

The Fork – A history

Forks were first used in the Middle Ages, but eating with one was considered scandalous.

A Byzantine princess introduced the table fork to Europe in the eleventh century. The story varies slightly depending on the source, but the essence is that a nobleman, probably Domenico Selvo (or Silvio), heir to the Doge of Venice, married a princess from Byzantium. This Byzantine princess brought a case of two-tined table forks to Venice as part of her luggage. Forks seem to have been novelties in Byzantium, but not unknown.

The princess outraged the populace and the clergy by refusing to eat with her hands:

"Instead of eating with her fingers like other people, the princess cuts up her food into small pieces and eats them by means of little golden forks with two prongs. God in his wisdom has provided man with natural forks - his fingers. Therefore it is an insult to Him to substitute artificial metallic forks for them when eating."

One such fork, a small, gold, two-pronged tool, came to Italy in the eleventh century in the dowry of a Byzantine princess who married Domenico Selvo, a Venetian doge. After witnessing the princess use the fork, the church severely censured her, stating that the utensil was an affront to God's intentions for fingers.

In the year 1005, the Byzantine aristocrat Maria Argyropoulina married the future [Doge of Venice, Domenico Selvo](#). During their wedding celebrations she dared to refuse to eat with her hands. Instead, she had one of her eunuchs cut her food into little pieces she was able to eat with a golden fork she carried with her, fact that was considered decadent by everybody. The princess died shortly after of some disease, and this was perceived as divine punishment. The cardinal bishop of Ostia, [St Peter Damian](#), spoke "of the Venetian Doge's wife, whose body, after her excessive delicacy, entirely rotted away." He preached extensively against this extravagant instrument, calling it both diabolic (probably due to its Devil's trident-like form) and useless, as spaghetti and macaroni were so hard to eat with it. It must be noted that forks at that time were flat and two-pointed.