

Catalan Honey Nougat
12th Night 2013 A&S entry by
Aryanhwy merch Catmael
(Sara L. Uckelman, liana@ellipsis.cx)

Choice

When I entered the kingdom A&S competition in 2011, one thing I wanted to do, but didn't have the time/availability to do so, was enter something in the culinary arts category. The biggest problem with this is that I'm pretty much limited to things that can be made in advance, easily transported, and served cold. So my choice was motivated by this, and by what I could find in the medieval cookbooks that I own (not many). I was browsing through the *Book of Sent Soví* and found a tantalizing little recipe for honey nougat that looked simple enough, so I decided to try it out. This entry is the second of two attempts at making it, so my documentation will contain some comparative remarks on method.

Source

The *Book of Sent Soví* was written in the first half of the 14th C, and “circulated widely throughout the Middle Ages”¹. The sole remaining MS with the *Book* dates from the 15th C.² The edition/translation from which I'm working contains an appendix with “missing recipes from the *Sent Soví* tradition included in the *Llibre d'aparellar de menjar*” (“Book of food preparation”), and it is actually from this appendix that my recipe comes. The *Llibre* is unpublished, existing in an MS dating between 1360 and 1380.³

Here's is the original Catalan recipe:

Torrans melats, si en vols fer.

Hages avellanes perades e mit-les en una cassola neta, sobre un poc de brases, que es peren. Treu-les-ne e posa-les sobre arena freda; e, quan hauran estat una peça, pera-les.

Si hi vols metre amenles ab pinyons, pera'ls e torra'ls així mateix. Hages mel escumada e coga a carbó. E podeu conèixer quan serà cuita que en metats un poc en aigua.⁴

The translation provided reads:

If you want to make some honey nougat.

Take peeled almonds and put them in a clean casserole dish, over a few coals, which peels them. Take them out and put them on cold sand, and when they have been there awhile, peel them.

If you want to put in almonds with pine nuts, peel them and toast them in the same way. Take skimmed honey and cook it with coal. You can know when it is cooked by putting a little in some water.⁵

1 *The Book of Sent Soví: Medieval recipes from Catalonia*, Joan Santanach, ed., Robin Vogelzang, trans., (Editorial Barcino, 2008), p. 11.

2 *Ibid*, p. 12.

3 *Ibid*, p. 16, fn. 8. The dating of the *Llibre* provides a *terminus ante quem* for the *Book*, since the *Book* was used in the compilation of the *Llibre*.

4 *Ibid*, p. 220.

5 *Ibid*, p. 221.

There's a footnote to the latter which says "as explained in the *Llibre de totes maneres de confits*, to know if the honey is cooked, 'you take some honey and put it in a bowl of cold water, and then the honey you have put in should break like glass'."

Recipe

Here is the final recipe I used:

~40 g pine nuts

~50 g almonds

1/2 cup Spanish thyme honey

Toast pine nuts over low heat until brown; remove. Toast almonds over low heat until brown; remove, wrap in rough cloth, and cool in fridge. When cool, rub vigorously to remove as much of the skins as possible. Chop roughly. Set aside with pine nuts.

Heat honey in small saucepan; bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Boil for ~3 minutes, then add nuts, and continue boiling, stirring regularly, for ~5 minutes. Do not let the honey burn or brown too much.

Transfer to glass container lined with baking paper, and then put into the fridge to cool.

Method

I had never made nougat, and it had been ~20 years since I'd last made candy of any sort, so I have no prior experience to go by. My primary method the first time was to follow the recipe as closely as I could, and see what happens.

For the first batch, I did the "drop in cold water" test, but my water was never cold enough (I filled a bowl and put it in the fridge, and then when I realized that was going to take a long time to cool, transferred it to the freezer for awhile, but even by the time I finished things, it hadn't really cooled). For the second batch, I omitted the water test, and simply stopped boiling the honey when it reached the point where I was worried that it was beginning to burn.

The first thing in the original recipe that I found confusing is that you take peeled almonds, but then put them in a casserole dish over coals in order to peel them. My guess is that the first "peeled" is actually "shelled" -- i.e., take shelled almonds, and then toast them in order to loosen the brown skins that they have, so that they can be removed. I have no coals, so I used a frying pan over (first) a medium-sized burner or (second) a small-sized burner. In the first try, I toasted the almonds and pinenuts together, over high heat with the lid on. However, the two types of nuts toast at different rates, and the pinenuts browned too much while the almonds didn't do anything, so the second try I toasted them separately. Not having any cold sand, I simply put the almonds in the fridge in a rough cloth to cool them. I didn't have much luck rubbing off the skins, though; I'm not sure if I need to toast them longer, or what.

I did not have to skim the honey at all, since I was using modern clarified honey.

In the first batch, I first thought my honey/nuts ratio was way off (way too many nuts), but when the nougat was finished, I actually found I liked the large amount of nuts, and so duplicated the same ratio the second time.

Thoughts for the future

I would love to try making the nougat into shapes; I would need some type of mould or form that is

sufficiently heat resistant. The first batch I simply poured into a round pie plate (lined with baking paper); for the second, I opted for a square loaf pan, which I hope will result in something that I can cut or break into bars.

I'd also like to try cooling down the boiled mixture to a point where it can be touched, and then knead it, to see how/if that changes the consistency. I thought of this after the first batch, but wasn't brave enough to try it after the second.

A brief history of nougat

Modern nougat is this nasty white fluffy stuff, and that is the only nougat I had previously been familiar with, so I was surprised when what I ended up with was roughly jazzed up peanut brittle. It appears that there are in fact three strains of nougat, modernly: white nougat (made with egg whites), brown nougat (without egg whites), and Viennese nougat (made with chocolate and hazelnuts). The white nougat is what I was familiar with; the brown nougat is what I made.

Though the translation of the *Book* calls this “nougat”, it is interesting to note that the original recipe uses *torron*, which is a cognate with Spanish “turrón” (deriving from Latin *torrere* ‘to toast’), which is itself a type of nougat-like candy known in Iberian and Italy (whereas “nougat” under that name is more of a French thing). Interestingly, Wikipedia says that the 16th C *Manual de Mujeres* (“Women’s Handbook”), has “what is probably the oldest extant Spanish *turrón* recipe”⁶, though they trace the origins to the 15th C. If you count Catalan as “Spanish” (geographically if not linguistically; and indeed, the historical origins of the candy as discussed in the aforesaid article are all from Catalonia), then the *Llibre* recipe predates the *Manual* recipe by about two centuries; however, as shown below, the *Manual* recipe is for a white nougat rather than a brown nougat.

Comparative data

The *Manual* mentioned above is available online at <http://bib.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/01371074322363763092257/p0000001.htm>; the recipe for *turrón* is as follows:

Receta para hacer turrones

Para cada libra de miel una clara de huevo muy batida y junta con la miel. Y batida mucho, dejarla reposar un día. Y al otro día, cocer la miel meneándola siempre sin parar hasta que esté muy cocida. Ver se ha si está cocida de esta manera: echad una gota de miel en una escudilla de agua fría, y si después de estar fría se desmenuza, es cocida y si no, no. Y como esté cocida, echad dentro piñones, o almendras, o avellanas tostadas y mondadas. Y esté un poco al fuego. Y luego quitadlo, y hacer piñas o tajadas, lo que más quisiéredes, dello.

A rough translation:⁷

Recipe for making nougat

For every pound of honey add a well-beaten egg white. And whipped much, let it sit a day. And the next day, cook the honey stirring always nonstop until cooked thoroughly. Check doneness in this way: Throw a drop of honey in a bowl of cold water, and if after being cold it crumbles, it is cooked and if not, not. And when it is cooked, cast in pine nuts, or almonds, or hazelnuts, toasted and skinned. Put on a small little fire. Then remove it, and

⁶ “Turrón” (Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turr%C3%B3n>, accessed 30 December 2012).

⁷ By myself with liberal help of google translate and wiktionary.

make pine cones or slices, as you please.

In addition to differing via the presence of egg whites, this recipe is also interesting in that the nuts are apparently added *after* the honey has both cooked and cooled.