society. So what was left behind in the separation of the intellectual senses from the lower senses? And how might have building materials such as mortar suffered from this shift?

This paper will use the methods of historical research with a certain degree of interpretation to give depth to the story of blancmange, its ingredients, its origins and its connections across disciplines.

The Easy answer – it is about humoral theory

The treatise by Platina draws connections between theory and cooking, including theories of health via the humours. It is clear from the first chapter of de Honesta that Platina was fully aware of humoral theory, and its division of foods into a classification matrix delineated by the four Aristotelian elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water) and their corresponding humours (Black Bile, Blood, Yellow Bile and Phlem) along with the degrees of Hot, Cold, Dry and Wet. The theory of humours required cooks to balance ingredients in a meal with the needs of their patrons based on their natural temperament, their aliments, their likes and dislikes.

In humoral theory, the human body is typically understood to be a little hot and a little wet. In her essay, Birth of the Modern Diet published in Scientific American, Rachel Lauden accounts for the unusual ingredients in blancmange by arguing that they are a result of their medicinal location in the humoral chart. Chicken, almonds, sugar and bread were all located near the balance point of the humours and are perfectly aligned with the natural state of the human body. Martino and Platina would have been aware of this theory but although this accounts for the inclusion of the ingredients in a banquet, it does not account for the painstaking attention given to the use of the mortar and pestle to mash the ingredients, the straining of the texture out of the dish through a stamine or sieve, nor the attention to the whiteness through careful and constant stirring and finally the use of only white ingredients.

On Whiteness in the recipe

In his opening chapter Platina also makes a reference to the senses; “Moreover, who is stolid, as if alienated from the senses because of his sanctity and severe life, as some would want it, that he is not suffused by some pleasure of body or mind if he has held to temperance in eating, from which comes good health, and to integrity and consistency in action, from which happiness arises?”

Platina here draws the connection between the senses and pleasure in both body and mind.

14 Platina, Book 1, paragraph 4. (Milham translation, p103)
While Ballerini brings to light many contextual forces that make Martino’s text unique, he leaves the recipes and organization of the treatise to speak for themselves. Of note for this paper is that each chapter begins with a white ingredient; white meat/fowl, blancmange and blancmange over capon, white sauce, white torte, elderflower fritters (white), frittata (white and yellow) and finally sturgeon meat. Although each is not perfectly white, it is exceptional that so much white appears intentionally at the beginning of each chapter, followed by recipes that clearly involve color. Platina stresses the importance of white in various descriptions of ingredients, such as sugar where he notes “Surely, the whiter it is, the better…”\(^{15}\)

### Alchemy as the link?

In his essay “Some Basic Aspects of Medieval Cuisine” the medieval gastronomy historian Paul Freedman commends Platina’s efforts to elevate the art of the cuisine to intellectual status, but states that while it was not viewed with the same seriousness as art, architecture or painting it was highly popular.\(^{16}\) Freedman agrees with Ballerini that extensive social symbolism was embedded in the event of dining; for example what foods were meant for the lower classes, and what were appropriate for nobility. He laments the fact that not enough serious study has been given to the material and cultural history of dining.

Freedman describes many of the typically medieval aspects of cooking, among them the passion for spices (including sugar which was used as we use salt today), a great emphasis on color (especially red and gold), great interest in texture (such as the slippery texture of aspic), the use of special effects and elaborate and highly processed dishes. Freedman places these concepts under the headings of varied colors, illusion and transformation – all strikingly similar to concepts used in medieval alchemy, yet he makes no mention of alchemy\(^{17}\). The courses of a banquet were not divided by types of food, but rather by techniques of cooking; first boiled, then roasted, then fried foods, perhaps preceded by a serving of cold foods.\(^{18}\)

### The transformation in blancmange

The technique for making blancmange is focused on the mortar and pestle to take recognizable forms of the original ingredients and transform them into a completely different form. Platina’s recipe for blancmange in De Honesta voluptate et valetudine book VI section 41 (also called leucophagum) reads as follows:

(for 12 guests):

- Pound well in a mortar two pounds of almonds, soaked overnight in water and skinned
- Grind in the same mortar the boned breast of capon

\(^{15}\) Platina, Book 2, recipe 15, On Sugar (Milham translation, p157)
\(^{16}\) Paul Freedman, Some Basic Aspects of Medieval Cuisine. p 44.
\(^{17}\) Freedman, p 51.
\(^{18}\) Freedman, p 49.
• And add bread crust after it has been softened with verjuice (highly acidic juice from sour fruit or unripe grapes)
• Besides add an ounce of ginger and a half pound of sugar
Mix all this together and when it has been mixed, pass it through a meal-sifter (stamine) into a clean pot. Then let it boil on coals on a slow fire and stir often so it will not stick to the pot. When it has cooked, put in
• Three ounces of rose water

Through this process the almonds are transformed from brown nuts into white milk by soaking, waiting, peeling and then pounding in the mortar. The chicken is transformed from pink flesh into white mash “in the same mortar” assuming it has already been boiled. The hard bread has been broken down with the vinegar-like substance of young grapes to a mash, and the sugar has been transformed from white granules to liquid in the pot. The ginger seems optional depending on the recipe. The stamine is described in Martino’s The Art of Cookery as a cloth through which ingredients are passed like a sieve, purifying the mixture by ridding it of all texture. The final substance is a white milky liquid that is poured into a clean pot and cooked slowly. He also notes that the reason to stir the mixture often is to ensure that no blackened bits get into the white sauce into which the rosewater is added – certainly to give it fragrance at this point in the process. The mixture is poured into a mould where it gels and then it is turned out onto a serving board. The final product would certainly have no resemblance of the initial ingredients.

Mortar: "bowl for pounding," c.1300, from Old French mortier "bowl; builder's mortar," from Latin mortarium "bowl for mixing or pounding," also "material prepared in it," of unknown origin and impossible now to determine which sense was original (see morbid). Late Old English had mortere, from the same Latin source, which might also be a source of the modern word.19.

The transformative effect of the mortar and pestle on ingredients was common in medieval arts including medicine, architecture, cookery and alchemy to name a few. The Apothecary used the mortar and pestle, crucial for transforming disparate ingredients into health-giving medicines, as its guild symbol. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, came an influx of Greek medicine into Florence20. A Spesieria (drugstore) was opened in Santa Maria Novella where medicines, oils, ointments and perfumes were all made under the same roof. The key instrument for the making of these medicines was the mortar and pestle21.

Architecture was also dependent upon the mortar and pestle for the preparation of building mortar. In A Dictionary of the Science and Practice of Architecture, Peter Nicholson describes building mortar “...that was prepared for use by being beat in a very strong wooden bucket made for the purpose; each mortar beater had his own bucket, which he placed upon any level part of the work, and with a kind of rammer, or wooden pestle, first beat the lime alone, about a quarter of a peck at a time, to which when formed into a complete but rather thin paste, with
set-water, he then gradually added the other ingredient, keeping it constantly in a degree of toughness by continuance of beating.”

Building mortar is typically made of quicklime, sand, water and often pozzolana. Quicklime is chalklike in appearance - the best is pure white and is formed by burning limestone or shells in a kiln. It was the key ingredient of any mortar or cement up until the 18th century. The transformed stones or shells lose all of their weight and color in the process of burning and become a lightweight, pure white replica of the stone it was. Various types of sand, from coarse (for an undercoating material) to fine white marble dust (used for the best plasters, fine mortars and fresco work) are added to quicklime to give it binding abilities. Pozzolana was used to increase the speed of curing for mortars and concretes and allowed typical lime mixtures to cure under water. Pozzolana is white, red or black volcanic ash in three forms: a fine powder, lumps or tuffs. In a volcanic eruption such as Mount Vesuvius near Rome, large “volcanic bombs” are spewed from the volcano. The volcanic matter spins and solidifies in the air before hardening, leaving a rounded loaf-like material with a cracked crust that resembles bread. In order for this tuff to be used in mortar, it must be broken down into a fine powder.

When quicklime comes into contact with water, it bubbles violently and produces great heat and steam and is considered to be “cooking”. It is then typically slaked and can be aged for years (without exposure to air) to create a fine pure white mortar. In his treatise, the Roman architect Vitruvius describes aging the lime putty for up to 300 years to achieve the finest quality mortar. Finally, when the wet lime is mixed with a fine sand or white marble dust, pozzolana and exposed to air, it sets and returns to a stone-like substance.

In A Natural History of the Senses, Diane Ackerman notes a curious fifth ingredient that was added to building mortar – rosewater. As part of the sensory experience of mosques, builders mixed rosewater or musk into the mortar, which was released into the air when the midday sun warmed the surface of the building. This olfactory element of Western building mortar is not immediately apparent, but can be found in the Middle-Eastern roots of mortar, much like blancmange.

The etymological connections between mortar and blancmange/mortrews are now more evident. The list of ingredients have significant similarities: a base white substance (quicklime/capon), a liquid (water/almond milk), a setting agent (loaf of tuff/loaf of bread), a fine granule (sand/sugar) and a fragrant agent (rosewater for both). In addition, both are prepared with the mortar and pestle and are magically transformed away from their initial matter to a pure white substance. Unfortunately these wonderful similarities do not give us any deeper understanding of why so much effort might be exerted to eat mortar or to build with blancmange.

Alchemy used the mortar and pestle in a similar way to the other arts described above. Although typically described as either the precursor to modern chemistry that sought to turn

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base metals into gold or a magical discipline searching for the elixir of life, alchemy is a much more serious art, and would certainly have had significant impact in the time of Platina and Martino. In Alchemy the Golden Art, Andrea De Pascalis defines it as, “an attempt to understand man’s relationship with nature; a code of conduct; the search for transcendental experiences; a complex scientific system revealing an unsuspected capacity for intuition, considering the age in which it was practiced; a cultural phenomena of such intensity that during its golden age it was to influence the arts, literature, law, politics and customs in general.”

While extremely difficult to describe and understand from within our techno-scientific worldview of the 21st century, alchemy is a deeply ancient art that persisted through the ages crossing the boundaries of disciplines through material and allegorical operations.

The color of blancmange

Food critic Emoko Davies’ review of the 2011 Renaissance exhibition at the Canberra National Gallery describes the food scenes in various paintings such as Vittore Carpaccio’s (1502) “The Birth of the Virgin”. In this painting blancmange, a typical Renaissance first-meal after childbirth is being served to Mary’s mother Saint Anne to restore her strength. As we have observed earlier in this paper, the dish certainly contained the ingredients that would have been closest to neutral in the humoural medicine matrix. In this nurturing role this seems appropriate but again we come back to the whiteness of the dish. Why is it so important that the ingredients be served as something other than in their original forms? Can the cross-disciplinary art of alchemy give us any clues to the symbolic aspects of this dish? And why might a building material follow a similar transformation, made with similar tools? And finally, why the attention to the whiteness? Certainly it would have been obvious to the painter Carpaccio in 1502 when he painted the scene. So how can painting lead us into this investigation?

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25 Davies also notes that blancmange was served as the first dish at the wedding of Lorenzo the Magnificent’s sister into the Rucellai family. The Art of Food Reborn, The Canberra Times (Food and Wine), Dec.21, 2011, p8.
The architect, Leon Battista Alberti was a critical figure in the early Italian Renaissance. His early treatises include one on painting, De Pictura published in 1435 and an architectural treatise, De re aedificatoria (circa 1450) which was an “improvement” on Vitruvius’ Ten Books on Architecture. His familiarity with the realms of both painting and architecture is useful for this paper. We can also be quite certain that Platina, embedded in Florentine academic culture, would have known of these works.

In De Pictura, Alberti describes white (and black) as being used to raise or lower the “value” of a color. White is light, black is shadow\(^26\). Additionally, white in frescos is described by Alberti as “lime white”\(^27\).

Finally, the high values resulting from modeling entirely with white, and strong intensities, gave the surface a bright, candid appearance. "White", Alberti adds in the same passage, "lends gaity (hilaritatem) not only when placed between gray and yellow, but almost to any color," which is one reason why he recommended caution in its use.\(^28\)

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\(^{26}\) J. Ackerman, 13.

\(^{27}\) Ibid 15

\(^{28}\) Ibid 15
Alberti was keenly aware of the ancient treatises that were coming out of obscurity in his time. His own treatises demonstrate an awareness of such works and his excellent knowledge of many languages including Latin and Greek gave depth to his writings. For Alberti's treatise on painting, Aristotle's De Coloribus may have been the source of the concept that all colors come from black and white.

By the time of Leonardo, the concept of white and black had changed. Leonardo denotes them both as the extremes of all colors\(^{29}\), like a linear axis, or as a non-color, but certainly not as the source of all colors. As a painter, he sees white and black as modifiers of colors, with light always being entwined with a color, but yet he recognizes that those discussing the theory of color might say that only black and white are true colors.\(^{30}\) The art and architecture critic James Ackerman describes the shift in understanding of white a century later with Leonardo,

> The role of white in Leonardo's theory is entirely different from its function in the Quattrocento; white is a wholly passive non-color" more receptive to any color than the surface of any other body except a mirror: For that reason we shall say that because white is empty, devoid of color, when it is illuminated with the color of any luminous body it takes on the color of that luminous body. Black would not do so, for black is like a broken vessel, which is deprived of the capacity to contain anything". (T. 215 [205])\(^{31}\)

**The Alchemy of Blancmange**

The alchemical process is denoted by stages that are characterized by changing colors. As De Pascalis writes in the Alchemy the Golden Art, all things come from the Prima Materia or Chaos described as the Black Work or nigredo. It is associated with the darkness of chaos, death, mortification, earth, foul smell and coldness. The first transformation upon this Prima Materia is the White Work or albedo and is a purifying, washing and whitening associated with water, moistness and pleasant smell. The third transformation is the Red Work or rubedo associated with fire, heat and love.\(^{32}\) Often a fourth transformation xanthosis or yellowing is added and is associated with yellow, the element air and dryness. Fundamentally, out of black (Prima Materia) comes everything. The first transformation is to move from black chaos to make white, out of which come all the colors of life.\(^{33}\)

White is celebrated in other aspects of alchemy such as in its representation of its tools, the vessel and the furnace as the Philosophical Egg which reaches back to a Greek narrative whereby the Night (black) gave birth to the cosmic egg (white) which then hatches Eros (red) and brings harmony to chaos.

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\(^{29}\) De Pictura. P31
\(^{30}\) De Pictura, p 32


It is certainly true that blancmange is a dish that is perfectly located in the slightly wet and moist corner of the humoral medical chart, but the origins of that quartering of medicine, science and chemistry, as well as theory of art and processes appears to rest in the more ancient art of alchemy.

We have seen that the chapters of Martino’s Art of Cookery each begin with a white dish or ingredient, and later include other colors. That the first process of cooking would be directed at achieving whiteness aligns with the first alchemical process follows the typical allegorical structure that lasted through medieval times, for example, that birth is like whiteness and thus in cooking we should reflect this in whiteness.

The burning of dark stones to create super-white quicklime was also a part of this first alchemical step, and makes the pairing with blancmange even more evident. The mortar and pestle, and their etymological connections to death “mort” (and hence birth) via transformation of color and properties also give depth to the process of cooking and making mortar.

**The sense of blancmange**

While this paper began by looking for a connection between the separation of the “noble” senses from the “animal” lower senses and a connection between building mortar and blancmange, the investigation has led to a deeper connection in these two dishes through their process of transformation – namely their roots in alchemy. The alignment of the ingredients of blancmange with the slightly warm and moist humoral matrix to would certainly have been a dish consumed to give sustenance to the body after childbirth, but further investigation revealed that the humours and their associated colors were also built upon the colors of the alchemical transformation. The burning of limestone to create quicklime dates back to Ancient Greece and Rome. The transformation from dirty dark stone to pure white chalk and fine white paste would certainly have been magical.

The silent element in this investigation of culinary and architectural mortar is rosewater and the associated olfactory dimension. In comparing the ingredients of the two recipes blancmange was an allegory of building mortar where each ingredient represented another. The exception is rosewater where it is directly added to both recipes. Why was rosewater taken out of building mortar and yet remained in blancmange? Perhaps blancmange allowed the forgotten olfactory dimension of building mortar to be recovered. A further clue that this link requires additional research is seen in depictions of alchemists (See Figure 3) surrounded by their various tools and symbols of transformation often holding or surrounded by roses. Perhaps by looking through alchemy and the processes involved we might find deeper connections to the senses and their transformation in the early Renaissance.
Figure 3. An Alchemist holding roses (17th century miniature) in Alchemy the Golden Art. 28.
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