

Pope Francis inspires cookbook written by Swiss Guard

Milk pudding for Pope Francis, wurstel salad for Benedict XVI and dumplings for John Paul II – a new book by the elite soldiers of the Swiss Guard reveals culinary secrets of the Vatican



The colourful Swiss guard have protected popes for over five centuries Photo: GETTY IMAGES

Armed with pikes and halberds, they have defended Popes for more than five centuries, but the elite soldiers of the Swiss Guard have revealed an unexpected culinary side to their duties, with the publication of a book of favourite pontifical recipes.

The cookbook, entitled "Buon Appetito, Swiss Guard", reveals the particular tastes of Pope Francis and his two predecessors, Benedict XVI and John Paul II, shedding light on classic dishes from their home countries of Argentina, Germany and Poland.

The current occupant of the Seat of St Peter has a sweet tooth – one of Pope Francis's favourite dishes is "dulche de leche", a milk pudding that originates from his native Argentina.

He is also keen on spicy empanadas, as well as "colita de cuadril", or grilled sirloin steak.

The recipe book, published this week, has been compiled by David Geisser, a 24-year-old soldier

from Zurich who joined the Swiss Guard in February 2013, having been a professional cook in civilian life.

He compiled the recipes, while the text was written by Sgt Erwin Niederberger, 36, who was a trained pastry chef in Zug before joining the elite corps in 1999.

“The idea came from our commandant about two years ago. He checks out the background of new recruits and he saw that Geisser had published a couple of cook books in Switzerland,” Sgt Niederberger told The Telegraph.

“The book reveals a lot about the daily lives and the history of the Swiss Guard.”

John Paul II was particularly partial to “pierogi”, a type of Polish dumpling made from unleavened dough which are stuffed with potato, sauerkraut, meat, cheese or fruit.

“After he was shot in St Peter’s Square in 1981, he ate pierogi while he was recuperating in hospital – it made him feel at home and gave him a bit of comfort,” said Sgt Niederberger.

“They are typical of Cracow, which is where the Pope was from – they are a sort of Polish ravioli.”

Benedict XVI, who created history last year when he abruptly resigned as Pope, loves specialities from his native Bavaria, including wurstel salad, a pork dish called ‘schweinsbraten’ and baked cherries topped with whipped cream.

They too are in the hardcover book, which was launched in Switzerland on Wednesday and has so far only been published in German.

If it proves popular, it will be published in English next year.

Daniel Anrig, the commander of the elite corps, said no one should be surprised that the Swiss Guard held food in such high regard.

"A soldier can only fight and wage war when he has eaten sufficiently and well," he said.

The introduction to the book said it would appeal to anyone interested in cooking as well as people who were curious about the Swiss Guard and “some of the secrets of the Vatican”.

The cookbook also contains the favourite recipes of people close to the Popes.

Georg Ganswein, a German monsignor who is private secretary to both Benedict and Francis, loves “saltimbocca alla romana”, which consists of prosciutto and veal cooked in white wine and butter.

Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, is an aficionado of gnocchi, or potato dumplings.

Along with cooking suggestions, the book includes the prayers that the guards recite before sitting down to eat in their barracks inside the Vatican City State, the world's smallest sovereign nation.

The Swiss Guard was formed in 1506 as a body of mercenary fighters by Pope Julius II.

The tiny force, which consists of around 110 officers and men, is responsible for the Pope's safety and the security of the Vatican in general.

They can be seen on guard outside the Vatican every day, dressed in striped blue, red and gold uniforms and carrying halberds as their traditional weapons.

The Swiss Guard's most significant military engagement was in 1527 when 190 guards died fighting Holy Roman Empire troops during the Sack of Rome, allowing Clement VII to flee to safety from the Vatican through a stone passageway.

The corps works alongside the city state's equally small police force, the Vatican Gendarmerie.