

Barley Cakes for Demeter

The Great Earth Mother Goddess



Demeter Δημητηρ is the name of the Great Mother Goddess of the Earth. Her name, in classical Greece pronounced *Dey-meyter*, literally means Earth Mother and was originally spelled Γη Μητηρ and pronounced Gey-meter. Demeter was the goddess of the fruitfulness of the Earth and therefore of every kind of crop, but she was particularly the goddess of barley. Some scholars, including Robert Graves and Goblet d'Aviella, derive her name from the Cretan goddess name, Barley Mother.

BARLEY IS ONE OF THE OLDEST GRAINS KNOWN TO HUMANKIND. IT CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY GROWN in a wider range of climates than any other grain. It was the basis for beer or ale, the oldest known fermented drink. The Saxon word for barley was *bere*, and it seems quite natural that from this comes the German word *bier*, the French *bière* and the English *beer*. Another name for Demeter is Ceres, and it is from this name that the general name for all types of edible grains, *cereals*, is derived.

The legend of Demeter includes the foundation of the Mysteries of Eleusis. They were the most famous of the ancient Mysteries. The Eleusinian Mysteries were unusual among the various mysteries of the ancient world, in that they were open to both men and women, unlike those of Cybele, the Good Goddess, which were open only to women, or of Mithras, the Lord of the Sun, which were open only to men.

'Fireless sacrifices'

In the temples of Demeter, the offerings to the Goddess were 'fireless sacrifices', that is, in their natural state, for example, honeycombs, unspun wool, unpressed grapes and uncooked grain. Demeter embodied the principle of natural, rather than artificial production.

However, among the common people, the offerings left for the Earth Goddess Demeter in those groves, caves and other places which were believed to be sacred to the Goddess were usually barley cakes and honey.

At the ritual feasts held at the Sanctuary of the Guardians, it has been customary for some years to eat barley cakes or bread dipped in honey, followed by wine, mead or ale.

Fortunately, our local supermarket has regular supplies of Barley and Sunflower Seed bread, which is ideal ritually as it acknowledges both the Great Earth Mother and the Lord of the Sun, for whom the Guardians of the Sanctuary hold a special reverence.

On special occasions, special barley cakes are made which include honey, so avoiding the rather messy business of people dipping their bread into the honey before eating it.

RECIPE FOR BARLEY CAKES

The following recipe has been found successful. It combines all the elements of nature. While preparing it, the cook should meditate on the Barley Mother and her bountiful fruitfulness.

Ingredients:

Elemental Correspondences are in brackets.

1½ cups barley flour [Earth]

1 cup self-raising wheat flour [Earth & Air]

1 cup milk [Water]

1 egg [Spirit]

¾ cup liquid honey [Spirit]

Pinch of salt [Fire and Earth]

Fire is also provided by your oven.

Sift the flours and the salt together. Mix in the milk and egg, stirring the mixture. Liquefy the honey by heating it in a double boiler then add it and continue to stir.

Preheat your oven and oven tray to 215° Celsius [450° Fahrenheit]. Drop spoonful of the mixture on to the tray, leaving space so each spoonful can spread out. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes. These cakes are not usually very brown in colour.

The quantities above will make a couple of dozen cakes. After baking, keep the barley cakes in a tight tin, as the honey tends to absorb moisture from the atmosphere.

Barley flour can be purchased at some health-food shops. We have a grain grinder, so we buy pearl barley in our local supermarket and grind it ourselves.

Because barley contains little gluten, an elastic protein, it cannot be used to make a flour that will produce the porous bread with which we are familiar. It can be used to make a flat or unleavened bread-cake, or you can do as we do and mix it with some ordinary self-raising wheat flour in which the air producing substance is included. ■



Holy Guardian Order of the Abbess