



Caramels from Baden

A remarkable document has survived from the Theresienstadt (Terezín) ghetto, which for most Jews was a transit camp on the way to Auschwitz: Minna Pächter, who was already seventy when she was imprisoned in the camp in 1942, wrote down recipes with the help of several other women.

Faced with constant hunger, the women recalled the dishes they used to cook when they were still able to look after their families and celebrate religious festivals. Susan Cernyak-Spatz, who survived Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, described it thus: “We called it ‘cooking with the mouth.’ Everybody did it. And people got very upset if they thought you made a dish the wrong way or had the wrong recipe for it.” Imagination and hope were vital for survival. The prisoners’ memories of food traditions and their own culture, which was being destroyed in front of their eyes, strengthened their sense of identity.

Before Minna Pächter died in Theresienstadt, she entrusted a friend with the manuscript and asked him to forward it to her daughter in Palestine, even though she did not have her address. After 25 years, a small parcel reached 62-year-old Anny Stern in Manhattan.

The manuscript was published under the title “In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women in Terezín.”

The German recipes were translated rather literally into English to preserve the idiomatic characteristics. The measuring unit “decagram” is Austrian – 1 decagram is 10 grams, about 1/3 ounce.

Instructions:

“Brown [caramelize] 30 decagrams sugar without water. Pour in 1/3 liter coffee extract [very strong coffee], 1/8 liter cream and bring it to a boil. Add 8 decagrams tea butter [best quality butter] and cook until mixture is thick. Pour boiling into a buttered candy pan. With the back of a knife cut it up before it cools completely. Then break it into cubes and wrap in parchment and then in pink paper.”

