

CULTURE

And it's a wrap...

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Source: Eli Zilka, <http://bit.ly/HZNHZ8>

Legend has it that the first sandwich was created not by Lord Sandwich, but by Hillel, who ate his Paschal sacrifice together with marror and matzah.

Sadly, this really is just a legend.

How did he combine these three ingredients? It seems clear that he did not place the meat and marror between two sheets of matzah.

“Korech”, the words used to describe his method, means to wrap or to fold. He could only have wrapped or folded his matzah if it was soft – rather like a lafa, tortilla or pitta. This is why, in the Gemara, the fear is expressed that one might get confused between bread and matzah; they must have looked similar.

To this day, Iraqi and Yemenite Jews make soft matzah. However, it was ubiquitous in Europe as well until just 170-odd years ago (1840's), when machine production of matzah took over. Several commentators discuss their matzahs being up to a finger-width thick.

It seems that soft matzahs finally disappeared from Ashkenaz communities by the beginning of the 20th century and today we have forgotten they ever existed.

The main difference between soft and hard matzahs is the ratio of water to flour. As a result, soft matzahs do not keep for very long, just like pittot (they are also less calorific!). In the past Yemenite Jews baked fresh matzahs every day, but Jews in other Arab lands were afraid of the possibility that their matzahs would start to rise, become chametz during the process of baking, and only ate soft matzahs on Seder night. During the rest of the festival, they ate hard matzahs that were prepared before Pesach.

This is why, when mass production began, producers opted for hard rather than soft matzahs. Without proper refrigeration technology, there was no way to keep soft matzahs fresh for long enough to market.

Nowadays, soft matzahs can be prepared ahead and frozen until needed.