CHAPTER ELEVEN

EPILOGUE: INTO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

A cuisine is defined with reference to the three coordinates which fix it in time, space and within the culinary hierarchy. In this comparative study, the intention of which is to identify differences in cuisine which relate to different geographical regions, a uniform social milieu has been selected and differences due to time have largely been subordinated. There is a certain validity in this approach; the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have, historically, been considered as a reasonably uniform era which can be differentiated from the preceding and succeeding centuries. At the same time, however, the developments which occurred in cuisine in these two centuries have not been totally ignored, nor have changes in the collective mentality and in attitudes towards food and eating been overlooked.

The sixteenth century saw a flurry of culinary interchange and a modification of what might have been regarded as a typically local character in regional cuisines. The 'essor de la cuisine au beurre', the trend towards a butter-based cuisine, was in evidence particularly in northern France and England but also, to a

lesser extent, in Italy and Spain.[1] The Libre del Coch spread an Italian influence throughout much of Spain while, linguistically at least, Italy continued to borrow from Spain, especially in the areas of food and drink, fashion and dress.[2] Italian cuisine, as represented by Messibugo's collection of recipes, became remarkably multicultural, with recipes alla francese, tedesca, ciciliana, turchesa, ongaresca.[3]

Paradoxically, it was also in the sixteenth century that the particular characteristics of regional or national cuisines began to be recognised and documented by travellers and scholars. It is difficult to accept that only then did they appear, although some scholars still dispute the existence of regional cuisines in the Middle Ages. Stouff, while admitting that a certain regional diversity existed, nevertheless believes that the wealthy Provencals of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had the same cuisine as the French aristocracy.[4] Flandrin, on the other hand, has demonstrated (with the example of blanc manger) that even within an aristocratic, international cuisine it is possible to discern different traits in different parts of Europe.[5]

For the early mediaeval period, contemporary travel accounts are rare, one invaluable exception being the observations of Gilles le Bouvier. In the sixteenth century, however, both travel and diarising were more common, and the accounts of observant travellers not only emphasise the existence of inter-regional differences but also confirm what has already been inferred or concluded

relating to the differences between Mediterranean and northern French cuisines in the previous centuries. Obviously, there are reservations to be attached to individual accounts, which are more likely to seize on and accentuate isolated idiosyncrasies and particularities which appear anomalous. Montaigne, for example, comments on the 'unseasonality' of vegetables in northern Italy, where artichokes, broad beans and peas are available from mid-March, while in northern France they would not be expected before June.[6] Similarly, as Jean-Louis Flandrin has remarked, it was the southern French use of olive oil that travellers from the north remarked on, although the most common fat was pork fat.[7] The limitations, however, are minor compared to the value of the evidence to be gleaned from these records.

Among the 'foreigners' who kept journals of their travels in Mediterranean regions in the sixteenth century (and the earliest years of the subsequent century) were Michel de Montaigne, Felix and Thomas Platter and Barthélemy Joly. Montaigne visited Italy in 1580-81, mainly for health reasons; Felix and Thomas Platter, of Basle, were students of medicine at the university of Montpellier in 1552-57 and 1595-99 respectively; Barthélemy Joly travelled extensively in Spain in 1603-04, to learn more of this country whose language appealed to him, and meticulously recorded his impressions. All four diarists made frequent mention of the resources of a particular region and of what they ate, pointing out how the 'foreign' cuisine differed from what they were

accustomed to or from the French or German custom, and touching upon the ways in which meals were served and eaten. Happily, all four appear to have been open-minded and objective, and rarely did they react irrationally to the foreign milieu.

One of the significant differences noted was in the order of a dinner. In Barcelona Joly remarked that, contrary to French custom ("au contraire de nous"), the dinner began with fruits, including oranges, either sliced and sugared, or whole, probably to be cut and squeezed over the salad, which was also part of the first course.[8] In Italy, too, fruits and salads were standard first-course dishes; a Venetian dinner of 1460 began with 'latuca-burago-caules-pomes' (lettuce, borage,cabbage, apples).[9] Platina, too, recommended "For the first course,... a few apples and pears and ... lettuce and such, either raw or cooked with vinegar and oil"; sweet oranges " are always most suitable for the stomach as a first course and the tart ones may be sweetened with sugar."[10] Some of the splendid, late fifteenth-century feasts detailed at the end of Cuoco Napolitano commence with figs and pears or 'insalata'.[11] In Montpellier, Felix Platter wrote that "at supper, salad is served regularly, and is followed by a small roast ... At supper time, even in Lent, we had a salad of lettuce or blanched chicory, and sometimes some onions ".[12]

This confirms the earlier inference that salads were typically associated with Mediterranean cuisine. Both

oranges and salads seem to have been relatively rare in northern France in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and in any case, the French meal order was quite different, according to Pierre Belon du Mans. The first course, still called the 'entree de table' consisted of "meats disguised in a thousand little ways, a diversity of dishes more for ceremony than anything else; dishes which are soft, and liquid, and which should be served hot"; they included 'potages', 'fricassées', 'hâchis' and 'salades'.[13] This corroborates Joly's remark, and explains his surprise at seeing fresh fruit at the start of a meal. As for the 'salades', if they were soft, and liquid, and hot, they would be unlikely to resemble Mediterraneran salads.

The serving of salads, and the prevalence of citrus fruits, are both features of mediaeval Mediterranean cuisine acknowledged in previous chapters. In Spain, oranges were used in salad dressings, individually prepared by each diner who made his selection from the condiments always on the table - salt and pepper, oil and vinegar, oranges.[14] It was earlier suggested that citrus fruits were cheaper in Mediterranean regions, and indeed Felix Platter commented that "oranges ... are so ridiculously cheap" that people throw them at one another in the streets on 'Mardi Gras'.[15] Thomas Platter expressed his delight and amazement at experiencing the same tradition in Marseilles, and in Barcelona, too, orange 'fights' were part of the celebrations of Carnival.[16]

Citrus trees grew comfortably in the warmer Mediterranean climate, and northern eyes could not help but remark on them. Thomas Platter described the orange trees of Perpignan, and the gardens of Barcelona, planted with pomegranates and citrus trees, where cabbages and other vegetables grew all year round, as they also did in Montpellier.[17] A few years later, Barthélemy Joly made the same observations: "C'est un plaisir de veoir les orangers, citroniers, poncires jaunissans de toutes ces especes de fruictz. Il y a aussy quelques palmiers, noyers et une vifve odeur et verdeur tout l'hiver."[18] In Italy, Montaigne welcomed the reappearance on the table of oranges, lemons and olives, which he had not been able to get in Switzerland and Germany.[19]

The Catalan custom of serving roast meats before boiled, noted in the fourteenth century by Eiximenis, apparently persisted throughout the sixteenth century.[20] It must have seemed odd to Barthélemy Joly, since in France boiled meats were usually served before roast, at least in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although the sixteenth century may have seen some modifications. (Pierre Belon du Mans wrote that the second service includes roast and boiled meats, or fish, if a fish day.[21]) The way in which the roast was carved and served differed, too; Joly noted that the various meats (guinea fowl, rabbit, capon and hen), having all been partially carved in the kitchen, were cut into smaller serving portions by the 'maestra sala' who also added a little of the sauce to each plate before presenting it to

the diner.[22] Again, this practice seems to have been standard in at least some parts of Italy; Pierre Belon du Mans wrote that in France, the meats are presented at table whole, "contrary to the Florentines, and other nations, which serve them chopped into pieces." [23]

For Joly's dinner, individual bowls containing 'spoon dishes' - 'brouet jaune', sweetened almond milk (probably a cereal gruel), blanc manger and rice - were set on the table at the same time as the roasts. Following the boiled meats, the dinner ended with more (and different) fruits, conserves, nougat, and biscuits to dip into the hypocras.[24] Thomas Platter also remarked on this Catalan custom of dipping biscuits in wine, in the wine cellars of Barcelona, where many different wines could be tasted.[25]

These sixteenth-century accounts also confirm the preference for mutton in southern France and Catalonia, and the predilection for veal in northern Italy. The Catalan family in Montpellier were Marranos (Jews who had been converted to Christianity but who nevertheless retained some Jewish customs) and thus did not eat pork, their usual meat being mutton: "At midday we eat a soup garnished with naveaux or cabbage; it contains mutton, rarely beef".[26] Thomas Platter also commented on the mutton: "the flesh of these animals (sheep) is very savoury, for they eat only aromatic herbs such as thyme, rosemary and lavender".[27] The Florentine preference for veal was confirmed by Montaigne, who commented that in Tuscany, the veal was of very good quality, and relatively

cheap; but in Rome, "mutton is of little value and is held in low esteem".[28]

Another ingredient which was both abundant and popular in southern France and Catalonia was the partridge, and both the Platters and Barthélemy Joly remark on this. Thomas describes a meal at an inn near Castelnau: "First, partridges were brought, as is always the custom, unless you are alone; this dish does not increase the price of the meal."[29] Partridges, he repeats, "are served in all the good inns, and at every main meal.Only the larger variety, with red legs, is known here; the grey partridge, which is smaller, is very rare."[30] Pierre Belon du Mans confirms these observations on the Mediterranean partridge, which "differs from the French partridge in that it is twice as large, and has red feet and beak; the 'perdris grise' is smaller, inferior and sold more cheaply."[31]

Partridges were so abundant in sixteenth century Provence, according to Quiqueran de Beaujeu, that they cost less than a sou each.[32] In fourteenth-century Tuscany,"partridges were very popular, and were eaten at any season of the year", although Montaigne, two centuries later, commented that "there are no partridge here (in Pisa), in spite of the efforts of the Tuscan princes."[33] It is perhaps surprising that partridge was so infrequently served to the archbishop of Arles, but any game was extremely rare in that household; partridge feature far more prominently in the papal accounts and partridge were certainly cooked and eaten by the Frères

mineurs of Avignon.[34]

Such observations support the evidence derived from cookery books. The Sent Sovi includes about ten different recipes for partridge, which might be taken as evidence of its popularity, while in the mediaeval Italian texts, partridge is the most frequently mentioned game bird.[35] On the other hand, recipes for partridge are comparatively rare in the Parisian texts, which supports the suggestion that it was more typically a Mediterranean ingredient.

Again, the contemporary accounts confirm that different methods of roasting were practised in northern France and Mediterranean regions, as was inferred earlier from a study of recipes. In northern France, cookery books indicate that meats for roasting were usually larded, whereas larding was rare in Catalan cuisine. Barthélemy Joly remarked that roast meats are not larded because the Catalans prefer that each meat retains its own savour: partridge should taste of partridge, not of pork.[36] Thomas Platter also commented on the different manner of roasting; the capon was "roasted but not basted, for that is the custom in Spain; it was simply moistened with fat melted with a red-hot poker, which was sprinkled on the bird after it was roasted."[37] In Italy, too, Montaigne reported that meats were served without being larded.[38] In France,however, wrote Pierre Belon du Mans, "a bird is never roasted without being larded,or barded all around, or surrounded with leaves, and it would be as unthinkable not to do this as to eat them without

sauce."[39] Montaigne's observation, however, is not in accord with Martino's advice, that almost all meats to be roast should be larded.[40]

Many of the specific dishes mentioned by these Mediterranean travellers can be traced back to mediaeval sources. Joly noted that poultry was stuffed with garlic and raisins, exactly as the Sent Sovi prescribes for kid and sucking pig, if not specifically for poultry.[41] Similarly the manner of serving partridges - partly jointed, spread out, sprinkled with pepper then pushed back into its former shape - is very similar to that described in both the Sent Sovi and the Libre del Coch (where it is sprinkled with salt and orange juice) and also adopted by Martino.[42] The 'brouet jaune' sampled by Joly was distinguished by its strong spicing and lack of bread; since bread was the almost inevitable thickener in northern French sauces and brouets, it is hardly surprising that Joly should remark on its absence.[43] In addition, his comment supports what has been previously suggested, that Catalan sauces and brouets were characterised by a diversity of thickeners, of which bread was perhaps the least important. The decoration of sugar and cinnamon on a dish of rice was equally characteristic of Catalan cuisine, and Blanc manger, one of the three triumphs of Catalan cuisine was an obvious choice for a dinner for an honoured guest.

Some of the dishes recorded by Montaigne can also be identified through recipes in the earlier Italian manuscripts. At the Mardi Gras celebration in Rome, the

supper included roast poultry in its plumage, lots of hare and rabbit, live birds in a pie and "chappons cuits tous entiers dans des bouteilles de verre".[44] This practice is described in the chicken-in-a-flask recipes of Anonimo Veneziano and Cuoco Napolitano, which in turn probably have an Arab origin.[45]

Surprisingly, Joly ignored the resources of the sea, although he visited the ports of Barcelona and Valencia; nor did Montaigne - fish fancier that he was - give this subject much attention. (This apparent neglect may have ensued upon the relaxation of church strictures, particularly in northern Europe, which meant that the obligation to eat fish may have been felt less strongly.) Fish was less plentiful in Italy than in France, according to Montaigne; in Rome, sea fish included large quantities of sea bream, mullet (a bit firmer and bigger than French ones), and a few sole, and among freshwater fish were barbels (very good and bigger than those at Bordeaux), pike (of low price and low esteem), and a few trout.[46] The unfamiliar seafood resources of Montpellier are described in greater detail by Felix Platter, since the Catalan household adhered to a strict Lenten regime: "haddock, a kind of fish that resembles cod...small soles ... tunny, a kind of fish four or five feet long... There are also mackerel and sardines, which are very good boiled or fried, enormous lobsters (langustae) two feet long, and small lobsters without pincers (squillae) which are brought in in basketsful."[47] Unfortunately, there is little indication of how the fish might have been cooked,

but the evidence of availability and popularity of certain species - mullet, sole, sea bream - accords with the conclusions reached in an earlier chapter.

Although the use of forks is presumed to have spread in the sixteenth century, none of the four travellers mention their presence. Foods were still commonly eaten with spoons or fingers, and even spoons might have been rare in southern France. Both Felix and Thomas Platter seem to have been slightly shocked by the southern French and Catalan practice of eating 'soup' with the fingers: "At midday we eat a soup garnished with naveaux or cabbage; ... It is eaten with the fingers", and "We ate soup in the manner of the district, that is by taking it in our fingers, so as to drink the liquid afterwards ... the use of spoons such as we have in Basle is unknown here."[48] (The translator seems to have made the error of using a modern term, 'soup', to approximate a mediaeval concept. The mediaeval 'potage' was of far greater diversity and, as used by the author of Le Menagier, the name could apply to thick purees of pulses and vegetables as well as to meats cooked and served in a broth.) The practice of using individual spoons may have been particular to the Swiss; Montaigne remarks that the Swiss always set a spoon for each person at table.[49]

Finally, the contemporary accounts confirm the cultural unity of the Mediterranean region as a whole as well as local particularities. Although Montpellier had been officially French for about three centuries by the time the Platter brothers arrived, the Occitan language

was still heard occasionally and to Thomas, the Mediterranean character of the town was clear. "The people of Montpellier are distinguished by the elegance and refinement of their apparel, of their dances, of their festivals and of their food. They copy slavishly every luxury invented by the courts of Italy and Spain, and unhappily also the artifices and knaveries that are practised there."[50] Joly comments on the ease of movement of the people of southern France and northern Spain across national borders, and the apparent absence of cultural barriers between the two nations.[51] The difference between the Lenten customs in northern and Mediterranean countries is clearly demonstrated; in southern France (and Spain) meat and eggs (and butter, presumably) were forbidden under pain of death, but this did not stop Felix from cooking himself some eggs in his room, since he considered himself exempt from such restrictions.[52] Similarly, Barthélemy Joly found that eggs were not usually eaten during Lent in Spain, but that it was an easy matter to purchase an indulgence to allow him to continue his customary diet.[53]

That the concept of regional diversity was current in the sixteenth century is evident from the writings of Pierre Belon du Mans. In Book I of his L'Histoire de la Nature des Oyseaux, he discusses the differences of opinion that have existed over the centuries as to the nutritive values of different birds, adding that it has always been assumed that the various nations of the ancient world had different culinary and gastronomic

mores. "We notice now that the French do not agree with the Italian on the way of preparing dishes, nor the Almas with the Spanish, and so on. An Almat, Turk, Spanish, English or any other nationality would find novelty in a French dinner."[54]

The extent of this diversity - and vivid illustrations thereof - is evident in the travellers' accounts discussed above. Not only did regional differences in cuisine exist, but the different cuisines were recognised as characteristic of the region. A region was defined by its cuisines as much as by its language, currency, natural resources, politics, religion, and so on. More important, in the present context, is the corroboration these documents provide of the specific regional characteristics inferred from a study of earlier sources, and proposed as the distinguishing features of mediaeval Mediterranean and northern French cuisines.