TWO LANGUAGES, TWO CULTURES, TWO CUISINES:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CULINARY CULTURES OF NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN FRANCE, ITALY AND CATALONIA IN THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

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SUMMARY

In the mediaeval era, southern France was differentiated from northern France both culturally and geographically. Such differences are generally recognised, yet the possibility of differentiated cuisines seems not to have been considered, despite different systems of agriculture in the two regions which produced differences in the basic components of the average diet. It is hypothesised here that mediaeval southern French cuisine differed from that of northern France, and had closer affinities with the cuisines of other neighbouring Mediterranean countries.

Mediaeval cuisine is assumed to represent a 'higher' cuisine, associated with the rich and educated of society and, specifically, with an urban population. The cookery books which recorded the recipes of mediaeval cuisine originated in such milieux, and can be seen to have grown out of medical and dietetic traditions which were returned to western Europe via Arab scholarship.

The most characteristic feature of mediaeval European cuisine, in general, is its use of spices. The role of spices was primarily symbolic, emphasising the

higher status of prestige dishes and differentiating celebratory from ordinary fare. Spices do not necessarily demonstrate regional particularities but but do illustrate the increasing culinary sophistication of the fifteenth century.

Specific differentiating characteristics can, however, be identified in the uses of meats, fish and sugar. Southern France shared with Catalonia a preference for mutton among butcher's meats and with the rest of Mediterranean Christian Europe preferentially ate pork in salted form. Neither of these features were typical of northern France. Frying of fish appears to have been more common in Mediterranean regions than in northern France, probably as a consequence of cheaper supplies of better-quality olive oil, which Lenten custom obliged. Fried fish was typically accompanied by the juice of citrus fruits, a typically Mediterranean ingredient. In northern France, fish was more often poached.

In sauces and 'brouets', Catalan and Italian cuisine favoured a diversity of thickening ingredients and aimed for a sweet-sour flavour harmony, whereas northern French cuisine relied on bread as a thickener and emphasised sour tastes. Since the ingredients of Catalan and Italian cuisine were also available in southern France, which was similarly open to Arab influence, it might be assumed the cuisine of southern France shared these Mediterranean characteristics.

A tradition of sweetening with either sugar, honey or concentrated grape juice is apparent in Mediterranean cuisine but not in northern French. Again, an Arab influence is implicated, and the sugar/almond combination of many recipes appears to be a direct borrowing from Arab culinary tradition.

Fresh and dried vegetables and cereals were often prepared in similar ways in both northern France and Mediterranean Europe, but certain vegetables - in particular, those of Arab introduction - were specific to southern France, Italy and Catalonia. Pasta, another ingredient of Arab origin, was similarly localised.

The cuisines of northern France, and of Italy and Catalonia, have been shown to have been distinctly different in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and despite the sparsity of detail relative to southern French cuisine, it was clearly closer to a Mediterranean than a northern French model. The accounts of sixteenth-century travellers in the Mediterranean not only confirm the distinguishing characteristics of Mediterranean cuisine but demonstrate that different Mediterranean and northern French culinary styles were recognised and accepted as evidence of cultural difference.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Dated .. December, 1987

Signed

Barbara Santich

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PREFACE

The impetus to this study was an impatience with the axiomatic assumption that what may have been true of Parisian cuisine in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was equally valid for France as a whole. Certainly, the lack of any mediaeval Occitan cookery book constitutes an apologia, and the linguistic and political boundaries of mediaeval France no longer have the same relevance. Yet, in the light of other demonstrable differences, to ignore the possibility of culinary differences is illogical.

The culinary past of Occitania is like an archeologist's nightmare - the odd relic here and there, but too few and too scattered to allow an authentic and complete reconstruction. Instead, the data must be matched to a hypothetical model, in this instance, the cuisine of one of the adjacent regions. In view of the many features which mediaeval southern France shared with other Mediterranean regions, a Mediterranean cuisine is more likely to offer an appropriate model.

Thus, from its focus on southern France, this study extends its area of interest to the surrounding regions of northern France, Italy and Catalonia. Despite its wealth of culinary detail relating to the mediaeval period, England remains outside the frame of reference.

All culinary histories include approximations and generalisations. Due importance ought be accorded an uncertainty principle in these generalisations, but this does not in any way negate their value. The gastronomic past is just as important as the artistic or economic one. The present study will, I hope, illuminate the civilisation of the old Occitania and confirm its essentially Mediterranean character.

INTRODUCTION

This work is an attempt to substantiate my hypothesis that the cuisine of mediaeval southern France was Mediterranean in character, rather than similar to the cuisine of northern France. It is not possible, given the present state of knowledge and the availability of resources, to assert the existence of two distinct culinary zones in mediaeval France, but the evidence demonstrates significant differences between the cuisines of northern and southern France, and affinities between the cuisines of southern France and other Mediterranean regions.

In form, this is a comparative history, according to Marc Bloch's interpretation of the term. It is a study in which are chosen, "from one or several social situations, two or more phenomena which appear at first sight to offer certain analogies; then to trace their lines of evolution, to note the similarities and differences, and as far as possible, explain them."[1] The comparative method makes a "study in parallel of societies which are both neighbouring and contemporary, constantly exercising a reciprocal influence, which have been, during the course of their development, subject to the action of the same broad causes precisely because of their proximity and contemporaneity, and which share, at least in part, a common origin."[2]

Throughout western Europe in the later mediaeval period, from approximately the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, the basics of cuisine varied little; nor were they confined by geographic or political boundaries. The same range of spices was used for similar purposes, and cooks adopted similar styles of preparation, permitting foods to be eaten either in the fingers or with spoons. Yet overlaying these fundamental similarities, like local topographical variations in the one broad landscape, were regional differences. These individual particularities which both derive from, and point to, cultural differences, form the subject of the present work.

LIMITS OF TIME AND PLACE

Mediaeval, in its broadest sense, describes that vague and obscure era between Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance. In the present study, focussed on the period from around 1300 to 1500, the term has a more restrictive meaning.

There are clear and cogent reasons - quite apart from historical conformity - for this decision. In many respects, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were differentiated from both the preceding and succeeding ones. The year 1300 is often seen as a turning point; Duby points to the breaks in the patterns of economic and cultural evolution, as evidenced by the weakening of Church authority and, of more importance to the historian, the secularisation and proliferation of the documentary evidence on which his work is based.[3] Jacques Le Goff describes a revolution in ideas towards the end of the thirteenth century, for example the 'ars nova', which introduced innovations into music which, in turn, was directed more to a secular than sacred end.[4] Genicot likewise sees in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a flowering of the social sciences, and a preference, in both arts and literature, for realism and the portrayal of everyday life.[5]

The earliest mediaeval (i.e.post-Roman) cookery books known today date from about 1300. Acre, the last of the Crusader strongholds in the eastern Mediterranean, was reconquered in 1291. The death of Saint Louis, in 1270, during the last crusade, effectively extinguished the crusading spirit; thereafter, contact with the Orient was left to the merchants, whose practical commercial motives were rather different to those professed by the early Crusaders. In western Europe, towns were thriving, with well-established systems of local government, their records documenting much of the minutiae of daily life.

The year 1500 is a generally accepted date for the end of the Middle Ages.[6] In the present context, it conveniently separates a mediaeval style of cuisine from that of the sixteenth century, a period which saw many culinary changes and innovations. First, a much wider and more rapid dissemination of knowledge was made possible by the printing press. About 20 years after the appearance of the first printed Bible, the first printed recipes were published, in 1475, in Platina's *De Honesta Voluptate*, a work apparently so popular that it was said to have sold more copies than Plato - seven Latin editions before 1500.[7] Second, the chance discovery of the New World gave sixteenth-century Europe a whole new larder of ingredients - turkey, beans, pumpkin, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, corn - which gradually became incorporated into the cuisine.

Other developments, too, make 1500 a logical close. Southern France was no longer an independent country. Provence eventually passed into French hands in 1481, although the Languedoc had been annexed about two centuries earlier. By the end of the fifteenth century, the French language had supplanted Occitan as the official language in the large towns; the *Petit Thalamus* of Montpellier changed to French in 1495.[8] The Arab influence in southern Spain faded with the conquest of Granada in 1492. Finally, the importance of the Mediterranean, and its role as the hub of the world, waned with the opening of new trade routes across the Atlantic and the subsequent shift of economic power.

To imagine a caesura isolating the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries from the earlier ones is perhaps an exaggeration and simplification, but it is undoubtedly convenient, in any study of mediaeval society, to concentrate on this period. Almost all the studies which have treated or touched on mediaeval diet and cuisine relate to this era - Stouff's monumental work on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Provence, Piponnier's detailed investigations into foods and culinary equipment in fourteenth-century Burgundy.[9]

Geographically, the subject-area of this study radiates from its focus on southern France to include Italy (and Sicily), Mediterrean Spain and northern France, and by 'mediaeval western Europe' is meant the continental part of the Western Roman Empire which remained Christian. For the present purposes, southern France does not mean the whole of the area south of the oil/oc frontier, but rather Mediterranean France, the coastal fringe within an arc which extends from Nice inland to Avignon and thence to Narbonne. Within this zone are most of the major towns of mediaeval southern France - Narbonne, Beziers, Montpellier, Nimes, Avignon, Arles, Aix, Marseilles - all of which, with the exception of Montpellier, by far the most populous, were originally Roman towns. Since, as will be argued in a later chapter, towns were necessary to the development of cuisine (and most mediaeval recipe books were written in an urban environment), the urban character of this region is highly relevant.

DISCOVERING CUISINE

> "To know the past as it really was ... we must approach it with adequate criteria, study it from within and try to discover its own internal structure; and we must be constantly on our guard against foisting our own contemporary values and standards on to it." [10]

Gurevich's caution is particularly relevant to any study of taste. In the past, the unfamiliar combinations of flavours in mediaeval cuisine have caused it to be stereotyped as a curiosity, a museum piece. As Georges Duby has so passionately argued, "it is the living individual who must be sought, beneath the dust of archives and in the silence of museums."[11] Any study of mediaeval cuisine should be approached with an open and unprejudiced mind, and occasionally with an unprejudiced palate, for it cannot be understood through words alone. Behind the written recipe one might hope to discover the mediaeval people, their tastes, their preferences.

Although the basic resources for this study are cookery books, it is not a comparative study of recipes but of cuisines. Recipes alone do not constitute a cuisine; rather, they illustrate it. Historically, a cuisine is abstracted from recipes in the same way as an archaeologist reconstructs a vase from isolated fragments. And just as an archaeologist assumes the authenticity of his model, so in the domain of culinary history must one accept the fundamental supposition that the recipes of cookery books give an accurate representation of a cuisine, that the formulae ran parallel to the practice. Through the cuisine one sees the people; by means of the recipes one hopes to discover not only what was eaten, how this ingredient was cooked, but why the people chose to eat it, and why they chose to cook it in that way.

At one extreme, a cookery book represents the individual tastes of a specific few - the cook/author and/or the patron or patrons for whom the dishes are destined. One might reasonably assume, however, that these tastes were shared by a larger social group and further, that they are representative of the tastes of a certain milieu, geographical or social. Further, the inherent bias of the primary sources may be compensated by corroborative evidence from other sources.

The imprecise relationship between cookery books and cuisine is the first of the qualifications to be attached to this study. Culinary history is highly selective, concerned with aspects of daily life which persist - albeit in modified form - in spite of political intrigues and minor wars, the significance of which depends more on the extent to which food supplies are affected. Its data are relatively scarce - historians and chroniclers are notoriously lax when it comes to recording details of what was cooked and eaten, where, when, how, and with whom - and thus it is difficult to resist the temptation to seize upon a scrap of detail and centre-stage it, or to generalise cause-effect links which might have a very localised application. Further, the origin of the data is sometimes questionable; one must constantly remind oneself that a cookery book is not necessarily representative of a certain region simply because it happens to be written in the dialect of that region, and that the dating of the written recipe does not automatically place the dish itself in the same time frame. Practice usually precedes codification, and transmission is not dependent on the written word.

As far as possible, I have tried to recognise and apply mediaeval concepts rather than impose anachronistic ones which relate to the present era. I have also tried to maintain a detached objectivity, although I must admit to a certain admiration for mediaeval cooks. Through years of close association, I have developed a sympathetic intimacy with the mediaeval culinary texts and their imagined, but no less real, authors or compilers, and with the scribes who recorded the words of the 'maitre queux' or who copied from other manuscripts, sometimes adding whimsical touches of their own. Such an attitude might not be in the best interests of scholarly research, but nor is it inconsonant with an attempt "to know the past as it really was".

An unexpected corollary of this study was its demonstration of the immutability of some culinary traditions. Recipes, certainly, have changed since mediaeval times, and most of the dishes which result from following these recipes bear little resemblance to those of today, but many of the underlying principles and preferences revealed through this study of mediaeval cuisine are equally characteristic in the twentieth century. Mediterranean cuisine today is the same model, clothed in a different fashion.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

The first chapter of the present study demonstrates the cultural integrality of Mediterranean Europe and the affinity of southern France with this region rather than with the northern part of the country. Chapter 2 examines the concept of 'cuisine' and defines the term for the purposes of this study. In Chapter 3 the culinary renaissance of the later mediaeval centuries is linked to the revival of trade and the recrudescence of towns and town society, while Chapter 4 traces the evolution of cookery books in mediaeval western Europe and outlines the methodology adopted for present purposes.

The following five chapters concentrate on the comparison of cuisines; in particular, they identify the distinctive features by which Mediterranean cuisine differed from northern French cuisine, looking first at the use of spices, then at meat, poultry and game, at fish, sweet dishes and baked goods and finally at the ordinary, everyday ingredients of vegetables and cereals. In Chapter 10 attitudes towards eating and drinking, and their evolution, are examined, while the final chapter takes the form of an epilogue, demonstrating the continuance, through the eyes of contemporary chroniclers of the sixteenth century, of those features assumed to have differentiated the cuisines of northern France and the Mediterranean region in the preceding period.

CHAPTER ONE

SOUTHERN FRANCE WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

The map of mediaeval France is overlain by a succession of latitudinal lines which have the effect of dividing the country into two halves. Hypothetical lines they may be, virtual boundaries traced by modern historians and philologists, yet their significance lies in their identification of contrasts which demonstrate fundamental dissimilarities between southern and northern extremes.

It is not my intention in this chapter to create another, albeit fictional, frontier - a culinary divide - but rather to draw attention to the differences between the two extremes, a southern region, the more urbanised and closely settled Mediterranean fringe, and a northern region centred on Paris, insofar as these relate to and influence culinary development.

The features on which the divisions are based are highly diverse but their effects are remarkably consistent; all point to considerable differences between Mediterranean and Parisian zones. Climatic data such as incidence of frost and of summer drought clearly delineate a southern coastal crescent, itself neatly encapsulated within the limit of tolerance of olive trees. The linguistic border between 'oc' and 'oil' is approximated by the line which separates the regions where Roman (written) or customary law prevailed and, more erratically, by the line marking the extent of Roman tiles. Agriculturally, the types of crops grown, crop rotations and cultivation methods differentiate north from south. Almost always, the ways in which southern France demonstrates its separate identity are also those which affirm its kinship with its Mediterranean neighbours.

The geographical features which oppose Mediterranean to Parisian France - climate, relief, soils, vegetation - and which also demonstrate the physical unity of the Mediterranean are outside the scope of this study, but have been thoroughly treated in works such as Le Sud et Le Nord (edited by Robert Lafont) and Fernand Braudel's classic, La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II.[1] Specialised studies, such as The Geography of the Mediterranean Region, by Ellen Churchill Semple, offer additional detail.[2] Similarly specialised works are devoted to the study of the economic and political forces which shaped the history of western Europe, firmly fixing southern France within the Mediterranean zone of influence. In this chapter attention will be focussed on those differentiating features which relate to the development of a cuisine.

COMMUNICATION

Language is a vehicle of culture. Peoples who share a common language often have other cultural attributes in common. The converse is not necessarily true, but language barriers effectively discourage communication and cultural interchange.

The distinction between 'oc' and 'oil' induced - some might say it exacerbated - a fundamental dichotomy in mediaeval France. As defined by Pierre Bec, the frontier between the two languages followed a line which extended northwards from the confluence of the Dordogne and Garonne rivers, skirted around the north of the Massif Central, descended south towards Roanne crossing the Rhone slightly north of Valence, and met the Alps just below Grenoble.[3]

An account of the historical development of the 'langue d'oc' can be found in numerous texts; suffice it here to say that the invading Visigoths preserved much of the former Roman civilisation in the south, retaining the Latin language base, while in the north the Franks allowed it to deteriorate and simultaneously superimposed Germanic elements. Thus the people of southern France - like their Italian and Catalan neighbours - continued to speak a language much more closely related to Latin than did the inhabitants of northern France. The real oc/oil dichotomy was manifest in more dramatic fashion in the eleventh and twelfth centuries with the burgeoning of literature in the vernacular. Formal recognition of the language seems to have followed upon Dante's differentiation, at the end of the thirteenth century, of the 'lingua d'oco' from the French and Italian of his day.[4]

Occitan - the name now used to describe the ensemble of meridional dialects - became prominent as a literary language, the language of the troubadours. Despite minor regional dialectal variations, the compositions of the troubadours could be sung and understood throughout the whole of southern France and Catalonia ("de Barcelone à Poitiers ou à Nice, point de difficulté pour se comprendre").[5] Similarly a common administrative language developed, which achievement demonstrates a high degree of linguistic unity. In northern France, a standard language did not appear before about the fifteenth century, around the same time as the Catalan language affirmed its separate identity, and a century or more later than in southern France.[6]

To what extent was the oc/oil frontier a real barrier, with an impact on material culture? As Jeanroy has emphasised, it arose more as a political and economic frontier than an ethnic one.[7] As long as Latin persisted as the clerical language, there was no barrier to official communication within France - indeed, within Europe - but the popular language, which became adopted as the literary language, was understood only within its own territory or, outside this, by an educated elite (the 'international set') who were familiar also with Latin and possibly other languages (for example, many of the troubadours were fluent in the language of northern France). The substitution of the popular language for Latin in the administrative sphere may well have accentuated any linguistic division; coincidentally, this occurred about the same time as the boom in the written word and increasing urbanisation of society. Thus, to the extent that the two groups of popular dialects each developed into two national languages, then the 'reality' of the frontier was perceived.

Paths of communication tended to promote a linguistic unity in the Mediterranean region while simultaneously enforcing the north-south division. To some extent, the Mediterranean was a closed world, with communication predominantly by maritime routes, along an east-west axis. Even before the Roman conquest, southern France had been in contact with countries of the eastern Mediterranean as well as Italy and Spain. Throughout the quiescence of the post-Roman period, despite a decrease in the volume of traffic, the Mediterranean remained the hub of the trading world, and the later resurgence of trade confirmed the importance of maritime routes across the Mediterranean for bulk traffic.

In France, the Romans had established a network of roads, radiating from the capital Lugdunum (Lyons) and designed to ensure ease of communication between and throughout all the provinces. Few of these routes, however, survived the disuse of subsequent centuries, and those which did persist, and which carried travellers and traders in the later mediaeval centuries, were predominantly the ones which linked established towns and cities, such as the old via Domitia which paralleled the Mediterranean coastline, and the Mediterranean-Atlantic connection through Carcassonne and Toulouse. These, too, favoured east-west rather than north-south communication. Nevertheless, there were also north-south corridors, such as the Rhone (which was particularly important for bulk goods), the pilgrimage paths, and the new mediaeval roads through the mountainous centre of the country, which were taken by Mediterranean merchants venturing to the northern fairs.

Large-scale population movements were comparatively rare in mediaeval western Europe; more often, the net result was a redistribution of population rather than a change in its composition, since migrations tended to occur within a linguistic region.[8] Merchants, too, operated within a restricted region; the clients for the cloth at the markets of Pézenas and Montagnac in the fourteenth century were principally from southern France, from Albi to Lyons.[9] Similarly, the troubadours and jongleurs of southern France tended to circulate within the confines of their own linguistic region; by the end of the twelfth century they were venturing to the Italian and Catalan courts and inspiring compositions in the same, or similar, language from local poets.[10]

The bulk of Mediterranean trade remained within the Mediterranean, as the example of Marseilles shows. Its trade was predominantly with other Mediterranean ports - Naples and Genoa, the Balearic Islands and Catalonia, Languedoc and the Eastern Mediterranean - and in terms of volume, consisted principally of foodstuffs (wheat, cheese, salted fish and salted meats, dried fruits and nuts) and cloth. Trade with northern France, by overland rather than maritime routes, was essentially limited to low-volume, high-profit items, such as spices.[11] Whether this localisation of trade was occasioned by the presence of a linguistic boundary or whether, on the other hand, it effectively promoted this divide, is impossible to answer. Nevertheless, it is clear that the frontier represented more than a mere difference in language.

LAND AND CULTIVATION

In a study of cuisine, agriculture has a dual significance, particularly for non-industrial societies. Not only does it have a direct relation, in that it provides a basis for cuisine, but indirectly, agricultural traditions govern the annual rhythm of life and often determine the kinds of foods associated with the regular religious festivities. While there does not seem to have been the same degree of specialisation in mediaeval as in modern agriculture, the differences between northern and Mediterranean regions were still significant.

The uses to which land is given are, to a very large extent, circumscribed by soil and climate, physical circumstances over which the farmer has no control. Such geographical factors can account for many of the fundamental differences between a Mediterranean and northern French system of agriculture. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that in actuality, the north-south division was never so precise, and that in a very large part of the country - a vast intermediate zone, extending from Cotentin to the Charentes - both systems were represented, in varying degrees.[12]

The agricultural 'revolution' of the eleventh and twelfth century may well have been the only rejuvenation of peasant practices since the neolithic era, but its effect was more evident in the geographically more favoured and more responsive northern regions.[13] The introduction, sometime after the eleventh century, of the mouldboard plough, which penetrated deeper and turned the sod, provided the heavier soils of northern Europe with a more appropriate technology than the traditional practices evolved in Mediterranean regions, where conservation of moisture was of prime importance and where the plough did little more than break up the surface of the soil.[14]

The mouldboard plough was heavier, because it used more iron, and it required more animal-power to pull it, but it obviated the need for a second cross-ploughing and thus allowed the cultivation of larger areas. At the same time, the adoption of a three-year rotation - spring-sown crop, autumn-sown crop, fallow - meant that the work of ploughing was distributed over the year, again making farming of larger areas more practicable. Cereal shortages were alleviated by spreading the risk over two crops; a spring planting of legumes helped restore soil fertility; a surplus of spring-sown oats could be fed to horses, more efficient draught animals than oxen. The combined effect of these complementary advantages was an increased surplus of food.

In Mediterranean regions, however, the traditional, more primitive practices persisted. Lack of summer rain precluded the sowing of spring crops, except in exceptionally favoured environments, and the standard farming system remained the soil-exhausting, low-yield, high-risk, two-year rotation in which crop and fallow alternated year after year. The standard implement was the primitive plough ('araire'), pulled by oxen, not horses: "The horse as a plough animal did not penetrate the Mediterranean lands".[15]

A further consequence of the more capital-intensive practices of northern regions, where the heavier and more expensive mouldboard plough required larger teams of horses or oxen to pull it, was the evolution of a system of joint ownership and cooperative management. Individual units of land were, in effect, amalgamated and were subject to the same treatment, so that at any time a farmer had one strip of land destined for a spring-sown crop, one for an autumn-sown crop and one strip fallow, these patterns cooperatively determined in advance and accepted by the whole community. Grazing on the fallow land was again a cooperative enterprise; individually-owned stock were assembled into a communal flock and entrusted to the shepherd.

Such a system was not possible in Mediterranean France, where, in any case, the old practice of transhumance was prevalent. Besides, few regions had either sufficient stock, or enough communally-held land to justify the formation of a collective flock. In southern France, "Chacun cultive à sa guise".[16] Physical and climatic conditions and the habitually low yields of cereal crops obliged the southern farmer to adopt a system of polyculture where fruit and nut trees (olive, chestnut, walnut, pear, cherry, peach, apricot) were integrated with crop and pasture, and their harvest helped compensate for low and irregular cereal yields. Under these conditions, where each parcel of land must be persuaded to produce its maximum, cooperative agriculture is not possible. "Southern polyculture is, in effect, too varied to admit any other regime than that of liberty."[17]

Only at harvest time, or for grape picking, would individual habits be subordinated to considerations of community benefit. It is tempting to see here another manifestation of the 'individuality' of the people of southern France, but Faucher warns against such a facile extrapolation, insisting that it is neither an innate characteristic nor of ethnic or historic origin; rather, it represents the ratification of habits born of contact with the geographic milieu.[18]

Characteristic also of Mediterranean regions was a more intensive system of horticulture, again a response to geographic and climatic conditions. Controlled irrigation practices were introduced into southern Spain by the Arabs, and from there spread through Catalonia to the Rouissillon, to Italy and to Provence. At the same time, many of the vegetables introduced or popularised by the Arabs followed the same routes, so that throughout Mediterranean Europe the same vegetables were being grown in the same way. Where irrigation was not of vital importance, as in northern France, the Arab influence was largely absent.

The consequences of these two, quite different, systems is immediately apparent in the different diets of the people of northern and Mediterranean countries. When cattle were spared from labour they could provide both meat and dairy products. In the Parisian region in the later mediaeval centuries, the inhabitants of towns and villages were large consumers of beef, butter and cheese.[19] Sheep, on the other hand, were valued principally for their wool, which supplied the local cloth industry.[20] In southern France native pastures and herbage could be more efficiently exploited by sheep and goats, while cattle had more value as draught animals, and those destined for eating were carefully distinguished and fattened.[21] Thus butter appeared rarely, cheese was more likely to be made from sheep or goat milk.[22]

Recognition of these fundamental differences has led to the elaboration of different dietary models for Mediterranean and northern countries at the end of the Middle Ages.[23] The southern European model, which prevailed in southern France, Italy and much of Spain, was based on white wheaten bread; mutton, lamb and kid, plus a little pork; an abundance of wine; olive oil; frequent recourse to eggs and fish, if possible. In addition, "Contact with Arab cuisine was able to stimulate the search for sugars."[24] A different dietary model was evident in northern Europe, from Portugal to Poland, and including central and northern France. Here bread was also made with grains other than wheat (rye, barley,meslin); beef was more common than mutton, and more fresh pork was eaten; cider and beer were drunk instead of, or as well as, wine; there were more dairy foods and, in Atlantic regions, more fish.[25]

Diet and agriculture are naturally and intimately related, and in subsequent chapters it is suggested that mediaeval dietary recommendations were more closely attuned to the rhythm of the agricultural calendar than to any intrinsic qualities of the foods. Both, in turn, are parameters of cuisine, and differences in dietary or agricultural system, or in both, presuppose differences in cuisine. On the other hand, a cuisine does not depend solely on the basic food resources produced by a certain region; cuisine is the way these, and other ingredients, are used by the people.

SOCIETY

Mediaeval society in southern France retained much of its Romanised character, as did also the societies of Catalonia and Italy. This is one of the means by which southern France may be distinguished from northern France, and by which it proclaims its place in the Mediterranean world. Among other characteristics which differentiated southern mediaeval France were its greater tolerance for Jews (and other 'foreigners'), less marked social oppositions and a more important role for the urban bourgeois.[26]

Most of these societal differences were historical in origin; many were direct legacies of Roman civilisation. The particular legacy which appertains to cuisine is the urbanisation of society since, as will be argued in a subsequent chapter, towns are necessary to the development and persistence of cuisine. The Romans introduced their own style of urban organisation into Gaul; most of the important cities and towns of third-century Roman Gaul were situated in the southern half of the country and were particularly concentrated in the Mediterranean fringe.[27] Narbonne, Nimes, Arles, Beziers and Orange, all large, populous, thriving urban centres during the period of Roman colonisation, still retained much of their pre-eminence in the later mediaeval period, permanence often assured by their election as seats of bishops or archbishops. Protected by walls and ramparts, cities provided refuge for ecclesiastics and lesser nobility, together with their wealth and possessions; in function, they were counterparts to the northern castles.[28]

Thus arose a fundamental difference between southern and northern French society. In northern France, the nobility was absent from the towns, both physically and politically, but in southern France, as in Italy and Catalonia, nobles often lived in the town and, as in Roman times, participated in town affairs. The nobility "played an important role, especially in the first phase of establishment of the consulats and, from a cultural point of view, it stamped the urban culture of southern France with a more positive aristocratic imprint than in northern

France."[29]

In France, the 'consulat' system of town government was particular to the south - indeed, a hypothetical boundary between the zones of 'consulat' and 'commune' would almost coincide with a line drawn between the territories of 'langue d'oc' and 'langue d'oil'. It originated in Italy where the town, with its markets and its communities of nobles and merchants, had never completely disappeared. In the twelfth century consulats began to appear in southern France - in Avignon in 1129, Arles in 1131, Marseilles in 1178 - and took over the role which had formerly belonged to the seigneur, dispensing justice in penal, commercial and civil matters. It was the consulat which looked after the well-being of the town, for example, by contracting for supplies of grain if shortages appeared imminent. An important characteristic of the consulat was the presence of both nobles and bourgeois, acting in concert. At Avignon, four nobles sat side by side with four bourgeois; at Arles, four knight consuls represented the 'city' and eight bourgeois, the 'town'.[30]

The urbanisation of the nobility in the Mediterranean region went hand in hand with a weak feudal system, another feature by which southern France was distinguished from the north, where feudalism was the very backbone of society. The Carolingian conquest had very little permanent effect on the system of landholding in southern France and Catalonia, which was essentially based on allodial (freehold) ownership. Uncultivated land was made productive through a type of sharefarming arrangement, known in Italy as mezzadria, by which the land, once cultivated, was divided between the farmer and the original owner. Archibald Lewis emphasises that "the particular type of society which emerged (in southern France and Catalonia) by 1050 was more the result of certain indigenous instincts than it was of Carolingian influence".[31] These 'instincts' were the traditional preference for allodial land, the emphasis on family control, and less regard for the personal loyalty obliged by feudal ties in northern France. Lewis' conclusion stresses the unity of the civilisation and society of Mediterranean Europe and the fundamental divergences between southern and northern France.

> "By 1050, and even earlier, we can clearly view this whole region as an area enjoying a civilization generally similar in every portion of it, and different from that found in northern France. All of the Midi and Catalonia by the eleventh century had the same kind of social classes, the same kind of Church, the same kind of military system, the same weak feudalism, the same lack of government, the same kind of voluntary courts or assemblies which kept the peace. We can say, by this time, that we are dealing with what, for want of a better term, we might call a special civilization. ... The society of the Midi, then, was different from that of northern France by 1050, because its original elements, the

contributions that the Carolingians made to it, and the basic instincts were different from those north of the Loire."[32]

Other 'traditions' with which the feudal system did not concur included the system of inheritance common to southern France and Catalonia, and some parts of Italy, by which property was divided among all heirs, including female heirs; women could "freely inherit and dispose of property and act as free agents controlling their own estates".[33] Disregard for any rights of primogeniture had other consequences: "The Church too in Italy never suffered itself, as in northern countries, to be used as a means of providing for the younger sons of noble families."[34] One corollary of this system, together with the juxtaposition of nobles and merchants in the towns and in the consulats, was a more fluid society with a less rigid hierarchy. Social distinction was based on wealth as much as on birth, and on 'real' worth as much as on inherited estate. Marriages which united landed nobility and moneyed merchants were not scorned on either side, and merchants used the profits from trade to purchase respectability via an impoverished nobleman's estate. The example of fourteenth-century Brignoles might be assumed to be typical; in outward appearance, little difference would have been remarked between nobles and merchants, lawyers and doctors, since all were customers for the expensive imported fabrics.[35]

Southern French society - indeed, Mediterranean society - was typically multicultural. The Jewish communities, never numerous in the north of France, were better tolerated, even accepted, by southern society. A synagogue was established in Carpentras in the fourteenth century and by the fifteenth century Jews accounted for one-tenth of the population. As doctors, they were highly esteemed, even by the Christian population; conversely, Christian servants, nursemaids and tradesmen were employed by some Jewish families.[36] An Arab influence was particularly noticeable in Montpellier where, from the eleventh century, the school of medicine had attracted a diverse population, Arabs, Jews and Spaniards living side by side.

One senses a spirit of autonomy, of individualism, in southern France, and this was already evident in the themes of troubadour poetry which, in portraying a sensual and adulterous love or in denouncing corrupt priests (as by Peire Cardenal) hardly conformed to ecclesiastical ideals. Nor did the heretic Cathar movement, which was particularly widespread in south-western France.

It is easy to imagine how, in this urbanised and culturally literate society of southern France, the culinary art could flourish. Certainly the manners and ceremony surrounding the dinners and festivities of courtly society were fixed and ritualised by the thirteenth century, since they have been detailed in a text written for the count of Foix, 'Elucidari de las proprietatz de totas res naturals', although these same conventions may have been common to mediaeval civilisation in general.[37] It is possible, too, that a more open, less codified society was more conducive to innovation and experimentation, borrowing and adapting, and thus favoured culinary evolution.

These features of southern French society were also typical of Italian and Catalan society. One might therefore anticipate southern French cuisine similarly to tend towards a Mediterranean model. It is unlikely that the integration of the Languedoc into the French kingdom in 1271 had any immediate and noticeable effect on its cuisine, since the imposition of a language of administration is more easily achieved than that of a cuisine. Like its society, southern French cuisine remained essentially Mediterranean for several centuries thereafter.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL DIVERSITY

> "Le mot de France ne correspond, il est vrai, à aucune unité économique avant la fin du Moyen Age. Il désigne un certain nombre de régions juxtaposées et n'ayant guère les unes avec les autres plus de rapports qu'avec l'étranger."[38]

There is no doubt that national and regional cultural differences also existed in the mediaeval period and were as clearly perceived as physical or geographical differences. A sense of regional identity was felt even among what might be called the 'international set' of merchants who travelled from their home bases to the trading centres of the east and to the large fairs of northern Europe. At the fairs of Troyes, merchants from the same town or region tended to group together, and 'houses' were established for merchants from Montpellier, Barcelona, Valencia, and other towns.[39] At the same time, the evidence favours the concept of a cultural divide between northern and southern France, and a closer affiliation of the latter with other countries of Mediterranean Europe.

Lynne Lawner has suggested that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a rivalry existed between northern and southern France as to which region possessed the superior culture.[40] It was manifest when Constance of Arles married Robert le Pieux in 1032, and was accompanied to the northern French court by some of her fellow-countrymen; Raoul Glaber described these citizens of Auvergne and Aquitaine as full of self-conceit, with ridiculous manners, clothing and hair styles.[41] On the other hand, the people of southern France saw the northern French as insufferably arrogant and imperious, and personifying the 'desmezura' which was the very opposite of their ideal of 'mezura' (reasonableness, restraint and rationality).[42] The veracity of such descriptions is questionable, but the underlying sentiments are clear; the inhabitants of northern and southern France preferred to strengthen the sense of national or regional identity by accentuating what were seen as differences.

For contemporary descriptions of the various regions and their inhabitants one is indebted to the zealous and observant Gilles le Bouvier dit Berry, who, it seems, travelled through France, Italy and other Mediterranean countries, plus the other countries to the north of France, in the early years of the fifteenth century.[43] His account is not without flaws; it is doubtful whether he was an impartial observer, and he does not appear to have been very discriminating in his sources of information, for he repeats the old myths of Prester John and spices arriving via the Nile. Nevertheless, even if his writing merely perpetuated popular belief, he portrays the attitudes and opinions of his era.

The descriptions of Gilles le Bouvier touch not only on the physical environment but also on the people of each region and their differential manners of dress, of fighting, of housing, of eating and drinking. Languedoc is "un très bon païs, et riche d'or et d'argent, de blé, de vins, d'uilles d'olives, de dates et d'amandes"; Provence has "foison huilles d'ollives, amendes, figues et grant foison chevaulx. Ce pais de Provence fournist le sel, des poissons de mer frés et sallé ... En ce païs a grant foison juifz".[44] Likewise in Italy, olive oil, citrus fruits, figs and wines characterise the regions of Genoa, Tuscany, Naples and Sicily. Venice is described as "la plus riche cité de crestienté ... Ces Veniciens sont moult grans seigneurs".[45] In the Naples region, too, there are "grans seigneurs,ducs, contes et marquis et y a grant foison juifs".[46] Neapolitans are "grosses gens et rudes, et maulvais catholiques, et grans pecheurs" while the Tuscans are "moult saiges gens, et honnestement vestus et sont biens soubres gens de boire et de mengier".[47]

On the other hand, Normandy is a "païs de blez et de bestial blanc et rouge... et grand foison de pommes et poires, dont l'on fait le citre et le poiré".[48] The people of Flanders are said to be "grans mengeurs de chers, de poissons, de lait et de beures" and, in common with the inhabitants of other cold countries, such as England and Scandinavia, "usent fort d'espices pour eschaufer en toutes leurs viandes".[49] Instead of wine, they drink beer and mead, which has a deletorious effect on their character: "Ces gens sont terribles gens et furieux, et gens à sang et frapent plus tost que ceulx qui sont nourris de vin".[50]

Eating and drinking habits may thus also serve to distinguish one nationality from another. Francesc Eiximenis detailed such differences even more vividly in his Com Usar Be de Beure e Menjar of 1384.[51] No more than Gilles le Bouvier was he impartial - indeed, his characterisations were usually intended to demonstrate the superiority of the Catalan people - but one can assume that these exaggerations also reveal a kernel of truth. The answer to his question as to which nation has the most 'honest' and most 'religious' eating habits was, incontestably, the Catalan nation, and Eiximenis enumerates the reasons why. Catalans are content with simple meals and, unlike others, do not desire a profusion of different dishes; Catalans drink wine with their meal, but not to excess, unlike the English and Germans who drink beer and mead, and the French and Lombards who drink copious amounts of wine; Catalans carve meat carefully and neatly, while other nations hack it to pieces (only Catalans and Aragonese observe the correct carving procedure for each piece of meat); Catalans wear their sleeves at the right length, while others, who wear long sleeves, have the problem of them falling into the bowl of sauce. Thus, concluded Eiximenis, Catalans are superior to all others, although he also conceded some merit in the Italian custom - moderation in eating, preference for quality over quantity in wines.[52]

It is not extravagant to suggest that these differences in table manners proceeded from, or at least were associated with, different cuisines, and the idea of differing national - even regional - cuisines in the Middle Ages is now widely accepted. Jean-Louis Flandrin has argued convincingly that, despite a certain 'internationalism' of cuisine in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, recipes testify to specific national - and regional - culinary practices and tastes.[53] Anglo-Norman cuisine of the late thirteenth/early fourteenth-century differed significantly from that of northern France at the same time, despite many basic similarities; and a comparison of collections of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century French and English recipes has shown that "more than half of the most frequently repeated recipes are in fact peculiar to one country or the other".[54] Likewise, English formal feasts, from the late thirteenth century, differed in both form and content from their French counterparts.[55]

One of the earliest French culinary manuscripts concludes with the phrase "according to the diverse customs of diverse countries", implying recognition of differing culinary customs, and in the Latin Liber, the naming of recipes as Spanish or German or Provençal suggests that these variations were believed to be typical of the country or region, whether or not the correspondence existed in actuality.[56]

In support of the idea of some shared culinary traditions in Mediterranean Europe comes a scrap of evidence in a thirteenth-century composition by the monk Joffre de Foixa - in effect, a list of his favourite foods - which suggests that not only the language but also the dishes were familiar to audiences throughout the region.

> "Hoc dixit monachus de Fuxano
>
> Subrefusa ab cabirol
> Porc ab (un) unyo novell,
> E gallina ab juxell,
> E capo rostit d'un an
> Vull que hom me pos denan,
> E formatge torrador,
> E vi rosat en Pascor,
> E giroflat quan inverna."[57]

'Subrefusa' seems to have been a kind of sauce, perhaps similar to a sauce called 'renfuso'; 'juxell' was presumably the same as 'jussel', for which the Libre del

Coch includes a recipe, and which also seems to have been common in Provence; 'formatge torrador' was a typical dish in the last course of a dinner in Catalonia.[58] The rose- and clove-flavoured wines would also have been well-known, but were not necessarily restricted to, or even typical of, Mediterranean countries.

Likewise, similarities in culinary equipment and tableware support the concept of a common Mediterranean tradition. The presence of similar styles and shapes of serving utensils is not necessarily proof that the same kinds of dishes were served in them, but does suggest fundamental similarities. In both Italy and Spain in the fifteenth century, the same kinds of serving dishes appeared on the tables. Italy imported large quantities of lustred earthenware from Valencia, and when the technique was mastered by Italian craftsmen they continued to use Spanish forms and motifs in their decoration. The bowls ('scudulle') and flat plates ('talladors') were almost identical to those used in Spain, including Catalonia, and the large, deep bowls ('piattelli grandissimi', 'bacili' or 'conche') were directly influenced by the Valencian 'brasero'.[59]

The evidence for the culinary particularities which earlier studies have brought to light is derived almost exclusively from recipes. The absence of any comparable corpus in the Occitan tongue or of southern French origin has meant that the culinary identity of this region has been largely ignored. Historically, geographically, linguistically and culturally, Mediterranean France shared the same background as its neighbours, and had much less in common with northern France. Why should it not share culinary similarities?

From this hypothesis to its proof there is no clear and direct path. One must approach obliquely, first identifying those features which are characteristic of the cuisines of Mediterranean Europe (Italy and Catalonia) and northern France, and establishing two culinary models, then matching what is known of southern French cuisine with one or other model. The result might not provide a categorical answer, but rather will tilt the scales preferentially in one direction. But before even the first step can be taken, it is necessary to identify what is meant by 'cuisine'.