Scottish Oat Cakes: A Conjectural Reconstruction

"the only things they take with them [when riding to war] are a large flat stone placed between the saddle and the saddle-cloth and a bag of oatmeal strapped behind. When they have lived so long on half-cooked meat that their stomachs feel weak and hollow, they lay these stones on a fire and, mixing a little of their oatmeal with water, they sprinkle the thin paste on the hot stone and make a small cake, rather like a wafer, which they eat to help their digestion." (Froissart's Chronicles, Penguin Books translation.)

So far as I know, there are no surviving period recipes for oat cakes. This article is an attempt to reconstruct them, mainly on the basis of Froissart's brief comment.

Rolled oats—what we today call "oatmeal"—are a modern invention. I assume that "oat meal" in the middle ages meant the same thing as "meal" in other contexts—a coarse flour. The only other ingredient mentioned is water, but salt is frequently omitted in medieval recipes—Platina, for instance, explicitly says that he doesn't bother to mention it—so I have felt free to include it. The oat cakes Froissart describes are field rations, so unlikely to contain any perishable ingredients such as butter or lard, although they may possibly have been used in other contexts.

Consistent with these comments, the following is my conjectural recipe for oatcakes as they might have been made by Scottish troopers c. 1400:

½ c steel-cut oats   ¼ t salt   ¼ c water

Combine all ingredients and let the mixture stand for at least fifteen minutes. Make flat cakes ¼" to ⅜" in thickness, cook on a medium hot griddle, without oil, about 3-5 minutes. The result is a reasonably tasty flat bread, though inclined to be crumbly.

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