Transcultural Food: What Cervantes’ Writing Reveals about New World-Old World Exchanges

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Wednesday, October 8
4:00-5:30 pm
Ballantine Hall 305

Abstract: As food travelled into Spain from the Americas we witness a key stage of transculturation that laid the groundwork for revolutionizing Spanish cuisine. Drawing from what Don Quixote frequently eats for dinner according to Cervantes' famous novel, salpicón, this lecture explores a series of questions regarding food in the early modern period. What do the ingredients of a traditional salpicón and its place on the table as an alternative to a salad tell us about dinner fare in the early modern period? What are the main ingredients in a salad in the early modern period and how do they differ from our understanding of a salad today? When do key ingredients of today's salpicón and salad, namely the tomato but, to a lesser extent, the pepper and the potato, become part of the menu in Spain? And finally, how do writers across discourses describe and respond to Old World vegetables found in salpicón and salad, and New World products that are appearing in Spain for the first time? Using contemporary cooking manuals, paintings, and the writing of Cervantes, Tirso de Molina, Bernardino de Sahagún, and others whose works reveal a curiosity for New World products, this lecture explains how New World 'peripheral' products transform 'metropolitan' Western world food identity in unprecedented ways.

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