

Regions - Balazar and the Elder Wilds - Food in Balazar



There are, as with most things Balazaring, two different approaches to food in Balazar, that of the hearths and that of the citadel dwellers. The hearths lead their traditional, semi-nomadic lifestyle, living off of the game they hunt and the plants and animals they gather while the citadels have a much greater reliance on wild grains and their herds of semi-domesticated swine.

Beliefs

The Balazarings collectively believe that the Wild Mother is the source of all the foodstuffs they gather and hunt. Every Balazaring is very careful to offer praise and prayers to the Wild Mother lest She take her bounty away. The Hearthmother taught the Balazarings how to gather and eat plants and how to cook while Foundchild taught the people how to hunt and what animals could and couldn't be eaten. Votank gave people the tools they needed to gather and prepare food and taught the people to live together. Balazar stole for the citadel dwellers the knowledge of how to keep pigs and showed them how to build the citadels. Every activity the Balazarings engage in is accompanied by prayers to the diety they know to be responsible for teaching their ancestors the activity in the first place. Harvesting, gathering, hunting, cooking and tending the pigs all have their prayers.

The Hearth Dwellers

The hearth dwellers will hunt and eat virtually any animal that runs, swims or fly (with the notable exception of dogs (taboo) and some wild carnivores whose taste doesn't appeal to them). They also gather and eat any edible plants. In both cases they do not tend to go into woods where the forest people (aldryami) live and they never fail to first ask permission from the Wild Mother before hunting, fishing or gathering. They also always perform the Peaceful Cut on all animals (except insects-see [How Brother Dog came to Foundchild](#)). The hearths' mobility makes it easier for them to move from location to location timing their arrival for times when food is plentiful. They laugh at outsiders who see Balazar as a barren wilderness and only rarely go hungry (mostly in the winter when the herds are elsewhere).

Citadel Dwellers

Plants

(The following account relies heavily on Reay Tannahill's [Food in History](#) for information).

The citadel dwellers have a great reliance on wild grains and their semi-domesticated

pig herds. Each of the three citadels was built near sites that had plentiful supplies of wild grains. They needed these grains to feed their relatively large sedentary populations. Research has shown that groups could easily harvest enough grains to feed small populations like those of the citadels.

"An experiment more than 25 years ago by Dr. Jack Harlan, an agronomist at the University of Illinois, demonstrated the likely importance of wild einkorn [a type of wheat] in the diets of post-ice age hunter-gatherers in the region and what might have encouraged them to domesticate it. Harvesting wild einkorn by hand in southeastern Turkey, Harlan showed that in only three weeks, a small family group [of six members¹] could have gathered enough grain to sustain them for a full year."²

They harvest wild barley and wheat using flint toothed sickles. Dr. Harlan discovered that "...[i]n an hour he gathered enough to produce over two pounds of cleaned grain, which was incidentally, twice as rich in protein as the domesticated variety."³

"One of the characteristics of wild grains is that as soon as the plant reaches maturity, the ear shatters and sprays its seeds out to burrow in the soil for protection until the next growing season. Sometimes, if the weather is hotter than usual, a field of mature grain can turn into a field of barren stalks in as little as a week."⁴

This means that the citadel's disadvantageous lack of mobility preventing them from easily gathering diverse foodstuffs and not being near the herds has been turned into an advantage in that they are near the grain fields when they ripen. This also means they don't have to haul large amounts of grain long distances for storage. (Though the advent of horses would seem to make this task easier they don't use horses as beasts of burden since they're so rare).

Turning a pile of wheat into edible grain is no easy task though. Humans are pretty much incapable of eating whole grain and it has to be prepared somehow. One of the possibilities is to germinate the grain and then eat it. But this requires spreading the grain out evenly (to avoid the development of molds) and keeping it moist which is impracticable on a large scale.

"The desirable part of wheat and barley consists of an embryo (the nutritionally valuable "germ") embedded in a starchy mass called the endosperm, to which is attached a thin, tough coat of bran. This whole seed unit is encased in a harsh outer sheaf, the chaff, and tufts of the sheathed seeds, protected by further shells of chaff, make up the ear of the grain. The first thing that had to be done when clean grain was needed was separate the edible part of the grain from the husks surrounding it. In the case of wild types the seed and chaff are reluctant to be parted, and it was therefore necessary to toast ('parch') the ears to make the chaff brittle enough to be loosened."⁵

The citadel dwellers do this by building fires on their threshing floors and then sweeping the fires away after the floor is hot and threshing the grain on the hot surface using willow beaters. Then the grain is winnowed using baskets specially woven for this

purpose. Even after threshing and winnowing some of the husks remain and the grain has to be rubbed between two rocks to remove it. This is back breaking, laborious work (except at Elkoi where the Lunars have introduced the rotary mill). Depending on the skill and/or patience of the grinder the end result can be clean grain or a gritty, chaff and groats mixture.

The resulting grain is then prepared in two main methods. It is either cooked in huge, communal stone pots where families come to get their share as a sort of porridge or it is pounded some more, mixed with water and baked as a flat cake on a hearthstone. Threshed and winnowed grain is stored in large, stone communal silos. Leavened bread is unknown.

Many other plants, fruits, berries and roots are collected and whatever can be preserved for the winter by drying is. The citadel dwellers are very careful to never take too much from the land and they always give thanks to the Wild Mother.

Game

While the citadel dwellers still hunt their hunters have to range further afield as game is relatively scarce in the immediate vicinity of the citadels. Wild game is THE favoured meat though.

Pigs

The main supply of meat for the citadel dwellers is pork. (Though they do eat the many pigeons that nest in the citadel's walls as well). Balazar stole the knowledge of tending pigs from the dragons and the goddess Mralota is known and worshipped in all three citadels. Her worship is what allows the citadel dwellers to raise the mostly wild swine with little danger. Prayers and sacrifices to Mralota ensure that the boars, while never tame are at least relatively placid. [The reality is that the pigs now raised in the citadels are pretty much domesticated. Worship of the goddess shows the pig herders how to raise their charges properly].

Recently the Balazarings captured two semi-divine boars. See [The Boar Wars](#) for more details.

Footnotes

1. **Food in History** p.21
2. [New Clues Show Where People Made the Great Leap to Agriculture](#)
3. **Food in History** p.21

4. **Food in History** p.21
5. **Food in History** p.22-23

Bibliography

[Alternative Wheat Cereals as Food Grains: Einkorn, Emmer, Spelt, Kamut, and Triticale](#) by G.F. Stallknecht, K.M. Gilbertson, and J.E. Ranney

Interesting information on early cereals.

Food in History by Reay Tannahill 1988 New York: Three Rivers Press

[New Clues Show Where People Made the Great Leap to Agriculture](#)

Good article on early agriculture.

[Plants and People in Ancient Anatolia](#) By Mark Nesbitt

Good overview of a RW region that I feel is similar to Balazar.

[Animal Diversity Web: European Wild Boar \[Sus scrofa\]](#)

Good, general information on wild boar.

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