

The Ancient Lives cooking event was a great experience for all involved. On the night of November 7th, students gathered in Northwest Laboratory B145 to take a trip to the past and experience food from the “land between the two rivers.” The event took place in the midst of traditional dinner time, and as a result, students eagerly anticipated the menu. Upon arrival, the intriguing menu immediately caught everyone’s attention. Students would warm up their taste buds with an appetizer of drained yogurt drizzled with olive oil and garnished with olives and za’atar, served with tannour bread. For a main course, the main attraction would be babylonian beet stew served with steamed bulgur. And to cap off the night, the class would enjoy a dessert of a sweet dip of date syrup and tahini, served with tannour bread, as well as mersu, an ancient Mesopotamian date candy. Before the students were able to enjoy this experience, however, there was work to be done.

Students arrived and began initial preparations for cooking the Mesopotamian food. The class split up into smaller groups to prepare the various dishes. It was fascinating to see students move from station to station as they got to experience different methods of cooking. Students took on different roles during the process, but when they began to realize that ancient Mesopotamians had to prepare meals without modern cooking equipment, there was an overwhelming sense of appreciation for the technology we have today. Senior Brian Forst commented that through the event, his “eyes were opened to how far we have progressed in the cooking world,” and wondered just how long it would have taken to prepare a meal of this magnitude in ancient times.

In the midst of preparations for the meal, the students were treated to a lecture from Professor Nawal Nasrallah. An expert writer on Mesopotamian culture, Nasrallah spoke to the class about traditional customs. She explained how tannour bread was made in ancient times, and how it is incredible that similar bread still exists today. It was a great example of how culture can be timeless. Nasrallah also mentioned how the elite used molds to shape their bread into fancy shapes, a trend that reminded students of how the elite in the modern world often have food delicacies made available to them as well.

Nasrallah also spoke to the presence of beer in ancient Mesopotamian times. The brewing group in Ancient Lives had been working on their product for months, and the evening cooking event provided a good opportunity for a taste test. Professor Barjamovic did the honors, as many other students were skeptical of the product. Students found it fascinating that beer had a presence in Mesopotamian society. Isabel Docal, a senior in the class, found it fascinating that Professor Nasrallah explained that the “beer was often times safer to drink than the river water.” Docal also said that it was interesting that “alcohol was often times used in social settings to make people feel good,” similar to how it is used today. This is another great example of how culture can be timeless, and we can still experience Mesopotamian cultures today.

From talking to students in the class, the overwhelming perspective from the cooking event was that we are not in fact so different from ancient Mesopotamians. It is interesting to think that the ancient civilizations of the land between the two rivers had much to do with shaping the way we

eat and socialize today. Many students, including Forst and junior Wes Fabyan, all emphasized just how lucky we are to have the luxury of the cooking equipment we have today.

At the end of the event, students got to enjoy the food that they produced. The consensus favorite was the appetizer dip of drained yogurt drizzled with olive oil and garnished with olives and za'atar. However, the desert of mersu was a close second. In all, it was a great event that put smiles on the faces of everyone involved.