



The entries before you are entirely and deliciously consumable. Called krupnik, it is a kind of cordial made from vodka, water, and honey that originates in Pomerania (northeastern Poland and Lithuania). Its origins are legendarily attributed to the 1500's but are likely far older, and recipes exist from medieval sources as passed down through noble Polish families. The recipe is incredibly flexible and welcomes the addition of spices, herbs, and fruits for various flavor profiles. Given the access to river trades through Rurikid kingdoms and through the Baltic sea, ingredients in the noble Polish-Lithuanian pantry are varied far beyond the local terroir. In the earlier periods, these foreign ingredients would have been encountered by Vikings plying the river trade between the people of the Baltic Sea and the various kingdoms of the Rurikids, including the Kievan Rus. In the later periods, they would have been accessed through the extensive networks formed through the Hanseatic league. It should be noted though, that the palate of a Medieval person is not that of a modern person's, so the krupnik that I make attempts to use period ingredients found in Medieval pantries to suit modern preferences. Based on Recipes from The Domostroi, I have two offerings for sample. The first is modelled after instructions to make honey drinks with "beneficial herbs and raspberries" The second is based on directions to make desserts with "apples and spices."

The third bottle is non-alcoholic for consideration of those who may not drink alcohol. It is a tisane made from the same mix of berries and herbs as the first entry. It is intended as a courtesy, not as a representation of krupnik.

Lord Cassiano da Castello

Section I: Historical Background

It was a maxim in my anthropological classes that, where humans settle and begin to cultivate grain, alcohol follows nearly immediately in mass quantity.¹ Indeed, the earliest evidence of beer is fiercely fought between those who study the Nile River Valley and the scholars of the Fertile Crescent, with those who follow the tracks of the ancient Horse Lords of the steppes sipping on their *kumiss*² and wondering about the fuss of agriculture.

Academic shouting aside, alcohol has long been a staple of human existence and has taken a variety of forms. For the people who settled East of the River Elbe and North of the Caucasus Mountains, their cultural liquor contribution was vodka, as well as its various adjacent forms. These were created by using additives such as herbs, spices, or honey. Honey, popular in its own right for its use in mead production, was a useful addition for softening the bite of grain spirit. Eventually, the practice became common enough to earn the right a separate classification of alcohol. Called *krupnik* by the Poles, *barenfang* by the Germans, or *krambambula* by the Belorussians, honey liquer culturally came into its own.³

As with any great myth of creation, the origin of *krupnik* is compiled from scraps and entirely legendary. Allegedly, it was created by Benedictine monks in a monastery in the northeast of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, now known as Belarus, in the 16th century.⁴ After its inception it became very popular with the nobles of Poland-Lithuania, called *szlachta*, who modified and expanded their personal recipes for the drink and passed them down through

¹ Arnold, John P (2005). *Origin and History of Beer and Brewing: From Prehistoric Times to the Beginning of Brewing Science and Technology* pp 135

² An alcoholic beverage made from fermented mare's milk, drunk by steppe horsemen including, but not limited to, the Mongols, Huns, and Scythians. Has been sampled by the author, who would recommend it if you enjoy sour and funky things and are not bothered by weird dairy.

³ *Likör, der Bienenhonig enthält* [liqueur which contains honey] *Wahrig: Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Gütersloh/München: Bertelsmann Lexikon Institut. 2006. p. 227.

⁴ Michael Gurin . Nicholas Christopher Radziwill // *The Golden Horde: The Encyclopedia. The 3 tons / red. GP Pasha and others. Volume 2: Cadet Corps - Jackiewicz. - Minsk: Belarusian Encyclopedia, 2005. S. 494.*

their closely guarded, hereditary cookbooks.⁵ While the basic recipe stays consistent, family recipes add many different ingredients to create a profile unique to the house. This experimentation was facilitated by easy access to the extensive river trade through the Vistula, Dnieper, and Volga Rivers. These were overseen by the conglomerate of Rurikid kingdoms which accessed the Black Sea and the realm of Constantinople during the Early Period (900-1200).⁶ Rare, also available ingredients could further be accessed through the Baltic Sea trade networks. Known more readily as the Hanseatic League, Hanse member states could access markets as far as Cordoba in the West and Palermo in Sicily through central Europe during the latter period (1200-1550's).⁷

The evidence of the recipes of the *szlachta* is undoubtable, but that of the monks and their alleged distillation is. Given how early folks discovered the process to ferment and distill grain alcohol and the ability to add flavorings to it, I find this myth to be of dubious credence. That a group of enterprising monks commercialized a traditional product for sale by the monastery is likely much closer to the truth. However, while a dearth of primary sources leaves scholarship in the dark for the monastic origin, the cultural lynchpin of folklore provides some answers. Long before the encroachment of Christianity and the area's evisceration by the Teutonic Crusades, the area of modern-day Poland and the Baltic Coast was once dominated the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Until 1386, when the Grand Duke Jogaila converted to Christianity to marry Jadwiga, Queen Regnant of Poland, the duchy and its rulers held fast to a variant of paganism now called

⁵ Maria Dembińska, William Woys Weaver. *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland: Rediscovering a Cuisine of the Past*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 1999.

⁶ Janet Martin, *Treasure of the Land of Darkness: The Fur Trade and Its Significance for Medieval Russia* (2004) The term "Rurikid" refers to kingdoms and royal families descended from Rurik I, a Varangian who established Holmgardr in 862 and whose descendants ruled the area of now-modern Russian until 1610.

⁷ Cowan, Alexander. "Hanseatic League: Oxford Bibliographies Online Research Guide" (Oxford University Press, 2010)

Romuva.⁸ Analysis of the primary sources closest to the period indicated that the Romuva faith had a loosely organized pantheon and was highly animistic, allowing for the incorporation of deities of all kinds.⁹ While authoritative lists of canonical gods are difficult to come by and often don't agree with each other, they still demonstrate consistent themes.

In the absence of contemporary sources, we must rely on post-structuralist techniques to understand the emphasis that Medieval practitioners of Romuva placed on alcohol making.¹⁰ This will allow us to understand that the origin of krupnik lies in the hands of early farmholders and those who lived well beyond the margins of recorded history. The evidence of the gods of fermentation, agriculture, honey, and roads of trade and travel heavily indicate a cultural mindset of people who sought to grow resources, alter them to produce a commodity, and then look beyond their borders for consumption markets.¹¹ The intentionality that builds the sympathetic magic of prayer and offering underpins this statement, as one does not pray for ventures to go smoothly if they do not care much about their success. Given these links, it is unlikely that krupnik was fabricated by Christian monks with little stake in the matter of its creation. Rather, it was much more likely to be a very traditional beverage, most likely used in offerings as mead and aquavit were used by people of Germanic customs.¹²

While this krupnik was not made by a Romuva practitioner, it was made with their methods, traditions, and homeland very much in mind. In this work I previously touched upon

⁸ Rowell, S. C. (1994). *Lithuania Ascending: A Pagan Empire Within East-Central Europe, 1295-1345*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought: Fourth Series. Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Greimas, A. (1992). *Of Gods and Men*. Indiana University Press

¹⁰ Barry, P. *Beginning theory: an introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002.

¹¹ Greimas, A. (1992). *Of Gods and Men*. Indiana University Press

¹² Blue, Anthony Dias (2004). *The Complete Book of Spirits: A Guide to Their History, Production, and Enjoyment*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers

the existence of extensive trade networks that connected the Baltic, Black, Caspian, and Mediterranean Seas during the Early Period. Their importance for the intersection of trade cannot be underestimated as these trade corridors functioned as high-volume medieval highways for centuries. As early as the 8th century, Scandinavians were traveling across the continent as mercenaries and tradesmen, bringing various cultures into contact with exotic goods.¹³ Intermediate stages along the Volga and Dnieper routes expanded into hubs of commerce operating under the mandate of the Rurikid Varangian princes.¹⁴ By the height of the Viking Age, the vast majority of this network was fully controlled and operated by Vikings, anchored by the Grand Principalities of Novogorod in the North on Lakes Ilmen and Ladoga and Kiev in the south on the Dnieper River.¹⁵ This hegemony of Rurikid princedoms thus controlled all trade from the Baltic Sea through the northern lakes of Ladoga and Ilmen all the way to Black Sea.

To access this network from the north, Viking trade ships made crucial stops along the Pomeranian and Curonian coastlines, acquiring valuable materials such as fur and amber from the Lithuanian towns of Kaup and Truso on the Prussian coast.¹⁶ Contact with the tribes in the area through trade would have exposed Vikings to the most easily diffused aspects of culture, or food and drink. If one accepts the assertion that I made earlier in this work, that *krupnik* was likely an early extant drink adapted for production by later monks, this exposure to local cuisine would have included *krupnik* or something very similar. Much like later recipes that included

¹³ Jesch, Judith (2001). [*Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*](#). Boydell Press. Pg 99

¹⁴ Franklin, Simon and Shepard, Jonathon, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200*. (Longman History of Russia, general editor Harold Shukman.) Longman, London, 1996. Pg 154

¹⁵ verdlov, M.B., 1970. Transit Routes in Eastern Europe in the 9th to 11th Centuries. *Soviet Geography*, 11(6), pp.472-479.

¹⁶ [Thomas D. Kendrick](#). *A History of the Vikings*. Courier Dover Publications, 2004. ISBN 0-486-43396-X. Page 187. These cities also contain Viking burial sites and grave goods related to the Dnieper Basin trade.

local ingredients unique to families, home distillation of this alcohol in the area would have used various recipes and combinations of flavors. The *krupniks* for this entry have been flavored with forageable items from the Prussian coast, blackberries, apples, and juniper, in acknowledgment of these choices from the local terroir.

However, the impact of later additions from foreign markets upon the Polish-Lithuanian pantry should not be underestimated. Established in the late 1100's, the Hanseatic League represented a confederation of major cities in the Northeast of the Baltic, canvassing the coasts of Denmark, Pomerania, Poland, Sweden and Russia.¹⁷ Originating as an alliance between the German Free Cities of Lubeck and Hamburg to establish a land route across Schleswig-Holstein, the Hanse cities acted as a bridge between the earlier patterns of river trade through the corridor of Rurikid kingdoms and the wider trade routes through England, France, the Netherlands, and Spain.¹⁸ Through these extensive networks in both the east and west, the coast of Pomerania and its Hanse cities of Szczecin, Slupsk, Danzig, Gdansk, Konigsberg, and Riga had access to markets well beyond the Mediterranean and connecting to multiple subroutes of the Silk Road. Beyond its eponymous fabric, the Silk Road also conveyed spices, teas, new cultivars, and new methods of utilizing ingredients. Thanks to close trade relations with Turkey and the countries in the Caucasus through this route, the price of [spices](#) (such as [black pepper](#) and [nutmeg](#)) was much lower in Poland than the rest of [Europe](#), hence spicy sauces became popular. The usage of two basic sauces (the *jucha czerwona* and *jucha szara*, or red and gray blood in [Old Polish](#)) remained widespread at least until the 18th century.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Polish pantry was greatly expanded

¹⁷ Dollinger, P (2000). [The German Hansa](#). Routledge. pp. 341–43.

¹⁸ Schleswig-Holstein is the part of Germany directly south of Denmark on the Jutland Peninsula.

¹⁹ Maria Dembińska, William Woys Weaver. *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland: Rediscovering a Cuisine of the Past*. [University of Pennsylvania Press](#). 1999 p. 95

through marriage with Mediterranean families. Accompanying the Italian queen [Bona Sforza](#) (second wife of [Sigismund I of Poland](#)) many Italian cooks came to Poland after 1518, bringing with them the use of citruses and other Mediterranean fruits such as pomegranates.²⁰

After the Passing of the Icedragon (2019), I sought the opinions of my friends as to what next flavors to try. The Icedragon entries focused on local Pomeranian ingredients, with some that might be sourced from abroad, and I have kept with that idea of always using at least one ingredient local to the North Baltic (or extent of Slavic peoples across Eastern and Southern Europe). However, after an unfortunate feast where the food was successful in its historicity but less so in its tastefulness, I wanted to pay careful attention to making my entries as tasty as they could be to the modern palate without playing too fast and loose with the ingredients. Accordingly, the two entries for today are popular fits for both traditional and modern European tastes. The elements for both of the entries were chosen after research into the 15th century compendium of Russian righteousness, *The Domostroi*. The “raspberry and healing herbs” and “apples and warming spices” pairings are lifted directly from the instructions of *The Domostroi*. The base fruit ingredients are common foraging items found in Northern Europe. I have spoken at length already regarding various trade routes that warming spices might enter Northern Europe and Italy (cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, black tea, black peppercorns). The “healing herbs” mix of juniper, bay laurel, lavender, coriander, and dandelion is composed of ingredients found commonly in Northeastern European medieval cuisine.¹ Furthermore, their uses in European cuisine are documented in the

¹²⁰ Jerzy Pasikowski (2011). "Wpływy kuchni innych narodów na kształt kuchni polskiej (Influences of cuisines of other nations in Polish cuisine)". Portal Gastronomiczny *NewsGastro*. This is demonstrated heavily through court records of the time, as Queen Bona was adamant in her court eating better, Italian food. Court records show that Queen Bona imported large volumes of southern European, American and Western Asian fruits (oranges, lemons, pomegranates, olives, figs, tomatoes), vegetables (potatoes and corn), nuts (chestnuts, raisins and almonds, including [marzipan](#)), along with grains (such as rice), cane sugar and Italian olive oil.

Medieval period as early as the 800's, and famously throughout the Late Medieval Period which had a deep fascination with now-strange applications of cinnamon.² Cinnamon and warming spices in alcohol are well documented through mulled wines and other medicinal cordials, which inform the modern favorite liqueur of any cinnamon lover, Goldschlager. My choices for flavor and method are more fully explained in Section II.

It is with all of this careful research and ethnographic study that I can say that the roots of *krupnik* were assuredly planted in indigenous piety and ingenuity, not within the walls of a monastic enclave. Given the extensive documentation of the preparation of honey-drinks and cordials from the Early Medieval period, any other conclusion seems deeply unlikely, or backed by reasoning driven by the economics of marketing. Furthermore, the nexus of trade loci in the Northeastern Baltic afforded the region an incredible pantry of flavors and tastes well beyond the complexity of their local terroir. This kind of market access most certainly was expressed in their cuisine, and while specific recipes of the period are typically difficult to locate, inferences can be drawn from related ones that do survive.

Section II: Method

Abstract

Montagne, Prosper. *The Concise Larousse Gastronomique*. Octopus. p. 691.
2 Lancelot de Casteau, *Ouverture de cuisine*, 1585.

A Few Notes:

As I mentioned in the research and historical background section, the precise method of how to make *krupnik* and who first made it is hard to discern and likely shrouded in some aspect of legend. However, the methods and proportions of how to make other honey and water drinks, such as meads, small meads, *kvass*, and cordials, have survived into the modern day from period. From these recipes, we can make some inferences as to the methods of preparing our honey and water mixture, how it might be flavored, and how it might be rendered alcoholic.

To this end, I have selected excerpts from two sources. The first is Carolyn Johnston Pouncey's translation of "*The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible.*" Printed and distributed in 16th century Muscovy, though elements can be traced to earlier 15th century Novgorod, *The Domostroi* is a household guide for all Russian masters-of-the-house, and how they might both practically and morally order and direct their demesne. Within *The Domostroi* are several directions on how to prepare and store various honey-based alcoholic drinks and how they ought to be properly flavored. This is primary source for my decisions regarding the flavoring of these entries.

The secondary source, and frankly supplementary, is Sir Kenelm Digby's *The Closet of Sir Kenelm Digby, Opened*, as printed in David Fiedman and Elizabeth Cook's *How to Milk and Almond, Stuff an Egg And Armor a Turnip: A Thousand Years of Recipes*. I have labeled this source as supplementary on two counts, the first being that it is out of period and the second being that it is also several thousand miles removed from the cultural sphere that *krupnik* and its variants can be found in. However, Digby elaborates on methods that are suggested at in *The Domostroi*, which while *The Domostroi* is more particular to my region and time of study, it does make some common-knowledge assumptions that any Russian man worth his *borscht* would

know the basics for making his alcohol. Thus, Digby's explanation is rather helpful. As for the main body of the method, I have organized it below into four stages: clarification, flavoring, resting, and filtration.

Clarification (and Proportions)

From *The Domostroi*, "Recipes for All Sorts of Fermented Honey Drinks: How to Distill Mead; Make Juice, Kvass, and Beer; Brew with Hops and Distill Boiled Mead" regarding the making of boiled mead:

"Take one part honey to seven parts warm water. Strain the honey carefully through a fine sieve, making sure no wax gets through. Put the strained honey in a pot... and boil it carefully. While you boil it, skim it with a fine sieve, till the mixture in the cauldron is clear. Put the honey and warm water in a clean jar, free of wax, and cover it..."

From Digby, "Weak Honey Drink (More Commonly Called Small Mead)" regarding the aforesaid drink:

"Take nine pints of warm fountain water, and dissolve in it one pint of pure White-honey, by laving it therein, till it be dissolved. Then boil it gently, skimming all the while, till the scum be perfectly scummed off; and after that boil it a little longer, peradventure a quarter of an hour. In all it will require two or three hours boiling, so that the last one-third party may be consumed..."

In terms of method, I agree with both the author of *The Domostroi* and Sir Digby. For clarity of the cordial (or mead in their cases) simmering or boiling off the honey and water mixture is absolutely necessary as a first stage. As *krupnik* is a cordial and not a mead, the proportions of water and honey are inverted, with more honey than water. Sir Digby's recipe is interesting, however, in that he insists upon heavy boiling for hours which would result in a near-syrupy consistency similar to the initial product that my method produces.

For my recipe for *Krupnik*, I combine two cups honey to one cup water in a saucepan and heat from simmer to nearly boil, skimming off impurities and scum as I go. The process takes between fifteen and twenty minutes, depending on the kind of honey you use and where you have sourced it from. For these entries, I have sourced winter honey from a local apiarist. I selected her winter honey after discussion of the flavor profiles, as I suspected it would produce a similar profile to the plants found in the climes of Northern Europe.

Flavoring

From *The Domostroi*, “How a Man Must Keep Liquor Stored for Himself and His Guests. How to Present This Liquor to Company” regarding how mead ought to be flavored and stored:

“To celebrate...the host should decant mead from a vat into five perter jugs or...small casks. He should put nutmeg in one little bag, cloves in a second, beneficial herbs in a third. He will warm these on the stove and mix them with the mead.”

From *The Domostroi*, “How Order Depends on Storing Supplies Needed throughout the Year, and for Fasts as Well”

“A well-ordered house has plenty of food for fast days; you need buy nothing in the marketplace. You have bilberry wine, cherries in syrup, raspberry juice, and desserts (apples and pears in kvass and syrup, pastilles, doughnuts) for yourself, for guests, and for those who are ill.”

From these two excerpts, I gathered the traditional commands for flavoring mead for guests and the flavors of the mandated desserts that should in in one’s larder. As *krupnik* is a sweet cordial, in the past I have sought the flavor profiles of desserts from the region to inform my flavor choices. Accordingly, I looked at the traditional desserts and meads and settled on the first pairing of “raspberry and healing herbs” and the second pairing of “apples and warming spices.” The first was made using blackberries and black raspberries, juniper, coriander, bay

laurel, lavender, black peppercorn, and dandelion. The berries were heated slowly in a pan to break them down for faster and more complete maceration by the alcohol. Once cool, they were added to the honey-water-vodka mixture with the herbs for cold steeping. The second was made with two kinds of apples, black peppercorn, green cardamom, fresh nutmeg, and cinnamon. For this batch, the fruit and the spices were gently heated to begin the melding process and to start breaking down the apples. The apples and spices were added to the honey-water-vodka mixture and set to steep. Green apple slices were added cold, to impart more tartness to the cordial without imparting bitterness and creating more sediment.

Resting and Filtration

As mentioned in the recipe at the beginning of this section, the honey-water-vodka mix must sit and rest for at least two weeks. This is to allow the harshness of the alcohol to be softened by the honey and mellow with the added flavors. As demonstrated in the earlier quotes from *The Domostroi*, mead and honey drinks would be served from casks where they had been fermented and rested. I have specifically chosen flavors that are not only historically documented, but also have the best possible chance of completely softening the alcohol without being cloyed by the honey. However, they need time to meld with each other and the difference between three days' rest, five days', a weeks' and then two weeks' is remarkable and this process should not be rushed.

The final stage is filtration. Both Sir Digby and the author of *The Domostroi* mention straining or sieving until clear. They are correct in their method here, but clarity in cordial is something to be mindful of through every stage of the process. The clarifying of the honey and the choice of whether to heat flavoring or cold steep them affect clarity as much as the final stages of filtration. Regardless, for final stages of filtration, starting with a sieve or strainer will

remove most of the large particulate, but to remove any cloudiness one must use cheesecloth that has been layered several times. This will remove the majority of sediment to within tolerable levels.

