

# A Survey of Pear Tarts from the Manuscript of Sabina Welserin, 1553

## Signora Serena da Riva

The manuscript written by Sabina Welserin in 1553 contains 205 recipes for making a wide variety of dishes. Within these recipes are a large percentage of pies, pastries and tarts. Of the tarts there are various fruit, nut and custard based examples. For this survey I have chosen to limit the scope to the Pear Tarts. There are four recipes that are labeled by Welserin as Pear Tarts, and of the four, three are exceptionally similar; and it is these that I have chosen to work with. The fourth is provided at the end of the documentation to show how different it is and why I chose not to include it in this survey.

The four tarts being evaluated (numbers 73, 80 and 87) upon first read seem so similar that it appears unlikely that they would produce tarts that taste very different. But, if that were so, why would Welserin include the variations? The only way to determine the answer is to prepare all three tarts.

Focusing on the recipes and scrutinizing the instructions subtle differences become evident. Two of the tarts call for peeling the pears one does not. All three contain sugar, raisins and cinnamon but only one contains cloves. Two of the tarts call for frying the pears in fat and the third has no precooking but does have fat added directly to the tart. All of these differences, plus others that are evident, will have significant effect on the texture and flavor of the finished product.

Within the pages are the original German text, an English translation, my interpretation of the recipes, and some brief explanation of choices made where the original text is vague. Finally, in the interest of creating a flavor as close as possible to what would have existed, there is the recipe and interpretation of a pastry shell, also taken from the Welserin manuscript.

### **The original number 73**

#### *73 Ain birentorten*

Jtem nim biren vnd schels vnnd schneid dinne fledlen/nim ain marck von ainem oxen, zimerrerlach, zúcker, weinberlach vnnd lasß bachen/ hast dú kain marckt, so nim búter oder sonst ain schmaltz.

#### *73 A pear tart*

Take pears and peel them and cut them into thin strips, take beef marrow, cinnamon, sugar and raisins and let it bake. If you do not have any marrow then use butter or another fat.

### **My interpretation**

2/3 C – Raisins – soak a bit in hot water and drain

5 T – Unsalted butter

2 ½ t – Cinnamon

2 T – Sugar

3 to 4 - Pears

Pre-heat oven to 375° F. In a small container mix sugar, raisins and cinnamon; set aside. In another container soften butter using a fork. Prepare tart shell (#61) and chill. Peel pears, cutting off stem and bottom. Cut pears into 3 pieces lengthwise. Lay each slice on its flat side and slice into thin strips. Place in bowl of water to avoid browning. After all pears are sliced drain well and transfer to dry bowl. Add spice mixture and toss well. Smooth up to half of the butter onto the bottom of the tart shell. Put pear filling into tart shell and then dot the top evenly with the remaining butter. Place onto cookie sheet and cook in oven for 55 minutes or until done.

### **Notes:**

I obviously chose not to include beef marrow, mostly because I do not care for it, but also because there is a definite option provided that to me is more palatable. The directions to cut the pears into “thin strips” was a bit confusing, but I believe that is to make sure that the pear is cut into small enough pieces that it will cook completely without the precooking occurring in the other two tarts. I chose to use the softened butter because I do not believe that they would have had the cold, hard butter that is so prevalent in modern times. It would have been easier to cut the butter into little chunks and toss with the pears, but that might effect the results.

## The original number 80

### 80 *Ain torten von biren*

Schneit aús ainer biren 8 oder 12 schnitzlach, darnach die bir groß jst, rests jn ainem schmaltz, nims darnach vnnd legs aúf die torten fein vmber/ vnnd see vnden vnnd oben zúcker, relach, negellen, weinberlach vnnd lasß bachen.

### 80 *A pear tart*

Cut out of each pear eight or twelve slices, according to how large the pear is, fry them in fat, take them after that and lay them nicely around the tart and sprinkle them under and over with sugar, cinnamon, cloves and raisins and let it bake.

### My interpretation

2/3 C – Raisins – soak a bit in hot water and drain

2 T – Sugar

2 t – Cinnamon

½ t – Cloves

3 to 4 – Pears

2 – Sticks unsalted butter

Pre-heat oven to 375° F. In a small container mix sugar, cinnamon and cloves; set aside. Prepare tart shell (#61) and chill. Cut pears in 8 to 12 slices depending on size. Remove seeds and string core – do not peel. Place both sticks of butter in a heavy skillet and melt, allow to get hot enough for frying but do not burn. Set tart shell beside stovetop and sprinkle a good bit of the spice mixture and some of the raisins over the bottom of the crust. Fry slices of pear in butter a few at a time – do not overcrowd the pan. Cook pears until they start to brown a bit – but not too long because when you try to remove them from the butter they will fall apart. Transfer pear slices directly to tart shell and try to place them neatly & attractively in the shell. After you have one layer of pears over the bottom of the crust, sprinkle on more spices & raisins. Continue until all of the pears are done and finish with a layer of spices and a very few raisins. Drizzle a bit of the butter into the tart if you want to. Place onto cookie sheet and cook in oven for 50 minutes or until done.

### Notes:

This one was pretty straight forward. The instructions on cutting would most likely result in cutting the pear lengthwise into medium thickness slices, each in a pear shape. I attempted to do that, but my knife skills are not what they should be. So, some of the slices look good & some not so good. I kept the good ones for the top.

## The original number 87

### 87 *Ain torten von biren zú machen*

So nim die biren vnnd schel die vnnd thú die púetzen saúber heráuß/ vnnd thailt die biren jn 2 tail vnnd schneit schnitz darein, als brait die biren jst/ vnnd schwings jn dinem schenem mel vmb/ darnach lasß ain schmaltz woll haisß werden vnnd rests darin, bis ain wenig braún wirt darnach mach das bedenlin vnnd legs daraúff/ nach zemen/nim zúcker, relach, weinberlach vnnderainander vnnd stres an boden vnnd oben darvmber/ laß ain weil bachen/ darnach nim ain maluasier, thú zúcker darein, zimerrrelach, laß anainander sieden/ geúß daraúf vmber vnnd lasß ain wenig bachen.

### 87 *To make a pear tart*

Then take the pears and peel them and remove the cores and divide the pears into two parts and cut them into slices as wide as the pear is and turn them over in a little good flour. Then heat up some fat and roast them therein, until they are a little browned, afterwards prepare the pastry shell and lay them on top of it, close together. Take cinnamon, sugar and raisins mixed and sprinkle them on the crust and over the top of it, let it bake a while. After wards take Malavosia, put sugar into it and cinnamon, let it boil together, pour it over the tart and let it cook a short while.

**My interpretation:**

½ C – Raisins – soak a bit in hot water and drain

2 t + 3 t – Sugar

2 t + 2 t – Cinnamon

¾ C – Wine made from Malvasian Grapes – also known as Malmsey Madeira (contains sulfites)

3 to 4 – Pears

½ to ¾ C - Flour

2 – Sticks unsalted butter

Pre-heat oven to 375° F. In a small container mix 2 t sugar and 2 t cinnamon; set aside. Prepare tart shell (#61) and chill. Peel pears. Cut in half lengthwise and remove core. Place flat side down and cut crosswise. Place sliced pears into a bowl of water to avoid browning. After all pears are sliced, drain well. Place flour into dry bowl and flour each slice of pear, put into bowl. Place both sticks of butter in a heavy skillet and melt, allow to get hot enough for frying but do not burn. Set tart shell beside stovetop and sprinkle a good bit of the spice mixture and about half of the raisins over the bottom of the crust. Fry slices of pear in butter a few at a time – do not overcrowd the pan. Cook pears until they start to brown a bit – but not too long because when you try to remove them from the butter they will fall apart. Transfer pear slices directly to tart shell. After you have one layer of pears over the bottom of the crust, sprinkle on more spices & raisins. Continue until all of the pears are done and finish with a layer of spices and a very few raisins. (Your numbers of layers will vary depending on the size of your tart.) Place onto cookie sheet and cook in oven for about 50 minutes. While the tart is baking put the wine, 3 t sugar and 2 t cinnamon into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce a little bit. After about 30 minutes in the oven, pull the tart out and drizzle wine mixture over the tart (make sure you stir it up before pouring) – resume cooking until done.

**Notes:**

The addition of wine to this version caused me to reduce the amount of sugar and increase the amount of cinnamon. The wine will bring in more sugar, but the aggressive flavor of it will compete with the cinnamon, necessitating more. One assumption that I made is that the instruction to “boil” the wine is to create a syrup, thus the reduction. In many locations in the manuscript Welserin calls for Malavosia wine. It is uncertain if she is calling for a specific variatal or for one of the wines produced in a specific region. In an attempt to get the most appropriate vintage I spent some time with my local wine merchant and we found the following in his wine manual:

*Malvasia*

[mal-VAH-zha; mal-VAH-zha]

Grape that has existed for about 2,000 years. It's believed to have come from the area around the Aegean Sea, possibly from what is now the southwestern area of Turkey and the islands between Turkey and Greece. Malvasia is primarily a white-wine grape, but it has many known subvarieties, including a red version called Malvasia Nera. The red grape is chiefly grown in Italy-around Piedmont in the north and Puglia in the south. It produces very perfumy wines and lends a delightful fragrance to some Italian red wines. The white variations are better known, the most recognized strains being Malvasia Bianca del Chianti, Malvasia del Lazio, Malvasia delle Lipari, Malvasia di Candia, Malvasia di Sardegna and Malvasia Istiana (or Malvasia Friulana). These white varieties are grown all around the Mediterranean in one form or another. They produce golden, perfumy, flavorful wines with hints of apricots, musk, and almonds. Unfortunately, Malvasia is not an extremely high-yielding vine and is being replaced by better-producing but less-flavorful grapes such as trebbiano in Italy and Viura (macabeo) in Spain. Malvasia is made into a variety of finished wines-dry, sweet, fortified, and sparkling, but probably is best known for its sweet fortified products. On the island of madeira, the Malvasia variety is called Malmsey and is combined with tinta negra mole and verdelho. The sweetest and richest style of Madeira wine is also often referred to as malmsey. In Portugal some port makers use Malvasia grapes in their white port. The vermentino grape, grown on corsica and sardinia, is thought to be related to Malvasia as well. Malvasia Bianca is also grown in California, mostly in the central valley, and is used primarily in sweet fortified wines. Malvasia is also called Blanca-Roja, Früher Roter Malvasier, and Malvoisie, as well as a host of other names beginning with "Malvasia." ©

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My wine merchant had a bottle of Malmsey Madeira available so it is that I chose to work with. Finally, I have read and reread the comment "Take cinnamon, sugar and raisins mixed and sprinkle them on the crust and over the top of it, let it bake a while." and I cannot decide if this means this is supposed to be a covered tart. I have chosen to interpret it as putting the spices directly onto the crust, place the pears, and then sprinkle over the top of the pears. I am sure either would be acceptable.

### **The original Pie Crust (number 61)**

*61 Ain pastetentaig zú machen zú allen auffgesetzten pasteten*

Nempt ain mell, das pest, so jr bekommen múgen, vngefarlich 2 gút gaúffen oder darnach jr die groß oder klain habenwelt, thiets auff den disch vnnd riert 2 air mit ainem messer daran vnnd saltzt ain wenig, macht jn ainem pfnndlin ain wasser vnnd wie 2 gúte air groß schmaltz, last es als aneinander ergan vnnd sieden/ darnach schit es an das obgemelt mell ob dem disch vnnd mach ain starcken taig vnnd arbeit jn woll, wie dich gút dúnckt, wan es jm somer jst, múß man an des wasser stat ain fleischbrie nemen vnnd an des schmaltz stat ain abscheffet von der súpen nemen, wan der taig gearbeit jst, so machent jn zú ainer rúnden kúgel vnnd thenet jn fein mit den fingern vornen aus oder mit ainem walgelholtz/ das jn der mit ain hechin beleib, darnach lands erstaren an der keltin, darnach setzent daig aúf, jn maß jch eúch gezaigt hab/ aúch balten ain taig zú der teckin vnd welget jn zú ainer deckin vnnd nempt ain wasser vnnd bestreichts oben an der deckin vnnd oben an der aúffgesetzten pasten vnnd thiets mitt den fingern woll zusammen, last an ainem ort ain klain lechlin, vnd das es woll zúsamengedruckt sey, das nicht offenstand/ blassen jn das lechlin, das jr gelassen habt, so wirt die deckin hibsich aúffláuffen, so trúcken das lechlin von stúnd an zú, darnach thits jn offen, set vor ain mell aúff die schissel/ secht, das jr den offen recht haitzt, so wirt es ain schene pasteten, also macht man all aúffgesetzt pasteten den taig.

*61 To make a pastry dough for all shaped pies*

Take flour, the best that you can get, about two handfuls, depending on how large or small you would have the pie. Put it on the table and with a knife stir in two eggs and a little salt. Put water in a small pan and a piece of fat the size of two good eggs, let it all dissolve together and boil. Afterwards pour it on the flour on the table and make a strong dough and work it well, however you feel is right. If it is summer, one must take meat broth instead of water and in the place of the fat the skimmings from the broth. When the dough is kneaded, then make of it a round ball and draw it out well on the sides with the fingers or with a rolling pin, so that in the middle a raised area remains, then let it chill in the cold. Afterwards shape the dough as I have pointed out to you. Also reserve dough for the cover and roll it out into a cover and take water and spread it over the top of the cover and the top of the formed pastry shell and join it together well with the fingers. Leave a small hole. And see that it is pressed together well, so that it does not come open. Blow in the small hole which you have left, then the cover will lift itself up. Then quickly press the hole closed. Afterwards put it in the oven. Sprinkle flour in the dish beforehand. Take care that the oven is properly heated, then it will be a pretty pastry. The dough for all shaped pastries is made in this manner.

### **My interpretation:**

3 C – Flour

1 t – Kosher salt

2 – Eggs, beaten

1/3 C – Water

1/3 + ¼ C – Lard

Measure flour into a goodly size bowl and add salt. Stir together with a knife. Crack eggs into a separate bowl and beat moderately. In a small saucepan combine water and lard, melt and bring to a boil. When the lard has melted and is about to boil add eggs to flour mixture and combine well with knife. Add boiling lard mixture to bowl and combine until well mixed and cool enough to handle. Turn out onto table and knead a bit. Pat dough into a disk shape and wrap with plastic – place in refrigerator. Allow to cool for at least an hour. Roll out on a well floured surface. This makes enough for two tarts or one covered tart.

**Notes:**

The only thing about this that was completely vague was the water to lard ratio. I prefer a tender crust, so I chose to have a high proportion of fat. I originally was thinking that 1/3 C of lard was roughly equivalent to one egg. With that thought I decided on 1/3 C water and 2/3 C of lard. Upon measuring out 1/3 C of lard I decided it looked like more than a good sized egg, so I only added ¼ C to it to come up with what visually looked like two good eggs. I had started out with 2 C of flour (assuming one handful = 1 C), but after I added the boiled mixture it was evident that I needed a good bit more flour. Adding the flour until I reached a good dough consistency I ended up with 3 C of flour. I ended up with enough dough to make one covered pie or two tarts, and since that is what the recipe called for I decided it was fine.

**The Pear Tart that was not included***131 Birentorten zú machen*

Nim die biren vnnd schels, schneids, dan bachs jm schmaltz, thús jn ain morser vnd stosß sý klain, stosß ain rossenzúcker daran vnnd rossenwasser/ thú daran jmber, negellen, rerlen, zúcker, versúch es, mach ain boden wie zu den andern torten, mach kain deckin daraúff vnnd bachs resch.

*131 To make a pear tart*

Take the pears and peel them, then fry them in fat, put them into a mortar and pound them well, put rose sugar and rose water in it, put ginger, cloves, cinnamon and sugar therein. Taste it, make a pastry shell as for other tarts, make no cover for the top and bake until crisp.

**Notes:**

This recipe starts out looking similar to the others. Slicing the pears and frying them, but it then veers off in a completely different direction with all of the pounding and sugar etc... I decided that it would come out nothing like the previous three and that I did not want to include it in the survey. My goal for the survey was to show how things that on the surface seem very similar can turn out very different. I judged that this recipe is already very different and could be excluded from the survey. I still want to cook it eventually, just not right now.

Original German recipies found on web at: <http://staff-www.uni-marburg.de/~gloning/sawe.htm#english>  
Site provides bibliography as:

Das Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin. Hg. von Hugo Stopp. Mit einer Übersetzung von Ulrike Gießmann. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter Heidelberg, 1980.

English translation found on the web at:

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Sabrina\\_Welserin.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Sabrina_Welserin.html) (c) Valoise Armstrong 1998  
Site provides bibliography as:

Welserin, Sabina. Das Kochbuch der Sabina Welserin . From handwritten manuscript, Augsburg, 1553. ed.. by Hugo Stopp, trans. by Ulrike Giessmann. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1980.

**A Conclusion for those reading this without the benefit of samples**

For the competition I allowed the judges to decide for themselves how much of an effect the differences in technique had on the finished products. I would encourage those who are adventurous to try the recipes out themselves, but for those with out the time or wherewithal I will provide my observations.

For tart #73 the lack of frying produced a tart that was considerably juicier, the juice combined with the butter and the taste was succulent. But you still had the distinct “mealy” texture of pears. The simple addition of cloves in #80 provides a substantial punch to the flavor of the pie, making it stand out from the others. Leaving the skins on added to the pear flavor and frying the slices changed the texture considerably from #73, eliminating the “mealiness”. Coating the pear chunks in flour before frying in #87 changed the texture even more, resulting in a creamy texture in the pears. Even after two tries, I still did not up the wine enough and would encourage others to add even more wine. The wine had a considerable dampening factor on the spices in the tart, even with the increase in the quantities.

In all, the subtle differences in instructions resulted in three vastly different tarts, all of them tasty.