

CHAPTER NINE

THE EVERYDAY TABLE

In the preceding chapters attention has concentrated on prestige foods and ingredients, the special-occasion dishes, as Chiquart's recipes illustrate. Meatless, fish-less, sugar-less dishes were definitely of second rank, and disdained by gourmands like the anonymous ecclesiastic whom Eixeminis holds up as an example of moral (and gastronomic) corruption.¹

But a continual diet of such dishes was a long way from the everyday reality of even modestly-well-off bourgeois households, where a meal may have been but a single course of only a few dishes, and possibly just as distant from the ordinary, everyday fare of the wealthy and noble. Many records testify to the differences between 'ordinary' and 'feast' days; 'ordinary' days meant a higher proportion of the daily budget spent on bread and vegetables, or on more bread and more of the less-expensive, locally-produced ingredients. Ordinary dishes were cheaper, plainer and more dependent on local resources, which characteristics were in total antithesis to the qualities of expensive, rare, and exotic which were attached to prestige dishes.

Mediaeval cooks accepted the proverbial wisdom about sow's ears and silk purses, and preferentially lavished their arts and skills on those ingredients and dishes which were already in the silk purse class, where their efforts were better rewarded. It has already been shown that differences between cuisines are more likely to be manifest in dishes which are more expensive, more decorative, which required more craftsmanship; obversely, it is in the ordinary dishes that are found similar treatments for similar ingredients. Thus at the lower extreme of 'alimentation', distinctive regional characteristics are absent, as Stouff concluded: "The dish of peas, broad beans or cabbage, with a piece of salted pork, was the basic food of the peasants, the artisans, the ordinary folk of Provence. It was also the basic food of the masses throughout Europe in the late mediaeval period."³

To the extent that ordinary dishes are dependent on local produce, regional differences become apparent in the diversities of ingredients available. Yet these are no less indicative of differences in cuisine than are differences in choice of culinary treatment. That they belong to agriculture as much as to culture makes them no less relevant. This chapter, then, looks at basic ingredients, vegetables and cereals. Once again, it is clear that the Mediterranean model shared some features with that of northern France, but also had its own distinguishing characteristics.

A common misconception about mediaeval cuisine is

that, apart from roast and boiled meats, all foods were like a thick mush. "At any rate, it is a common characteristic (of the 'made dishes' of courtly cuisine) that solid ingredients were ground in mortars or pureed, so that the largest pieces or gobbets were no larger than could be eaten with a spoon," wrote Mennell, echoing Mead's horrified remonstrance.⁴ It is more accurate to say that the ordinary dishes of ordinary cuisine were of the sort to be eaten with a spoon, but in the most representative 'made dish' of courtly cuisine, the brouet, the meat was more likely to be in largish pieces, such as quarters of chicken. Cereal and vegetable dishes, however, typically appeared as thick purees. It was the exceptional diner who used a fork at a mediaeval banquet, and more often towards the end of the fifteenth century, when the Middle Ages were metamorphosing into the Renaissance.⁵ The implements customarily used were the fingers - with rigorous decorum - and the spoon, and even the use of a spoon was probably restricted to the more prosperous households; Stouff suggests that at a more simple level of society the 'potage' was drunk directly from the bowl.⁶ In illustrations from the series of Tacuinum Sanitatis manuscripts, an obviously well-born lady sups her barley soup with a spoon but a labourer, sitting at the kitchen table with a dish of boiled tripe, has no implement save a knife to slice his bread.⁷

Although the spoon might not have been in universal use, the sorts of dishes that could be eaten with a spoon were found over the whole spectrum of mediaeval society;

they are more appropriately described as 'dishes in a bowl'. Unlike meat and fish dishes, they were firmly grounded in the realm of popular cuisine; if they contained meat or fish, it was as an ancillary rather than primary ingredient. In Catalan cuisine there was a clear division between 'pietances' - roast and boiled meats, pies, fish in any way - and 'cuines', the 'made dishes', which were further subdivided into those eaten with bread, which generally correspond to what have here been termed brouets, and those eaten with a spoon, dishes based on cereals and vegetables plus the more elaborate group typified by blanc manger.⁸ In Italy, too, 'spoon dishes' seemed to form a consistent and coherent group and were usually referred to as 'menestre' or 'brodetti'.

The prestige ingredients of mediaeval cuisine - meats, fish, spices, sugar - were specifically associated with the towns and their wealthy citizens. Cereals and vegetables, the ordinary, everyday ingredients, could be independent of commerce and free of this association. They were diffused through all levels of society, although distinctions could still be demonstrated through the ways in which they were cooked and served.

VEGETABLES

Vegetables belonged to the group of ingredients whose use was not confined to, nor necessarily associated with, a privileged class. Unlike meat, poultry and fish, vegetables were not under the control of a corporation

(more often, the vegetable seller was a woman, offering her wares in the streets), and were largely outside the regulated commerce. Even in the towns, many households had their own vegetable gardens close to the house or just outside the city walls ("La possession de vergers et de jardins est presque aussi répandue que celle des vignes ... on trouve des jardins, des vergers au coeur même des villes .. Il n'est pas de monastère, pas d'établissement religieux sans jardin".⁹) In his month-by-month garden guide the author of Le Menagier names nearly thirty different vegetables (including legumes) and herbs to be grown in the household garden.¹⁰

Vegetable dishes can be seen as more fundamental (and thus more traditional) than many meat and fish dishes whose symbolic role sometimes superseded the nutritive one. Based on the products of the domestic garden and, by extension, on the resources of the local region, vegetable dishes belonged as much to 'alimentation' as to cuisine. In a comparative study of cuisines, this gives rise to a problem, since cookery books do not always tell the whole story, especially when the ingredient is seen as less important. In the Vatican Viandier, recipes for 'ordinary' dishes are deliberately omitted because "d'autres menuz potaiges, comme poree de bettes, chouz, navetz, ... poys, fèves frasées, ... brouet aux yssues de porc, femmes en sont maistresses, et chascun le sçait faire."¹¹

In addition, the emphasis given vegetables varies from text to text; recipes for vegetables (including legumes) represent one-third of the total in

Anonimo Toscano but less than 5% in the printed Viandier. This is not only indicative of the individuality of each text and illustrative of the direction of evolution of cookery books, but may also relate to the different levels of society to which each was directed.

Ordinary vegetable dishes were not in the same class as roast peacock, nor even brouets. The only vegetable recipes given by Chiquart are destined for invalids; there are no recipes for 'ordinary' vegetable dishes in the Nice manuscript which addresses itself to 'rich gourmands' ("per XII ricchi giucti"). This is not to say that in such society, vegetables were not eaten, but rather that they did not make the sort of dish that would convey an impression of wealth and power. Just as meat and fish can be said to belong to the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, so vegetables find their niche among the lower bourgeoisie and peasantry.

According to the social context, however, the role, content and appearance of the vegetable dish varied. For the less well-off, the simple vegetable broth was the meagre accompaniment to the basic bread; at the next higher level the vegetable potage, easily accessorised with meat, fish, cheese or eggs, or a combination of these proteinaceous ingredients, became the basis of a one-dish meal. It must be remembered that at all levels of the culinary hierarchy there were oscillations between the commonplace of everyday and the festive exception. Opulent feasts which form the subject of many familiar mediaeval paintings (such as the Duke of Berry's banquet, in Les

Très Riches Heures) tend to overemphasise this style of eating, but in the more realistic illustrations of works like the Tacuinum Sanitatis can be seen the ordinary bourgeois at table, a single dish before him.¹² "On the whole, meals in Provence at the end of the Middle Ages seemed to be reduced to one or two dishes."¹³ Catalans similarly - at least the ordinary citizens - were, according to Eiximenis, content with one dish containing meat or fish for their dinner, and for their supper, fish or eggs or something equally modest.¹⁴ At lavish multi-course dinners vegetable dishes were very much the Cinderella. If offered, the vegetable dish (sometimes two, in the menus of Le Menagier) was usually a part of the first course.

Most of the vegetable dishes for which recipes are given in the mediaeval texts typify the one-dish meal, even when the dish was intended to be served as one of several dishes in a dinner of several courses. In some, the accessory ingredients are incorporated into the vegetable hash or puree, in others the accessory ingredients are additional. It was this kind of vegetable potage which was served almost daily to both students and masters at the Studium Papal at Trets and to which would be added, according to the day, fresh or salted meat, fresh or salted fish, and/or eggs.¹⁵

In accord with the mediaeval distinction between legumes or pulses, usually dried, and fresh vegetables, that is, leafy greens and root vegetables ('legumina' and 'ortologia' in Provençal parlance) the two categories will

be considered separately, although similar cooking methods were applied to both.

LEGUMES

If the dinners of the students and teachers at Trets are any indication of general custom in southern France, legumes were typically eaten in Lent, and rarely at any other time of year.¹⁶ At a different social level, legumes appear in all five Lenten menus in Le Menagier but in less than half of the suggested menus for dinner or supper on meat days. However, any association of legumes with Lent is probably more fortuitous than ritualised and emphasises the fundamental importance of the agricultural calendar which underlay not only religious observances but also dietetic medicine. Dried legumes were customarily eaten in winter, when fresh provisions were scarce, and Lent came at the end of this period. Like other more humble ingredients, they typified 'alimentation' as much as 'cuisine', but the standard culinary 'tours de main' could easily adapt the prosaic to make it appropriate for more opulent tables.

Again, as with other basic staples, any differences between the cuisines of the north of France and Mediterranean regions are first manifest in the range of legumes used. In the northern French cookery books, only peas and broad beans are mentioned. These two predominated in household inventories in geographically-similar Burgundy, where some records also mention chick peas,

lentils and phaseole, possibly home-grown for domestic use in rural areas.¹⁷ In the extreme Mediterranean situation, the peas were supplanted by chick peas; the only legumes used in the recipes of Sent Sovi are broad beans, chick peas and lentils.¹⁸ Southern France and northern Italy appear to have represented an intermediate zone, with both peas and chick peas as well as broad beans, lentils and phaseole beans; Italian texts give recipes for all five legumes. Chick peas, however, may well have been far more prevalent than peas.¹⁹ Peas, broad beans and chick peas are mentioned in Provençal kitchen accounts, and all three were bought on various occasions for the papal court at Avignon. Peas and broad beans were grown in Provençal gardens, although peas were far less common, and Francesco Datini's Tuscan farm produced both broad beans and chick peas.²⁰

Broad beans, then were universal; Piponnier suggests that they were considered "un aliment vulgaire" and at one 'seigneurie' in Auvergne they were fed to the pigs.²¹ Peas and chick peas carried a higher prestige; Chiquart gives recipes for peas and for chick peas ('syseros') but not broad beans. Peas, in particular 'pois blancs', were rated more highly than broad beans in northern France, and were more expensive; similarly in southern France, peas were at the top of the price scale, followed by chick peas and lentils and then broad beans.²² In mediaeval Piedmont, chick peas were normally the most expensive legume.²³ The fact that the Lenten 'potages' at Trets never used peas (at least not in the sample year, 1364-65)

is perhaps an indication that they were too great a luxury for the students, and too expensive. Such values are, however, merely relative; both peas and broad beans were regarded with some disdain in northern France, possibly because of their Lenten symbolism, and the term 'pois' was used figuratively to refer disparagingly to something of little value or merit.²⁴

This is not to say that legumes were habitually treated with disdain in a gastronomic sense. Like other 'ordinary' ingredients, they could be prepared in sophisticated ways far removed from the peasant prototypes, as in the northern French 'cretonée', an egg yolk-enriched puree which served as a base for pieces of fried meat or fish. In the ultimate fantasy of Martino, the hollowed-out outer skin of the beans is stuffed with a sweet, marzipan-like filling.²⁵ On the other hand, because of their origins in a lower level of the culinary hierarchy, they were generally associated with other ingredients of that level, the less prestigious, less expensive flavourings of onions, herbs and saffron.²⁶ They were cooked in water, or in water then in meat stock, or with a piece of meat, as were fresh vegetables. Almond milk was never used with legumes in the recipes of northern France but did enter into some of the recipes of the Mediterranean texts.

The preference for peas in northern France, at least in the ranks of the bourgeois and the nobility, can perhaps explain the relative prevalence of pea stock in its Lenten recipes. The practice seems to have been

typical of northern France, which is confirmed by a remark in Anonimo Toscano (in a recipe possibly derived from a northern French source): "Keep the pea stock, with which you can make soups in the French way".²⁷ Indeed, the recipe in which this remark is included is similar to those in northern French texts. Probably the most popular preparation in northern France was Pois au lart, a dish mentioned often in the fabliaux, and basically boiled peas to which were added, near the end of cooking, a piece of salt pork. (The 'lart', in this instance, was probably not just pork fat but slices of salted pork, possibly streaky belly pork.) In Lent, the pork was replaced by 'craspois' (salted whale meat or blubber). This combination of peas with salt pork, or 'craspois', does not seem to have been as traditional in Mediterranean regions.

FRESH VEGETABLES

Unlike most of the meat and fish dishes discussed in previous chapters, vegetable dishes were generally shy of spices and seasonings. This is particularly noticeable in the recipes of northern France, where vegetables are given a rather spartan treatment: parboil finish in meat stock/pea stock/almond milk, or with oil or butter, in accordance with meat-day and non-meat-day requirements. Catalan custom was to part-cook the vegetables in stock, then complete cooking in goat or almond milk, sometimes adding a final enrichment of eggs and/or cheese. The resultant puree could be sprinkled with sugar or, as

proposed by Mestre Robert, sugar plus cinnamon. Italian practices seem to have been similar to Catalan ones, and vegetable dishes - to judge by the comprehensive collection of recipes in Anonimo Toscano - often incorporated eggs, cheese, mashed fish or shredded meat. The inclusion of meat probably indicates that these were relatively important dishes, each a meal in itself, which might explain why the recipes are more elaborate than the very basic treatments of Le Menagier. The vegetables were often boiled with a piece of meat - usually not specified, as though one used whatever was available - and seasoned with the cheaper spices, pepper and saffron (locally-grown?); Lenten alternatives made use of onions and oil, or almond milk and sugar, a standard combination also present in the recipes of Martino.

These recipes provide evidence of disparities between northern France and Mediterranean regions in the style of cooking vegetables. Possibly there was also a difference in attitude towards vegetable dishes, although this is difficult to substantiate. (The proportion of the food budget spent on fruits and vegetables is, despite possible inaccuracies -household gardens may have contributed their share - remarkably consistent, from Bruges to Arles to Sicily.²⁸) In addition, there are demonstrable differences in the range of vegetables that entered into the cuisine, which in turn can dictate differences in the form of the vegetable dishes. In Catalan cuisine, for example, the popular gourds and aubergines would naturally have dissolved into a thick

mash or puree during cooking, whereas leafy vegetables and cabbage would have produced dishes of a different consistency.

The vegetables of Le Menagier are those common to most of Europe and England, the leafy greens, cabbage, leeks and onions, "navaiz", skirret and mushrooms.²⁹ There is only one recipe in Le Menagier for gourd ('courage').³⁰ In Anonimo Toscano and Martino are recipes for these same vegetables plus fennel, lettuce and various root vegetables ('rape', 'raponcelli', 'naponi', 'pastinache'), and Cuoco Napolitano adds recipes for aubergine and melon.³¹ Several varieties of melons, and cucumbers, are described in the manuscripts of Tacuinum Sanitatis, where gourds, melons and cucumbers are almost indistinguishable in illustrations. In the Sent Sovi, however, over half the vegetable recipes are for the 'new' varieties - gourds ('carabaces'), asparagus and aubergines ('alberginies'), although leeks and onions, spinach and leafy greens, mushrooms, parsnip and cabbage were also present.³²

These 'new' vegetables all belonged to the Mediterranean. Some, like asparagus, gourds and melons, had been known to the Romans, although their cultivation subsequently lapsed, to be revived by the Arabs. Asparagus was highly esteemed in the Arab world, and was eloquently praised in verse at the Abbassid court of Bagdad. The Sent Sovi includes four recipes for asparagus (five, if the additional recipe of the Valencia manuscript is counted), and in the Italian texts, Anonimo Toscano, Platina and

Anonimo Meridionale/A all offer recipes.³³ At a wedding feast in late fifteenth-century Milan, the second course consisted of "sparesi molto belli e di grande ammirazione per essere fuori di stagione et erano di smisurata grandezza".³⁴ Gottschalk states that asparagus was grown in the Parisian region in the fourteenth century, but according to Gibault, the earliest mention of asparagus in France is 1469.³⁵

Aubergines were introduced by the Arabs into Spain and Sicily, whence they spread throughout the Mediterranean region and, much later, to northern France. They were a common ingredient of Hispano-Arab cuisine, and a thirteenth-century cookery book includes at least 17 recipes for 'berenjenas'.³⁶ Aubergines must have been grown in Catalonia around the same time, or not long after, since the Sent Sovi gives four recipes.³⁷ Although they are thought to have been available in Italy at the end of the fourteenth century ('melongiana' is described in several Tacuinum Sanitatis manuscripts), the first documented recipe did not appear until late in the fifteenth century.³⁸ This recipe, which does not have a counterpart in the known Catalan repertoire of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, may be derived directly from Arab or Hispano-Arab cuisine, or from a Sicilian variation.

It is significant that the recipes of the Sent Sovi treat aubergines in a slightly different way to most other vegetables. The most likely explanation is that the adoption of a new ingredient was accompanied by the

acceptance of techniques for its preparation; thus one can imagine a migration of aubergines-plus-recipes from southern Spain to Catalonia and thence across the Mediterranean to Italy and southern France, later to northern France (aubergines were not popularised in northern Europe until the sixteenth century).

A typically Mediterranean practice, characteristic of both the Arab and early Roman agriculture, was the drying of vegetables for conservation. The Sent Sovi details the process for gourds: slice the gourds into rounds, thread them together and dry them in the sun, so that "the gourds are good to eat in winter".³⁹ Platina also mentions the drying of gourds, and several Italian recipes for 'zucche' instruct the cook to take "monete secche", since the hard, dried rounds of gourd would have had the appearance of coins.⁴⁰ Desiccation was a common means of preservation in the Arab world, used for meat and fish as well as desert truffles, figs and pistachios.⁴¹ Dried mushrooms are also mentioned in the mediaeval Mediterranean texts.⁴²

Artichokes also owed their introduction to the Arabs, although they do not appear to have been popularised until the fifteenth century. There are no recipes for artichokes in the texts here examined, although 'artichiochi' appear, in company with 'pera muscatella' and 'finoghio fresco' in one of the menus of Cuoco Napolitano.⁴³

These 'new' vegetables are rare in northern French cuisine; only 'courges' rate a recipe in Le Menagier and in the fifteenth-century Viandier, where the addition of

egg yolks and milk hints at a Mediterranean (Catalan) influence.⁴⁴ Spinach was also an Arab introduction, but possibly arrived by a more direct route than did aubergines. It was known to Pierre de Crescens in Italy in the thirteenth century and popularised in France in the fourteenth century (it was apparently still relatively new when the author of Le Menagier wrote his treatise, describing in detail this "espece de poree que l'en dit espinars").⁴⁵

The vegetable resources of southern France were similar to those available to Italian and Catalan cooks. Details of vegetable gardens in Provence demonstrate the ubiquity of the standard vegetables - leeks, onions, spinach, cabbage - but the 'new' vegetables were also cultivated. Gourds and lettuce were grown in the garden at Trets in the fourteenth century, and in the summer months (July and August) gourds formed the basis of the daily potage on one day in five, on average.⁴⁶ The thirteenth-century Provençal dietary recommended the eating of gourds and cucumbers in summer.⁴⁷ A merchant of Aix-en-Provence contracted with his gardener for the supply of lettuce, purslane ("pourpier"), parsley, gourd and melon for the use of his household (presumably for spring and summer, the contract being dated January 1438).⁴⁸ Likewise, the monastery of Saint-Victor at Marseille arranged for an annual supply of vegetables - cabbage, leeks, spinach, beets, parsley and other herbs, gourds and onions, according to season, and in addition lettuce, borage, 'brocoli' and cucumbers

for the hospital kitchen.⁴⁹ 'Cougourdes', 'melons' and 'potirons' were amongst the vegetables offered to King René during his period of residence in Provence.⁵⁰ In vegetable resources, southern France was clearly part of the Mediterranean.

The prevalence of lettuce in Provençal gardens prompts questions as to their use, since recipes for lettuce are rare.⁵¹ In all probability, lettuce were prepared in accordance with the instructions of Platina, who advocated a salad as a "light and not filling ... mild and pleasant" dish with which to start a meal.⁵²

Salads could be made with raw or cooked lettuce, or lettuce plus a diversity of green herbs, dressed with oil, vinegar and salt. King René may well have enjoyed this type of salad in the summer months - lettuce was specifically recommended for June - when his kitchen received regular deliveries of lettuce and herbs, often described as "pour faire salade".⁵³ Similarly, the bishop of Avignon was often served salads during "la belle saison".⁵⁴ Yet there is no mention of salads in the northern texts (and among the fourteenth-century English texts only The Forme of Cury offers a recipe, for 'salat').⁵⁵ Possibly, for a dish so elementary and so familiar as a green salad, a recipe was considered unnecessary. In one menu, the author of Le Menagier proposes 'laictues tubesches', presumed to be cos lettuce, in the third course, and 'lectues'/'laictues' in two other menus, but without further detail.⁵⁶ Lettuce was available in northern France, at least from the thirteenth

century; cos lettuce was apparently introduced from Avignon about 1389.⁵⁷ One would expect that, if salads were considered appropriate for King René and the bishop of Avignon, they would be equally appropriate at a similar level of society in northern France. Their absence from cookery books and menus could indicate that salads were neither typical nor frequent in northern French cuisine, and that in the mediaeval period at least, salads were characteristically associated with Mediterranean cuisine.

As has been remarked earlier, similar ingredients of similar prestige were often treated in similar ways, in both Mediterranean regions and northern France. Thus root vegetables (skirret, 'navaiz', 'raoncelli', 'pastinache') were customarily parboiled, rolled in flour and fried, almond milk was a standard Lenten substitute for meat stock, cabbage was boiled until tender then seasoned with stock. Where the two cuisines do differ, in regard to fresh vegetables, an Arab influence is implicated. Vegetables were grown in greater variety in the Mediterranean region, this variety owing much to Arab introductions. At the same time, Arab culinary techniques were introduced or borrowed. These 'new' preparations of 'new' vegetables were, I suggest, more prestigious, more worthy of inclusion in cookery books, than recipes for cabbages and leeks; Martino offers only one recipe for cabbage but four for gourds. In northern France, on the other hand, the relative lack of variety in vegetable resources did not encourage diversity in cuisine. It is interesting to note that in northern France, too, when

these 'new' vegetables did arrive their novelty conferred upon them a higher prestige than the everyday cabbage and beets. Ronsard appreciated them: "L'artichot, et la salade,/ L'asperge et la pastenade,/ Et les pepons Tourangeaux/ Me sont herbes plus friandes."⁵⁸

CEREAL DISHES

The most important use for cereal grains in the mediaeval period was obviously bread, which was made not only from wheat flour (although this furnished the prestigious white bread of the upper classes) but also from rye, barley, oats and almost any grain which could be milled. Whole or ground, the grains could also be cooked in a liquid to form a thick porridge or gruel, like the Roman 'puls' which, in ancient times, was a basic food of peasants and the urban poor, although by the time Apicius came to record the recipes of his contemporaries, it had been incorporated into the culinary repertoire of wealthy Romans - albeit in a more elaborate guise, made of the finest flour and glorified by the addition of meat, herbs and wine.⁵⁹

Similarly in the mediaeval period a rural staple could, and did, cross class barriers when spruced up and given a new set of clothes, and 'Fourmentee' appears regularly in the menus of Le Menagier. Why would such a basic dish, of the sort usually given to invalids and convalescents, be offered at important dinners and banquets? One answer might be that a bland, smooth,

soothing puree provided an agreeable contrast to the stronger flavours of salted and spiced meats - for example, the salted wild boar, the venison or dolphin with their highly spiced sauces, which, in northern France, were traditionally served with 'Fourmentee' or, less traditionally, with rice.

In both northern France and the Mediterranean, similar culinary treatments are applied to similar cereals - wheat, barley (more often for invalids), millet, rice, oats. The recipes in Le Menagier summarise the basic treatments of northern France. Fourmentee used husked whole grain, soaked in water then cooked in meat stock or milk, with saffron if necessary, and egg yolks. Likewise, rice was cooked either in a fatty beef stock or milk, plus saffron, or on a fish day in sweetened almond milk. Recipes in other mediaeval texts and a detail from the kitchen accounts of the Frères mineurs of Avignon testify to the universality of these procedures, although it is possible that the ingredient proportions may have varied.⁶⁰ In Mediterranean regions other cereal grains were prepared in the same way as rice - either in meat stock, with the inevitable addition of saffron, or in almond milk, customarily sweetened with sugar. Where there seems to have been a difference between northern France and the Mediterranean was in the way in which cereal dishes were served and eaten. In northern France, 'fourmentee' was the almost obligatory accompaniment to joints of boiled meats, salted or fresh, whereas in Italian recipes shredded mutton or poultry was

incorporated into the cereal puree.

Some cereal dishes, however, seem to have been particular to the Mediterranean region - and these, characteristically, were based on wheat or wheat derivatives. In a recipe context the identity of 'semola', 'farro', 'amido', 'froment' is not always clear, although the distinctions must have been clearly perceived in mediaeval times. Different types of wheat were grown - Platina lists spelt, wheat, winter wheat and starch ("Halica, .. triticum, siliginem, .. hamillum") - and mills produced different products.⁶¹ Semola seems to have been partly milled grain, or cracked wheat, although it could also mean bran; farro, the grains of Triticum spelta, a type of wheat known as 'épeautre' in French; amido, a granular starch extracted from a particular variety of wheat; froment, or formento, was a term used rather indiscriminately to describe any of the Triticum varieties. In both Italian and Catalan cuisine, these ingredients were cooked in stock (sometimes coloured yellow with saffron) or in sweetened almond milk, according to the standard methods.

PASTA AND BREAD

Not only wheat and its derivatives feature in Mediterranean recipes, but also secondary products derived from wheat - notably pasta, but also bread. Pasta-makers (lasagnai) had their own guild in mediaeval Florence, affiliated with that of the baker; their lasagne was in

sheets about 3-4 cm wide, one edge crinkled.⁶² In northern France, pasta did not appear until the sixteenth century, under its adopted Italian names of 'vermicelli' and 'macaroni'. These are the terms used by Martino to describe pasta, in addition to the generic 'lasagne'; Anonimo Toscano refers to both 'lasagne' and 'tria', and in the Tacuinum Sanitatis pasta is either 'formentini' or 'trij'.⁶³ In Sent Sovi, the term used for pasta is 'alatria', which derives from the Hispano-Arab 'atriya'.⁶⁴

The earliest recorded word for noodle in the Mediterranean region is the Greek 'itria', and 'itriyah' is the oldest word for noodle in Arabic.⁶⁵ As early as the tenth century, it referred to the dried pasta bought ready-made from a merchant, as distinct from fresh, home made noodles. In the Libre del Coch the term for pasta is 'fideus', which is apparently derived from the Genoese 'fidelli' (from filelli, threads or strands).⁶⁶ In the Italian recipes, fresh pasta is clearly intended (it must be 'sottile') and illustrations in the various manuscripts of the Tacuinum Sanitatis demonstrate admirably the steps in its preparation, from a simple flour-and-water dough.⁶⁷ With the addition of egg whites, the pasta could be dried and stored for 2-3 years; this 'maccaroni siciliani' belongs to the Mediterranean tradition of conservation by drying, as was mentioned for vegetables.⁶⁸

Italian custom was to cook the pasta in a fatty stock, or in water with the addition of butter or oil and

salt, and serve it sprinkled with grated cheese, with or without spices. According to Martino, it was traditionally made yellow with saffron, like any other cereal product cooked in stock. Alternatively, it could be cooked in almond milk (with sugar, naturally) or goat milk. The same techniques were adopted by Mestre Robert and by the Sent Sovi, with the optional addition of raisins.⁶⁹

The Mediterranean passion for pasta thus has a long history. Even in the fifteenth century it seems to have been used more often, and more imaginatively, in Italy than in any other European country; there are Italian recipes for 'ravioli' and 'tortelli', small pasta shapes filled with hashes of meat or fish plus herbs, spices, cheese and eggs, which mixtures were not too far removed from those of the larger torte. These were simmered in a saffron-yellow stock and served sprinkled with spices and cheese.

Mediterranean mediaeval cuisine was also notable for its use of breadcrumbs as a primary ingredient. This custom was not paralleled in northern France, where one of the most common roles for bread was as a thickener for sauces. The 'morterols' of early Catalan cuisine combined equal quantities of ground meat and breadcrumbs in stock, milk or almond milk thickened with egg yolks and coloured with saffron.⁷⁰ A similar recipe (Mortarolo) is given in the Latin Liber, but the same text also adds an alternative, and breadless, Mortarolum.⁷¹ Martino's Brodetto de pane and the Mortarol of Libre del Coch are basically similar to the dishes described in the Sent

Sovi.⁷² The primitive gnocchi - represented by recipes such as Manfrigo, Zanzarelli and Giusello - may have developed as a refinement of such gruels into a dish more acceptable and more appropriate to more discriminating palates.⁷³

Throughout Europe it was customary to serve broth-soaked slices of bread - 'souppes' or 'sopes' - as accompaniments to boiled meats, but in Mediterranean cuisine the 'suppa' became a more substantial, and possibly more respectable, dish - slices of bread, in layers, thoroughly moistened with broth or other liquid. Mestre Robert comments of his Sopes a la lombarda, "one would say it was rice", which may indicate that it could have substituted for rice.⁷⁴ Another style of 'suppa', deemed worthy of partnering roast peacock, was the ancestor of 'pain perdu'; slices of bread dipped in beaten egg yolks, fried and coated in sugar.⁷⁵

Why should there be this development of bread-based dishes in Mediterranean regions but not in northern France (nor, apparently, in England)? The morterol (which Grewe believes to be of Catalan or Provençal origin) presumably takes its name from the mortar in which the ingredients are ground, but it might have its origin in the traditional peasant dish of bread-and-broth.⁷⁶ Bread was not an ingredient to be wasted in Mediterranean regions. Cereal shortages occurred with devastating regularity; throughout the region, municipal records testify to a constant preoccupation with cereals: supplies and prices.⁷⁷ Compared to northern France, Mediterranean regions were

agriculturally disadvantaged - not only were the yields lower (in a 'normal' year, a good return might be four to six times the quantity of seed sown, while on the plains of northern France the ratio was more likely to be 8:1), but the seasons were erratic and unreliable.⁷⁸ Perhaps it was a consequence of this waste-not-want-not ethic that staples such as cereals were elevated in status, and perhaps the same reasoning can explain why bread does not seem to have been frequently used as disposable trenchers, as is presumed to have been the custom in northern France. Grewe believes that bread trenchers were not used in Catalonia and the accounts of King René in Provence list several purchases of 'tranchouers de bois' in addition to the 'tranchouers' from the 'panneterie'.⁷⁹

RESTORATIVES

This name is here applied to a group of 'spoon dishes' specifically designated as invalid fare. Given the complementary relationship between food and dietetic medicine in the Middle Ages, it is not surprising to find that every mediaeval cookery book includes some para-medicinal recipes (indeed, most general cookery books until the early twentieth century included a section on 'Convalescent Cookery'). Truly medicinal foods, food-as-medicine, seem to have been more the province of the specialised herbalist, but general restoratives, the province of folk medicine, could be, and were entrusted to the domestic cook who, as Chiquart emphasises, may have

consulted with the physician or been directly under his orders. It is also possible that the cook may simply have complied with a request from the master or mistress of the household for something to settle the digestion, or to strengthen someone weakened by illness.

The purpose of most of these para-medicinal recipes was to strengthen, to encourage appetite, to restore good health. (However, the 'Chaudeau flamant', for which Le Menagier includes a recipe under the heading of Potages pour Malades was also a dish traditionally presented to newlyweds after their first night of marriage.⁸⁰)

Chiquart describes the dishes as "viandes asses bonnes et confortatives pour malades".⁸¹ Often these recipes were specifically designated - as in the sections headed 'Buvrages pour malades' and 'Potages pour malades' in Le Menagier, and the recipe entitled 'Brou amellat a hom deliquat' in the Sent Sovi.⁸² In addition, some standard recipes could be modified so as to render them suitable for the sick (for example, Martino advises that if a certain broth is intended for someone who is ill, the salt pork should be omitted and the quantity of spices reduced).⁸³ The elimination of spices from the convalescent diet was a universal practice in the mediaeval era, part of what Jacques Le Goff calls its "code alimentaire".⁸⁴

The same convalescent foods could be found throughout Europe, either nourishing broths or soft, smooth purees. Since cereals were considered both highly nutritious and easily digestible they were often the primary

ingredient.⁸⁵ All the cereal dishes for which the Sent Sovi gives recipes were apparently suitable for convalescents although sugar, considered hot and moist, was not added if the dish was destined for someone with a fever; similarly in Anonimo Toscano most of the recipes using cereals (bread, rice, spelt) are labelled 'per li'nfermi'. Also universally esteemed was a concentrated chicken broth, the concentration of 'goodness' achieved either through reduction of a standard stock or by a novel treatment, possibly inspired by the technique of distillation learnt from the Arabs, in which the bird was cooked in a flask or pot inside another pot of boiling water, with little or no liquid.⁸⁶ Such an essence was so efficacious that it could, according to Mestre Robert, "tornaria un home de mort a vida".⁸⁷ Its innate powers were presumed to be enhanced if silver, gold and precious stones were cooked with the chicken (and later extracted), or at least the contribution of such inert substances was thought to be particularly appropriate for nobles who would thereby incorporate some of the desirable qualities associated with these talismen; the diamond, for example, was thought to represent Strength, the emerald Justice.⁸⁸ (Gold could be added to any dish, for certain invalids, but if included in a pie its presence had to be kept secret, in case the baker swapped pies and returned the wrong one!⁸⁹)

That para-medicinal dishes showed so little diversity possibly demonstrates the universal acceptance of the medical theory of the period. Unlike medicine, cuisine was

not bound by a standard intellectual doctrine and was thus free to evolve in different directions, although only some ingredients inspired such evolution. Ingredients considered most suitable for 'restorative' foods were generally the lowly cereals, the status of which also contributes to the lack of diversity in this group.

THE ROLE OF EGGS

There is no doubt that eggs were indispensable ingredients in mediaeval cuisine. They thickened sauces, bound stuffings, gilded roasts, garnished cold collations and complemented vegetable dishes; they were essential to the pastry of tartes and torte and to their custard-like fillings. Eggs were purchased in vast quantities - at least 200 per day for the household of the Count of Angoulême, 300 for maistre Helye's wedding feasts.⁹⁰ Yet the role of eggs was not a starring one, on the centre-stage of the banquet table; rather, they were behind-the-scenes supporters.⁹¹ Only one egg dish (arboulastre, a herb omelette) was considered worthy of inclusion in the sample menus of Le Menagier.

All but two of the mediaeval texts include some egg recipes, if only one or two. The exceptions are Chiquart's Du Fait de Cuisine, and Mestre Robert's Libre del Coch, which immediately suggests that eggs were somewhat lower in the ingredient hierarchy than other proteinaceous foods - meat, poultry, fish. Eggs may have been valued for their diversity in the supporting roles, but as a primary

ingredient they seem to have been ranked closer to vegetables. Not only were they inexpensive - for the price of an ordinary chicken one could buy 1 1/2 - 2 dozen eggs - but almost every household, whether in the town or country, could afford to run at least one or two hens, if not ducks as well.⁹² Methods of storing eggs were well known (for example, they were outlined by Pierre de Crescens), as were ways of keeping the birds in specially-designed cages, which implies that it was by no means unusual to be self-sufficient in eggs.⁹³ Francesco Datini regularly had fresh eggs sent from his farm to his house in Florence.⁹⁴

The basic methods of cooking eggs were apparently universal. Their culinary possibilities are summarised in the Sent Sovi: "Eggs can be fried (with verjus, with alidem or with salt); cooked in the coals; cooked as an omelette; or poached in water (with a sauce, with verjus or with a parsley sauce)."⁹⁵ Dietetic manuals propose the same fundamental treatments, stressing that the egg should be fresh and soft-cooked.⁹⁶ The techniques were apparently so familiar that the author of Anonimo Toscano could comment: "There is no need to mention fried eggs, roast eggs or beaten eggs."⁹⁷

Eggs, however essential to other dishes, were not, on their own, worth a lot of fuss. Platina condemns Martino's recipe for stuffed eggs (the yolks mashed with herbs, spices, raisins and cheese, the refilled whites fried in oil and served with a sweet-sour sauce) as having "more harm than good in it"; similarly he ridicules 'eggs on the

spit' as a "stupid invention".⁹⁸ Le Menagier gives a couple of recipes for egg brouets - thickened, spicy sauces poured over poached (or fried?) eggs, and other texts recommend particular sauces to serve with cooked eggs; also in Le Menagier is a recipe combining eggs with tansy - hard-boiled eggs dressed with a tansy, ginger and vinegar sauce.⁹⁹ Tansy was a bitter herb, believed to be both a vermifuge and purgative, and was traditionally eaten, with eggs, at Easter ("At Easter time, the French fry it with eggs and eat it to purge the humours engendered by a diet of fish in Lent.")¹⁰⁰ This custom was apparently more characteristic of northern France (and England) than Mediterranean regions.

Clearly, eggs did not have the same status as chicken, for example. Since the skills and arts of the mediaeval cook were preferentially directed towards those ingredients whose social prestige complemented their efforts, the techniques applied to eggs did not go far beyond the basic boiling/frying/poaching. Eggs belonged to everybody, eggs were the same from one end of Europe to another, and thus they were not the type of ingredient through which social or regional distinctions could be displayed.

CONCLUSION

In the realm of everyday dishes, similar ingredients and similar culinary techniques were used throughout most of mediaeval western Europe, and any differences between

northern French and Mediterranean styles of cuisine are fewer, and less pronounced than have been demonstrated with respect to meat dishes. This conclusion corroborates the thesis that different culinary styles are more likely to be developed when the primary ingredient already has a superior, and important, symbolic status. Thus the common vegetables and cereals, ingredients of chiefly nutritive value, were not likely to be metamorphosed nor embellished.

Nevertheless, Mediterranean cuisine did differ in some respects from that of northern France, and these differences can be attributed both to culture and agriculture. Many of the dishes particular to the Mediterranean region were based on vegetables also particular to, or more prevalent in, that region, vegetables which had been introduced or popularised by the Arabs. Whether the Arab civilisation also introduced pasta to the Mediterranean world is contentious; Jacques André does not mention pasta in his classic study of the foods and cuisine of ancient Rome, and describes 'laganum' - from which the term 'lasagna' may be derived - as "a thin pancake of soft dough, cooked in boiling oil".¹⁰¹

Charles Perry suggests that somewhere in the Eastern Roman Empire arose the idea of boiling thin sheets or strips of dough, which subsequently spread to those parts of Italy under Byzantine control.¹⁰² Thus, while the ingredient may have been native to the region, the technique may have been indirectly Arab-inspired.

Again, the Arab presence in the Mediterranean world

can be shown to have influenced the development of its cuisine in a way that was not possible in northern France. In almost all the vegetable and cereal dishes in which the Mediterranean region proclaims its distinctiveness, an Arab contribution can be discerned.