

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this study has been to demonstrate, first, the distinguishing traits of the mediaeval cuisines of Mediterranean Europe and northern France, and second, the culinary kinship of southern France with its Mediterranean, rather than its northern, neighbours.

Although the same general characteristics of mediaeval cuisine - such as a predilection for spices, a belief in the superiority of roasting as a cooking technique - applied throughout western Europe, the preceding chapters have uncovered particularities which clearly differentiate a Mediterranean cuisine from a northern French cuisine, and which situate southern French cuisine within the Mediterranean model.

'Cuisine' is assumed to represent an expression of preferences among available resources - ingredients, implements, techniques - and different preferences in these areas imply different cuisines. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, preferences indicative of regional differences in cuisine were not evident in the whole range of dishes which can be said to illustrate a cuisine, but were more likely to be displayed in a middle

category, neither the most prestigious nor the lowliest. Dishes like Torta Parmesana, the re-formed and roast shoulder of mutton, the golden-coated chicken with a forcemeat stuffing under its skin, the roast peacock in all its feathers, the sparkling jellies, all belonged to a style which might be termed 'international'. At the other end of the scale, a bowl of cabbage cooked in broth, or a puree of broad beans flavoured with salt pork, or a cereal gruel, were also universal. In the 'international' dishes, regional identity was less important than social status, while in those dishes with a primarily nutritive function, regional distinctions were less relevant.

Neither aristocratic nor humble, this middle category might be said to represent the cuisine of the new 'bourgeois', the merchants and doctors, butchers and apothecaries of the mediaeval towns, comfortably well-off citizens like the author of Le Menagier. Indeed, it is argued that the evolution of cuisine in the later mediaeval period is intimately linked with the revival of towns and town life.

Thus although poultry and partridge were always among the most highly prized meats, specific preferences can be seen in the choice of butcher's meat. Southern France shared with Catalonia and parts of Italy a preference for mutton and, in common with the rest of Mediterranean Christian Europe, favoured pork in salted form. Neither of these tendencies were expressed in northern French cuisine. Among game, large game and water birds appear to have been relatively less important in southern France and

other Mediterranean countries than they were in northern France.

Like poultry, freshwater fish were apparently the same throughout western Europe and were universally esteemed, and no particular patterns of preference are obvious. Among marine species, however, Mediterranean and northern French selections differed, and preferences are demonstrated in the ways in which such fish were prepared - often fried or grilled in Mediterranean cuisine, usually poached in northern France. The choice of frying, in oil, was consequent upon the local availability of an essential Lenten ingredient, olive oil.

The same fundamental culinary techniques applied throughout western Europe, with a possible variation in baking practices. In Italian cuisine, torte were typically baked in the fireplace, using a kind of domestic camp-oven, the 'testo' or 'tegame'. This practice may well have been characteristic of the whole Mediterranean region, but the available evidence does not show it to have been equally prevalent in northern France. Differences are apparent, however, in the particular variations of these basic treatments, such as the accompanying sauces. (Although roast meats could also be diversified by the use of stuffings and coatings, these created more of a visual effect, and such modifications were likely to be 'international'.) Italian and Catalan sauces, whether intended to accompany roast or boiled meats or as part of a brouet, used a greater variety of thickening ingredients - almonds, eggs, ground livers, as

well as bread - than those of northern France, and often achieved a balance of sweet and sour flavours whereas the sauces of northern France were predominantly sour. Similar differentiating characteristics can be discerned in fish dishes, although the use of citrus juice on fried and grilled fish appears to have been strictly Mediterranean.

Many of the differentiating features of Mediterranean cuisine thus identified relate to ingredients of local production, which might be assumed to be more readily available and cheaper in the Mediterranean region than in northern France - ingredients such as almonds and other nuts, citrus fruits, concentrated grape juice. The differences in cuisine might then be thought to be a natural consequence of the physical and climatic differences between Mediterranean and northern zones. In the preceding chapters, however, it has also been shown that in almost all these particularities, an Arab influence is implicated. In cuisine, as in other matters, Arab culture provided a link between the Classical world and the mediaeval West.

Even in vegetable and cereal dishes, which were invariably several rungs lower in the culinary hierarchy than meat and fish dishes, the differences between Mediterranean and northern French cuisines betray an Arab influence. In Catalonia, Italy and probably in southern France as well, a range of 'new' vegetables - asparagus, aubergines, gourds, melons, cucumbers, lettuce - were particularly esteemed, and were prepared in ways possibly derived from Arab practices. Most of these vegetables were

rare in northern France before the sixteenth century. Pasta, also believed to have been borrowed from the Orient, was similarly localised in the Mediterranean.

Citrus fruits and sugar were also Arab introductions into Mediterranean lands and passed into Mediterranean cuisine. The use of nuts, particularly almonds, to thicken sauces for meats was prevalent in Arab cuisine, as was a harmonious blending of sweet and sour. The combination of almonds with sugar also occurred frequently in Arab recipes, and the same combination is equally characteristic of Italian and Catalan cuisine. Thus it can be said that the Arab civilisation not only provided the ingredients but also the models for their use.

There are two avenues by which a foreign influence can be incorporated into a cuisine, the intellectual and the sensual. The first implies the transmission of a written recipe which is adopted into the existing corpus of recipes. Mediaeval Italian and Catalan recipe books include a number of recipes which have been shown to have Arab origins (Limonia, Romania, etc); on the other hand, very few Arab recipes can be identified in the northern French texts. In this case, it is a complete new dish which enters the cuisine, but when the innovation arrives via the senses, it may be simply one or two elements characteristic of the foreign cuisine. A visitor to the foreign country, having experienced its cuisine, returns home with new tastes and modifies the existing cuisine. Thus the idea of a sweet and sour balance may well have been borrowed from Arab cuisine and incorporated

into Italian and Catalan cuisine.

Because it relies on the written word, cuisine can travel much further via the intellectual route. Transmission of cuisine through the senses results in a more localised effect, because it depends on direct contact and because it assumes a similar base of ingredients and cultural experiences in the receiving country. In the mediaeval period, I suggest, Arab recipes themselves did not penetrate widely into western Europe (possibly because of language difficulties), and the borrowed elements of Arab cuisine were more in evidence in Mediterranean regions because the merchants who travelled to the ports of the Orient were predominantly Mediterranean and because the same ingredients were more readily available in Mediterranean regions.

The particularities which characterise Mediterranean cuisine and which differentiate it from northern French cuisine relate both to agriculture and to culture. Most derive, directly or indirectly, from the Arab civilisation.

Louis Stouff concluded that "there is a strong chance that we will never know the cuisine practised in Provençal households" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of recipe books, this statement is irrefutable. However, one can be reasonably confident in assuming that the wealthy citizens of the towns of Mediterranean France practised a cuisine closer to that of their Mediterranean neighbours than to that of their eventual masters in the north.

<sup>1</sup> Stouff, p. 260.