CHAPTER SEVEN

FAST-DAY FISH

During at least one-third of the year, meat was banned from the mediaeval table, its place automatically usurped by fish. For 151 days in 1429, the archbishop of Arles was served fish instead of meat, and at the papal school at nearby Trets, an average of 149 days each year were non-meat days.[1]

The longest and strictest 'fast' was the forty-six days of Lent, from Ash Wednesday to Easter. Add to these the Ember days, the standard Friday and Saturday 'fasts' and the requirements of other miscellaneous religious celebrations and a total of around 150 days is easily reached.[2] Sales of meat in Carpentras illustrate the typical weekday alternance: no meat sold on Fridays and Saturdays, and on Wednesdays, only small quantities - less than half as much as on an ordinary weekday - which possibly demonstrates the persistence of an earlier 'fast' obligation.[3] Similarly, the court of Burgundy (at Bruges) purchased no meat on Fridays and Saturdays but instead, fish, while on Wednesdays smaller quantities of meat were purchased and supplemented with fish.[4]

In the early days of the Catholic Church, the rules

governing 'fasting' in monastic communities stipulated abstinence from certain foods on Wednesdays and Fridays.[5] The rations for such days - basically bread and water and cooked vegetables or legumes - were intended to satisfy hunger and provide enough energy for a monk working in the fields and gardens, without exciting his "sense of taste and sexuality".[6] The earliest rulings did not specifically forbid meat, since the monastic orders generally existed as self-supporting, agrarian communities, but once introduced, meat and animal fats could be treated as luxuries, to be periodically dispensed with in a display of asceticism. Fish was initially a delicacy, feast-day fare, and apparently did not become the typical fast-day ingredient until the eleventh century.[7]

For the general community, the laws regarding abstinence, like those of fasting, were of unwritten origin and were always subject to variations in custom in time and place.[8] Nevertheless, canon law formulated during the period of the Avignon papacy set down the conditions of fasting for Lent, Ember days and certain other special days, specifying that only one main meal was allowed and proscribing meat, milk and eggs. Force of custom allowed butter to be tolerated in some places. All adults were expected to adhere to such conditions unless granted a dispensation by the bishop, but soldiers, pregnant women and nursing mothers were excepted. The law also imposed abstinence from meat on Fridays.[9]

Although Wednesday and Friday persisted as fast-days

in the eastern Church, the former apparently fell into desuetude in the western Church in the later Middle Ages, and the Friday fast extended to include the eve of the weekday feast.[10] Documents relating to the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries all show that Friday and Saturday were regularly observed as fast days. In the same way as this calendar derived from monastic observances, so too did the rules concerning abstinence from certain foods, specifically meat. How fish came to be the alternative to meat has never, to my knowledge, been satisfactorily explained. However, there is a perceptible line between the breeding and raising of livestock and the maintenance of ponds or pools stocked with fish, in a primitive system of fish-farming. The latter might well have been seen as more compatible with the mainly horticultural pursuits of many monasteries, with the result that fish could be considered more 'natural' than meat and therefore still completely acceptable on those days when some dietary restraint had to be displayed. The difference between 'fast' and 'other' days was less obvious in the lower levels of society, where meat was not part of the everyday diet, but among the upper classes, and in the later mediaeval centuries, the substitution of meat by fish developed into a farcical ritual - expensive fish in elaborate preparations - whereby the letter of the law could be observed while its spirit was flagrantly denounced.

The fourteenth-century canon law hints at different requirements for Lent and for other 'fast' days. Lent was

strictly a period of fasting, or quasi-fasting; Fridays and Saturdays were simply days of abstinence from animal foods, meat in particular. The recipe books accord with this distinction, giving recipes for Lent in which neither meat, nor eggs, nor dairy products are included, and other recipes for 'jours maigres' or 'jours de poisson' in which the only substitution is of fish for meat. Le Menagier, for instance, gives a recipe for "Rissolles a jour de poisson" in which both eggs and cheese are among the ingredients, then adds an alternative version for Lent, in which these ingredients are replaced by finely chopped fish, figs and dates.[11] Likewise, in a 'disner de poisson', 'crespes' and 'pipefarces' could be served in the third or fourth course, even though they were made with eggs and cheese.[12] On the other hand, 'crespes' are also proposed for a 'disner de poisson pour Caresme', and one is at a loss to know whether the author of Le Menagier, an honest, upstanding, Christian gentleman has made a slight error or whether his Lenten 'crespes' would automatically be prepared without eggs, like his 'gauffres'.[13]

The prohibitions against eggs and dairy products in Lent led to elaborate subterfuges - Martino offers recipes for 'mock' butter, cheese and eggs for Lent, all based on almonds and fish stock - although these, it would seem, were intended to substitute in a visual sense only.[14] Almond milk was the universal substitute for cow's or goat's milk in many dishes. 'Flaons', typically made with eggs and cream, could have a "saveur de frommage" in Lent

if made with fish roe and almonds.[15] Such Lenten apologies, however, were of minor significance in comparison with the total disappearance of meat from the diet, and its replacement by fish, which occurred, on average, one day in every three.

The imposition seems to have been generally resented, this attitude being epitomised in the popular theme of the battle between 'Charnage' and Lent, in which Lent was inevitably defeated. Further, fish was generally believed to be less nourishing than meat; Platina considered meats to be "better and more healthful and have more nourishing force" than any other food, while fish were difficult to digest.[16] According to Aldebrandin, "tot poisson sont froit et moiste et engenrent grosses humeurs et vissieuses"; fish was therefore more appropriate to summer and to those whose nature was hot and dry.[17] The fifteenth-century commentary on the Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum noted that all fish are easily digestible but less nourishing than meat.[18]

On the other hand, mediaeval menus clearly give the lie to Marc Bloch's statement that "Nos pères furent de grands ichtyophages: moins par goût que par nécessité religieuse."[19] Not one of the eighteen suggested menus for 'jours de char' in Le Menagier excludes fish, and many include fish in more than one course. Similarly at Avignon, "le bon poisson bien preparé" was always offered at papal dinners in honour of special guests.[20] Chiquart also implies that even on meat-days, some people - for whatever reason - will prefer to eat fish, and

therefore each meal of his planned two-day feast should include "aussi grandement, honnestement et honnourablement de poysson tant marins comme de eaue doulce comme dessus est servir de chars."[21]

Tastes or attitudes possibly changed during the fifteenth century, for in the menus appended to both the printed Viandier and Cuoco Napolitano fish dishes rarely relieve the long sequence of meats. Such a rejection might be seen as a reaction against Church strictures, which were increasingly challenged by the end of the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, one must assume that from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, fish was regularly eaten, and eaten with pleasure or at least, the enjoyment of the resigned.

HIERARCHY OF FISH

"Fish, more than any other ingredient, according to its quality, species, origin, freshness and style of preparation, held both ends of the alimentary hierarchy, the aristocratic choice or neighbour to poverty or abstinence.... The common species, sea fish and salted, appeared on the tables of the poor and the ascetic; freshwater fish, rare and costly, belonged to the gourmandise and refinement of the best-furnished tables."[22] At Tours, the typical fish for the ordinary townsfolk was salted herrings and cod, but for the visit of an honoured guest the town invariably provided freshwater fish from the Loire and Cisse.[23] While this

hierarchy was typical of mediaeval western Europe in general, it is suggested that it was more pronounced in northern Europe, and that in Mediterranean regions some sea fish - fresh, not salted - may have enjoyed a prestige equal to that of freshwater species.

A preference for freshwater fish runs counter to dietetic advice. For Aldebrandin, the best fish are the sea fish to be found far out to sea, away from the town and its waste products.[24] Platina held a similar opinion, and the commentator on the Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum noted that "les poissons de mer sont plus convenables au regime de santé que les poissons d'eaue douce."[25] It would seem anomalous, then, for freshwater fish to be more highly esteemed, yet the author of Le Menagier displays a definite bias towards freshwater species in his menus, and freshwater fish usually receive the more elaborate culinary treatments. According to Yves Grava, freshwater fish, including the pike transported live along the Rhone from Lyons, Chalon or Belleville, were particularly esteemed at the papal court at Avignon, although the archbishop of Arles, in the following century, showed no such faddish and extravagant preferences and was apparently content with the variety of local fish.[26]

If the choice, however, were between fresh freshwater fish (freshness guaranteed, for they were sold live, at least in mediaeval Provence) and less-fresh sea fish, even dieticians would have selected the former, and perhaps here is to be found the justification for the preference

for freshwater fish.[27] The distance limit for the transport of fresh sea fish was around 100-120 kilometres, and at this limit fish had to be eaten the same day, in summer months, although they could be kept slightly longer during the rest of the year.[28] Supplies of fresh sea fish could not have been assured at Paris, its distance from the sea approximately the maximum of 100-120 kilometres, even if natural hazards such as winds and storms did not sometimes interrupt them; in his ballad condemning Lent, Deschamps expresses his repugnance for the "poissons de mer pourris" that Lent obliges him to eat.[29] In addition, sea fish caught in damp and rainy weather were not good, according to the author of Le Menagier, which may have been another reason for preferring freshwater fish.[30] Fresh sea fish was transported from near Marseilles as far inland as Carpentras, a distance of some 100-120 kilometres, but even then, sometimes arrived putrid and unfit for sale.[31]

In Tuscany, Florence and Prato were similarly distant from the sea, and again, the availability of fresh sea fish would have been precarious. Francesco Datini's fish diet thus included fresh tench, pike and eels, plus salted trout, tuna and herrings.[32] The species called for in the recipes of Anonimo Toscano are principally freshwater - eel, lamprey, pike, tench and trout; there are also recipes for octopus and squid, and sardines and red mullet are mentioned as suitable for pies. Similarly, in another text, presumably of Florentine origin and dated to the

fourteenth century, freshwater species dominate - 'pesce d'Arno', tench, lamprey and eels - while sturgeon, lamprey, eel and trout feature in Florentine settings in the stories of Franco Sacchetti.[33]

The same freshwater species appear in almost all regions - pike, tench, barbel, carp, trout, perch and various small species. Recipes for these fish are given in Le Menagier; in Chiquart's Du Fait de Cuisine; in Martino; they are mentioned in the kitchen accounts of the papal palace, and in documents relating to food purchases in Burgundy.[34] Significantly, freshwater fish are of less importance in the Catalan Sent Sovi and Libre del Coch, in Anonimo Veneziano (of presumed Venetian origin) and Cuoco Napolitano (of presumed Neapolitan origin); in such Mediterranean sea ports freshwater fish would not be expected to be as numerous.

Lakes and ponds were probably more frequent in the mediaeval countryside than today; the 'lake' between Prato and Lucca which supplied fish for Franceso Datini no longer exists.[35] Another reason for the ubiquity of freshwater fish was the prevalence of 'viviers', ponds or dams in which a reserve of freshwater fish could be stored, in the same way as barrels of salted fish might be kept in the larder. Sometimes moats were used for this purpose. The Pope ordered construction of 'viviers' in and around Avignon in the early fourteenth century to stock the pikes purchased in more northern regions.[36] Although fish from such still-water reserves - usually close to centres of habitation and more likely to be

polluted - were not highly regarded by medical writers, they must have been still considered preferable to the alternative, one rung lower, of salted fish.[37]

The 'viviers' also fostered a crude system of fish-farming; they were stocked with young fish which could be harvested a couple of years later.[38] Isabelle Guèrin has described in detail the practices of fourteenth-century Sologne, where 'viviers' were constructed by damming a river, at intervals, to create a succession of ponds, or by building an earth bank around a low-lying or marshy areas which could then be flooded with river water or drainage water from cultivated land.[39] The newly-created ponds were stocked with carp and pike of varying ages and sizes, the product of a specialised industry, and after one year, or more typically after three years, the ponds were drained, this operation coinciding with Lent. Drainage was gradual, so the 'harvest' extended over several weeks. Any fish too small for immediate consumption were stored in nearby reservoirs; no doubt their turn would come the following year.

The insistence on freshwater fish being sold live is easier to understand in a mediaeval context where 'viviers' were common, and indeed necessary if the exaggerated demand of Lent were to be satisfied. It is possible, however, that such 'fish-farming' was a more important activity in northern France than in southern (Mediterranean) France where, according to Stouff, "The essential production was drawn from the sea and the

coastal lagoons."[40]

Clearly, distance from the sea was responsible for the predominance of freshwater species amongst fish in inland regions, but does not explain why freshwater species were considered more prestigious, as suggested earlier. Even in a sea port such as Bruges, where sea fish abounded, freshwater fish could still be purchased, and were purchased by the duchess of Burgundy.[41] At Avignon, tench and 'umbra' were in the highest price category for fresh fish, in company with soles, red mullet, tuna and sturgeon.[42] Freshness, then, was not the only prestige-conferring factor, and one must assume that freshwater fish had other properties - texture and flavour? - which appealed to the mediaeval palate or to the mediaeval mind. Unfortunately, there is insufficient information to substantiate the suggestion that the bias towards freshwater fish was stronger in northern than in Mediterranean France. The more vivid, more detailed descriptions of freshwater fish and dishes prepared with these in Le Roman du Comte d'Anjou suggests that they were far more important than marine species, which are merely listed by name.[43] In corroboration, the preponderance of freshwater fish in the menus of Le Menagier may be contrasted with the pre-eminence of marine species in the higher-priced categories of fish in Provence. Nevertheless, any conclusion drawn from such discrete details must remain in the realm of speculation.

SEA FISH: MEDITERRANEAN AND NORTHERN SPECIES

Just as geography determined, to a large extent, a preference for freshwater fish in inland towns, so it dictated the diversity of sea fish in northern France and in Mediterranean regions. As would be expected, the fish of the Mediterranean texts - cookery books and other documents - and those of the northern French (Parisian) texts form two distinct sets. The nine or so species common to both - mullet, red mullet (one species thereof), sole, sturgeon, rays, cuttlefish, hake, eels and conger eels - are of fairly widespread distribution, occurring in both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean texts testify to the presence of the same species, often with the same prestige, around the northern Mediterranean littoral. They are the classic Mediterranean species, the fish which inspired one course of the literary feast of Athenaeus, some of which gastronomically-minded tourists still photograph - and eat - in countless Mediterranean ports. Nearly forty marine species are named in Martino, and almost all of these are included in the larger list of the Sent Sovi and in the 'criée' for the Avignon fish market.[44] Many of the same fish were also available in the markets of Arles and Grasse.[45] The multiplicity of common names (as Platina remarked, "I had intended to speak of the nature and force of all fishes, if the names of them, changed and muddled, had not confused me.") means that it is not

always easy to recognise the same fish in different environments, but at least two-thirds of the extensive enumeration of the Sent Sovi can be identified in other Mediterranean documents.[46]

Many Mediterranean fish are migratory species, venturing into, and out of, inland streams and lagoons during their periodic migrations. Eels, mullet, red mullet, sea bream ('daurade') and sea bass ('loup de mer'), are included in this group. These were the standard, and popular, species of southern France, and constituted the bulk of the catch of the fishermen of the Camargue, for whom the proximity of the papal court at Avignon was, for a time, a source of prosperity.[47]

Mediaeval cooks and dieticians were more concerned with distinctions between freshwater and marine fish than with the hierarchy within each division, and rarely note which fish carry more prestige, nor why. Mediaeval market authorities, however, were more aware of their relative values, and classified fish according to price category. In general, the more expensive Mediterranean fish in the fifteenth century were those which are still highly esteemed today; they include sole, red mullet, tuna, dentex, sea bass and sea bream.[48] The same species - sole, mullet, red mullet, sea bass and tuna - were among the sea fish most frequently purchased for the papal palace at Avignon and the archbishop of Arles.[49]

On the other hand, the marine species cited by the author of Le Menagier, and which reappear in the list of the Vatican manuscript of Le Viandier, are clearly of a

different school. These are the northern fish, and most of them can be found among the inglorious forces of Lent in the battle of 'Caresme' against 'Charnage'; the same species are enumerated in popular literature and pedagogic manuals of northern France.[50] The classification, by the author of Le Menagier, of sea fish into two divisions - round and flat - is more accidental than scientific, but it does indicate the greater importance of flat fish in northern waters.

Again, it is difficult to establish which species were preferred in northern France. The court of Burgundy, at Bruges, most often ate 'rougets', sole and plaice, all of which appear in the menus of Le Menagier, plaice being probably the most frequently cited sea fish, although nowhere near as common as freshwater fish. At the court of Savoy, a few Mediterranean species - sardines and anchovies, for example - were available, although the fish resources appear to have been predominantly freshwater; this accords with the remark of Gilles le Bouvier, that Provence supplied both fresh and salted fish to Savoy and other inland regions.[51]

Cuisine begins with the choice of ingredients. In the realm of fish from the sea, Mediterranean and northern French cooks were faced with two different sets of ingredients, only a few species being common to both. This accident of geography does not guarantee that in other respects, Mediterranean and northern treatments of fish will not be similar, but it sets the stage for the development of two different culinary styles.

There were, in addition, some species which were neither entirely marine nor freshwater in their habitat and which were universally esteemed: salmon, sturgeon, eels and lampreys. The presence of salmon in Mediterranean environments seems anomalous, but in the fourteenth and fifteenth century salmon were relatively plentiful near Toulouse, for example.[52] Sturgeon, fished in the Rhone, the Gironde and the Po River, was one of the only two fish mentioned in the meat-day menus appended to Cuoco Napolitano, and sturgeon was an obvious choice to honour a special guest at the papal palace at Avignon.[53] Its prestige would seem to be confirmed by the recipe in Le Menagier and other northern French texts for "Esturgon contrefait de veel" - mock sturgeon, made of veal![54]

Recipes for eels and lampreys are included in all the mediaeval cookery books, and do not differ greatly from one text to another. They were almost invariably served with a highly-spiced sauce, thickened, in the case of the lamprey, with its blood. The similarity of these treatments for the same ingredients lends support to the suggestion that for different sets of ingredients, different culinary styles will be developed. These will now be examined.

FRESH FISH: BASIC COOKING TECHNIQUES

"La quinte diversité est de l'apparillement c'on fait, si com de saler et de mangier rostis, fris, et en ewe ou en autres manieres."[55] Writing in the thirteenth century,

Aldebrandin summarised the basic culinary techniques for fish in the mediaeval kitchen: roasting, frying, cooking in water. All three techniques were combined in the culinary _tour de force_ proposed by both Chiquart and Martino: the three-way fish, of which the tail part was fried, the head and middle sections separately either grilled or boiled.[56] More elaborate treatments were baking in a pie and cooking in a sauce, usually after a preliminary frying or poaching. Roasting was usually equivalent to grilling ("pex d'ast ho de greylla", "rostiz sur le gril"); cooking in water was often referred to as boiling ("pesce da allessare") but poaching is probably a more accurate description: "bollire piano, suavamente, ad ascio" stresses Martino.[57]

According to Platina, "the seasoning and cooking of fish is not the same for all; those that you want boiled are almost all scaled, cleaned and the gills plucked out ... those you choose to roast you put on the hearth whole."[58] Again, the refinement and discrimination mediaeval cooks brought to their profession is evident. Particular treatments were more appropriate to particular species; the same techniques could not be applied to all fish, nor were the same seasonings and accompaniments always apt. When culinary practice is thus codified, one can anticipate variation between systems. The mediaeval recipe books provide evidence which demonstrates fundamental dissimilarities between the northern French and Mediterranean styles.

Not all mediaeval cookery books treat fish in a

comprehensive and encyclopaedic fashion. Anonimo Veneziano includes only seven fish recipes, in a total of 135, and the only species named are eels, prawns and tench; similarly, Anonimo Toscano devotes only ten of its 181 recipes to fish. Martino (and its derivatives, Platina and Cuoco Napolitano) compensate for this deficiency, presenting cooking instructions for over 50 species. Comparable detail in the northern French and Catalan texts allows the various culinary systems to be compared. The most comprehensive treatment of fish in northern French cuisine is offered by Le Menagier, and since its recommendations are, in most instances, identical to those of Le Viandier, the various manuscripts of the latter need not be considered in this context.

The most obvious difference between the Mediterranean and northern French systems is a predilection for frying or grilling in the former, and the predominance of poaching in northern French cuisine. Ignoring for the moment recipes for the more complicated 'potages' and 'brouets', in which the fish might be subject to several successive culinary operations (such as fry - cook in sauce), and considering only the basic treatments for cooking fresh- and saltwater fish (not including crustaceans and molluscs), the preponderance of poaching in northern French cuisine is obvious from a study of Le Menagier: of the 50 or so species listed, poaching was proposed for 34 species. Only for 14 species was frying recommended, and a similar proportion was suitable for grilling. Several adaptable fish could be cooked by any

method.

On the other hand, poaching was effectively unknown to the compiler of the Latin Liber, a text which betrays its Mediterranean origin through its selection of fish species. The book gives two basic sauces for fish - one for fried fish, and one for grilled.[59] In general, the options were more rationally based in Mediterranean cuisine, the appropriate technique depending as much on the size of the fish as the species. The advice of Martino is fundamental: small fish should be roast or fried, large fish poached. In practice, frying may have been the more common technique, being suggested for more species than either grilling or poaching. The Sent Sovi likewise instructs that small fish should be floured and fried, while medium-sized fish might be either fried, grilled, roast or poached. Mestre Robert, whose selection favoured the more prestigious species, favoured grilling (or roasting) over either frying or poaching.

In southern France, too, frying was apparently the most prevalent treatment for fish. Stouff's examination of Provençal household inventories showed the frying pan ('paelle' in mediaeval French, 'sartago' or 'sartan' in Occitan) to have been by far the most common cooking utensil, and its importance in both Provence and Sicily is confirmed by later studies.[60] Mediaeval Montpellier had a considerable export business in 'sartans'.[61] It is not axiomatic that the frying pan was destined exclusively for the cooking of fish - recipes in the Sent Sovi indicate that the 'pella' was also used to fry meats,

omelettes and fritters - but this was probably its primary function, and at least one document refers specifically to "Unam sartaginem ad coquendum pisses".[62]

What is obvious is that frying was a very common culinary technique, and frying in olive oil the preferred procedure for fish. Sales of olive oil in Provence always soared in Lent; the number of deliveries through the Aix-en-Provence toll rose from one or two a month for most of the year to 13 in March, and for the same month fish deliveries increased threefold.[63] The merchant who contracted to supply olive oil to a village near Aix visited twice as frequently during Lent as in the other months of the year.[64] At the Studium of Trets, olive oil was purchased only on fast days, for cooking fish and eggs, and the coincidence of fish and oil purchases occurs in kitchen accounts for other Provençal households.[65]

Thus, in the mediaeval period, a predilection for cooking fish by frying was characteristic of Mediterranean cuisine and was not shared by northern French cuisine. If frying was the preferred technique in Mediterranean regions, and poaching in northern France, this is evidence of a fundamental difference in tastes and in cuisines. In Le Menagier, frying is more often suggested for 'Poissons de mer plat' than for other marine fish or freshwater fish; possibly 'round' sea fish, being more similar in form to freshwater fish, were naturally treated in the same way - namely, in water, this medium being more compatible with the nature of the fish.[66] A more plausible explanation is that in northern France, oil, the

common frying medium, was either scarce, expensive, of poor quality or not to popular taste, or all of these at the same time.

From a study of fats in French cuisine, Jean-Louis Flandrin confirmed the validity of this hypothesis.[67] Olive oil was not to the taste of the northern French. It was relatively scarce and expensive (although cost would not have prevented the rich from using it had they so desired), probably of inferior quality and in effect, synonomous with Lent, sharing the same associations of cheerlessness and gloom. Indeed, the use of oil - commonly olive oil - was imposed by the Church for this six-week period, regardless of one's preferences; when free choice was permitted, pork fat was preferred. Is it any wonder, asked Flandrin, that the popular imagery of Carnival and Lent doing battle belongs more to the north than to the Mediterranean, where the flavour of olive oil was not repugnant, "as if the traumatism of Lent was stronger in northern countries".[68]

Flandrin is justified in assuming that in Paris, the oil used for Lent was predominantly olive oil, but in other parts of northern France, different oils may have been available. In Burgundy, walnut oil did not seem to suffer the same disapprobation and even outside the Lenten period, may even have been preferred to animal fats.[69]

The mediaeval recipe books also indicate that fish was more commonly grilled or roast in Mediterranean regions than in northern France. 'Roasting' was not

necessarily spit-roasting, although eels and lampreys could be spit-roast, but more likely roasting on the grill. Logically, one would not expect fish to be spit-roast unless whole and unscaled, as Platina suggests, since the cooked flesh might easily fall away from the bones, but eels and lampreys could be threaded on to, or wound around, a spit and secured with ties, then roasted without risk of disintegration. Other fish, advised Martino, should be cooked 'sopra la graticola'.[70]

Patricia Labahn has theorised that a scarcity of wood in Mediterranean regions encouraged the development of enclosed charcoal stoves, and as a consequence Mediterranean cooks perfected the skills of grilling and frying. "In northern Europe, there was no shortage of fire wood, so the cook found ample fuel for the requirements of the spit and cauldron. This may account for the prevalence of these two items, rather than the grill or fry pan, in the inventories, illustrations and cook books."[71] On the other hand, cauldrons and spits are listed more frequently than grills in the inventories of southern France as well, although they were not as prevalent as frying pans.[72] Since grills were clearly a luxury, always associated with noblemen or rich bourgeois, it would be necessary to compare details relating specifically to these milieux in both northern and southern France to verify Labahn's proposition. However, the evidence of recipe books certainly suggests that grilling was a more common culinary technique for fish in Mediterranean regions.

Grilling may also have represented a refinement of the fifteenth-century, and therefore more typical of Mediterranean cuisine which, as suggested earlier, was more advanced than northern French. Mestre Robert inclined towards grilling rather than frying, and the popularity of the technique is confirmed by the frontispiece illustration to the Libre del Coch depicting a cook in his working environment, where a grill hangs on the wall, alongside a couple of spits.[73] (Incidentally, the design of this mediaeval grill is identical to that of the grill of today, at least in southern France.) Both Mestre Robert and Martino demonstrate their culinary finesse in their recipes for grilled fish, the former insisting that the grill and the fish be oiled, that the fish brushed with oil when turned, and that a moderately low heat be used. Similarly, Martino instructs to brush the fish during cooking, with a 'salimora' of oil, vinegar and salt, using a sprig of rosemary or bay leaves for the purpose.

According to Aldebrandin, roast/grilled fish were better than fried, since fried fish took on some of the 'viscosity' of the oil.[74] Better than all others, in his opinion, was the fish cooked in pure water, with the addition of salt only, provided it was eaten with a spicy sauce. This method - poaching in salted water - was the standard treatment for freshwater fish in northern France, to judge by the recipes of Le Menagier and Le Viandier, and the typical accompaniment was 'Saulse vert' or 'cameline', both spicy sauces.[75] The author of Le

Menagier discriminates between freshwater fish, which should go directly into simmering salted water, and sea fish, which are to be placed in the pan and sprinkled with salt before cold water is added.[76] A few fish, such as pike, salmon and sturgeon, are poached in a primitive court bouillon - water, wine and salt.[77]

One might assume the court bouillon to represent an advancement of culinary technique and indeed, by the middle of the fifteenth century, Martino invariably prescribed a court bouillon for poaching, approximately equal parts water and white wine or vinegar, plus salt. In the recipes of Mestre Robert, too, vinegar was often added to the water during poaching, but Mestre Robert also remained faithful to Catalan custom of poaching in the Lenten substitute for meat stock - water with a little oil and salt, often flavoured with fresh herbs; according to Aldebrandin, this method was least beneficial of all.[78]

Clearly, the fish dishes on a northern French table would have been vastly different to those served in Mediterranean regions. Not only would different cooking techniques have been preferred, but particular regional variations of the one technique would have produced dishes of quite different flavour. To illustrate the divergence between distinctive northern French and Mediterranean styles, recipes for the same species, fish common to both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, can be compared. For some highly esteemed species of fish, the same techniques applied. The noble sturgeon and

the gentle salmon were generally poached, although the Catalan texts also suggest the possibility of frying or roasting.[79] Mackerel, too, was treated similarly - grilled in northern France, while Martino suggests frying and Mestre Robert cooking 'en casola'.[80] Mullet, on the other hand, was more likely to have been poached in northern France, fried or grilled in Mediterranean regions.[81] Italian and Catalan recipes for eels and conger eels favour spit-roasting or frying, with poaching only for large specimens; northern French ones prefer poaching.[82] For sole, the author of Le Menagier suggests either poaching, or roasting, or frying, or cooking with a sauce, but Martino and Mestre Robert are adamant in recommending frying as the only treatment.[83] These basic differences in culinary treatment were complemented by differences in the sauces and flavourings which accompanied poached, grilled and fried fish.

FRESH FISH: FLAVOURINGS AND SAUCES

The northern French predilection for a spicy sauce with poached fish has already been mentioned. Fried fish, too, came with a diversity of thick, spicy sauces, the same sauces which accompanied meats - jance, saulse vert, cameline - but grilled fish was customarily served simply with verjuice.[84] 'Green sauce' - albeit a different green sauce, since no two recipes for this popular mediaeval accompaniment are identical - could also

accompany fried fish in Italian and Catalan cuisine; the Catalan 'baborada' for fried fish was effectively a 'green sauce' without the herbs.[85] Poached fish was teamed with 'sapor bianco' or 'agliata'in Italian cuisine, both almond-thickened sauces, while in Catalan cuisine the sauces for 'fish cooked in water' were of the 'pebrada' type.[86]

Diversity, therefore, but no distinctively regional preferences in these pairings. However, with the two techniques for fish which were typically Mediterranean - frying and grilling - was associated with another typically Mediterranean ingredient: citrus fruit. All the recipes for grilled fish in the Libre del Coch include a simple sauce of orange juice, water, oil, salt (and pepper) and chopped fresh herbs, which is merely a refinement of the 'aygua sal' of the Sent Sovi (orange juice, water, salt plus rosewater if desired); this 'aygua sal' was one of the standard accompaniments to grilled fish in Catalan cuisine.[87] Martino, likewise, favours orange juice with fried fish, sometimes adding salt and chopped parsley; grilled fish was usually served with the oil-and-vinegar 'salimora' with which it was basted.

There is only one mention of oranges in association with fish in the northern texts and, curiously, it occurs in a recipe for poached mullet, in Le Menagier.[88] It is likely that this recipe, which is not included in the fourteenth-century Viandier, is of Mediterranean origin, for the author commences with the explanation "Mulet est dit mungon en Languedoc." Whether the recipe was

transmitted in oral or written form, it seems that the scribe either forgot all the details of the original, save the orange juice accompaniment, or modified the recipe to suit his own taste, instructing poaching instead of frying. To my knowledge, no Mediterranean recipe for poached fish includes orange juice as a condiment.

The Liber also proposes citrus juice ("succum citrangulorum") for both grilled and fried fish.[34] In Provence, citrus juice was apparently the typical accompaniment to fried fish.[90] A book of kitchen accounts specifies "pro citronibus datis cum piscibus frixis", and a merchant who passed through the Aix-en-Provence toll on his return from Marseilles carried both fish and oranges.[91] According to Pierre de Crescens the 'citronnier' was 'assez commun', in thirteenth-century Italy, an observation confirmed by Gilles le Bouvier; by the fifteenth century, orange trees were being grown in Southern France, although the fruits had been known to the papal court much earlier.[92]

The combination of citrus juice with grilled or fried fish was therefore particular to the Mediterranean region. The prevalence of this combination, more than any other feature, distinguished a Mediterranean from a northern French style of cuisine. At the court of Savoy, where both Mediterranean and northern French influences were apparent, orange juice plus sorrel verjuice complemented fried sole, and orange juice fried or roast pike, but in northern France the use of oranges in cuisine was extremely rare before the sixteenth century.[93]

FRESH FISH 'EN POTAGE'

Like meat, fish could be served 'en potage' as a brouet, gravé or civé. Particularly in northern French cuisine, the names parallel those of the meat dishes, and similarly, many of the recipes seem to have been developed from recipes for brouets based on meat. Chiquart likewise gives instructions for fish counterparts to meat brouets, "pour ceulx qui ne manguent nulles chars".[94] The practice of substituting fish for meat, in a meat recipe, and using appropriate alternatives to meat stock, livers, etc., was apparently common throughout mediaeval Europe, and Mestre Robert makes reference to the custom in his introduction to the Lenten section of his book, concluding "E vet aci en qual manera de infinides viandes que son posades en dia de carn, se poden fer en la quaresma."[95]

This tends to confirm the second-rank status of fish, in general, but also implies that the distinctive features which characterised meat brouets in northern French and Mediterranean cuisines were equally apparent in brouets based on fish. The correspondence between meat and non-meat brouets is most obvious in the northern French texts and in Chiquart's Du Fait de Cuisine, where recipes for Broet blanc, Broet d'Alemagny, Broet de Savoye, Broet Tyolli, Broet Camellain, and Broet rosee appear in both meat and fish versions; likewise for Gravé and Saupiquet. Le Menagier includes non-meat versions of Brouet vergay,

Brouet blanc, Comminée, Cretonnée, Housébarré and Civé. Apart from the necessary substitutions - fish stock, or the liquid drained from cooked peas, in place of meat stock - recipes for fish brouets were almost identical to those of the meat counterparts.

Not all fish 'potages', however, were borrowed from meat prototypes, although in northern French cuisine they still shared similar features. Mediterranean cuisine, on the other hand, seems to have developed a separate group of fish dishes, apparently unrelated to meat ones. The fish counterparts to meat brouets may still have been part of the culinary repertoire, but were not necessarily documented as recipes; one exception is the 'Brudo de pescie marini', in effect a 'limonia' of fish ("Quisto civo si fi dicto limonia de pescie").[96]

One significant difference between northern French and Mediterranean recipes for fish potages (i.e. fish cooked in a sauce) is that in the former, the fish is invariably fried before being added to the sauce to complete its cooking, as is the standard method for meat brouets, while in Mediterranean cuisine the recipe is just as likely to suggest a preliminary poaching.[97] This seems a curious reversal of custom, since frying was more common, as a basic technique, in the Mediterranean, but might be explained by the close correspondence between meat and fish brouets in northern France and the apparent independence of Mediterranean fish brouets.

A technique for fish which seems to have been particular to Catalan cuisine, and was especially favoured

by Mestre Robert, was 'en casola', a sort of braising in which the fish and flavourings were cooked together in the same pan, usually over direct heat, without any preliminary poaching or frying. Mestre Robert recommended cooking 'en casola' for almost every species of fish cited; his basic method was to cook the fish on a bed of herbs and spices with a little oil, sometimes with the addition of a little verjuice or orange juice, and with a sprinkling of almonds, pinenuts and raisins. The Sent Sovi gives a standard recipe for 'pex de casola', in which the fish was simply cooked with a little oil and sliced onion in the casola, then finished in a spiced, vinegar-sour sauce thickened with ground cooked fish.[98] In both the Sent Sovi and Anonimo Meridionale/A are recipes for sardines cooked in a spiced and somewhat thickened sauce.[99]

Two other obvious and distinctive features of Mediterranean fish cuisine are the use of fresh herbs - predominantly parsley, mint and marjoram - and the elaborate preparations based on a kind of fish forcemeat. Recipes for what can best be described as small fish balls or sausages, flavoured with herbs and spices, fried, and possibly subsequently served in a fish stock, are included in both Anonimo Meridionale manuscripts and in the Nice manuscript.[100] A similar forcemeat was used as a stuffing for sardines, to be fried and served with lemon juice ("suco de citranguli") and for eels, then grilled; it might also be moulded around the reserved backbone, in the form of the original fish, then fried and eaten with a

sauce.[101]

The presence of such specialities supports the hypothesis that in Mediterranean cuisine, recipes for fish were not merely modifications of recipes developed for meats. A further implication is that fish-eating, in Mediterranean regions, may have been regarded less as a penance, and therefore more enjoyable than it was in northern France, at least in the Parisian region. Whether this was a consequence of the distaste for oil, an obligatory accompaniment to fish in Lent, or simply a spontaneous response to the resources available, is impossible to know, but in view of the stronger pressure for the relaxation of Lenten restrictions in northern France, the former explanation is perhaps more credible.

A MEDITERRANEAN SPECIALITY: ESCABECHE

Escabeche - to give the dish its modern orthography - is one of the few mediaeval dishes to have persisted, in recognisable form, to the modern period. Today's escabeche, almost anywhere in the Mediterranean, is essentially the same as the mediaeval version: fried fish dressed with a hot vinegary liquid.

In European cuisine, the first recipes were recorded around the fourteenth century. The _Sent Sovi_ gives three for 'escabeyg' or 'esquabey' and the Latin _Liber_ one, under the name of 'scapeta'.[102] About the same time, the Occitan term 'escabeg' appeared in documents relating to the Eglise de Maguelone.[103] In _Anonimo Toscano_,

mention is made of a popular tavern dish, 'schibezia', although the accompanying recipe, in which the fish is poached rather than fried, is not a typical escabeche.[104] Recipes for 'schibezo' and 'schibeze' are included in fifteenth-century Italian texts, and Mestre Robert gives one recipe for 'bon escabelx'.[105]

The derivation of the term, from the Arab 'sikbaj', vulgarised into 'iskebey', has been documented by Corominas.[106] (The procedure, however, was known to the Romans; Apicius includes a recipe which must rate as one of the most succint ever: "To preserve fried fish. As soon as they are fried, remove them and sprinkle with hot vinegar."[107]) In the thirteenth-century Wusla, the dish 'sakbaj' is described by Rodinson as "un ragout de viande au vinaigre"; in A Bagdad Cookery-Book, 'sikbaj' is boiled meat further cooked in a mixture of vinegar and sweet date juice, finally flavoured with saffron and almonds, raisins, currants and dried figs, and 'musakbaj' is a dish of fried fish placed in saffron-coloured wine vinegar.[108] The frying medium in this instance was sesame oil, which might explain the name 'cisame' given in Anonimo Veneziano to a recipe for a dish which is essentially an escabeche; 'cisame' could be a misspelling of 'sisamo' which in fourteenth-century Italy referred to sesame.[109]

All the mediaeval European recipes call for a thickened, more- or less-vinegary sauce to be poured over pieces of fried fish. The thickening agent was usually bread plus almonds or other nuts, sometimes with the

addition of ground cooked fish; the sauce usually included a compensating sweet ingredient; and dried fruits, such as raisins, prunes and dates could be included. These features are more characteristic of the meat 'sikbaj' than the fish version of A Bagdad Cookery-Book, but the transmission of recipes and ideas was such that some confusion is to be expected.

Indeed, there was further confusion in the minds of mediaeval cooks and scribes with respect to 'gelatina' of fish. Most recipes instructed that fish jellies were to be prepared in a similar way to meat jellies, in other words, the fish was cooked in a wine/vinegar mixture, with or without the addition of verjuice, and, in some instances, diluted with water; the stock, suitably reduced and spiced, was poured over the previously cooked fish. It is this dish, 'Gelatina di pesce senza oglio' which was mistakenly named 'schibezia' in Anonimo Toscano, while the real escabeche masqueraded under the title of 'Brodo de pesce'.[110] It appears, then, that the name 'gelatina' could be applied to any dish in which the fish was in some way preserved and served cold; thus 'gelatina senza oglio' could refer to an escabeche-like dish in which the fish was not fried but poached.

Escabeche does not seem to have been familiar to, or accepted by, cooks in the Parisian region, which is understandable in the light of northern attitudes to oil and to frying. Le Menagier includes a recipe, 'Espimbeche de rougets', presumed to belong to the escabeche family, its name being a corruption of 'escabeche'.[111] The

relationship, however, is tenuous, since the fish are not fried but parboiled then grilled; nor are they dressed with vinegar, but with verjuice. Northern French cuisine also had fish jellies and 'galantines', a dish of cold poached fish (carp, lamprey, pike, eel) dressed with a spiced and bread-thickened sauce, but this is a long way distant from the 'gelatina senza oglio' and even further removed from the classic Mediterranean escabeche.[112]

Escabeche, then, was a characteristically Mediterranean dish which did not feature in the northern French repertoire in mediaeval times.[113] It provides yet another example of a Mediterranean borrowing from Arab cuisine, both in the linguistic and technical domain.

CRUSTACEANS AND MOLLUSCS

Mediterranean mediaeval cuisine seemed to make better use of the resources of seas and rivers, with more recipes for crustaceans (crabs, prawns, lobsters) and molluscs (octopus, cuttlefish, squid, shellfish) in Mediterranean than in northern texts. In Le Menagier, only 'escrevisses' (saltwater or freshwater) and oysters appear in several of the sample menus.

Recipes for octopus, cuttlefish and squid are included in most of the Italian cookery books, although Martino describes the octopus as "pesce vile" and not worth eating.[114] Octopus was apparently boiled and eaten with salt; small squid and cuttlefish could be fried and eaten with orange juice or Green Sauce and larger

species stewed in a sauce containing their ink.[115] The Sent Sovi gives recipes for cuttlefish and squid, parboiled then fried and finished in a sauce, or the bodies stuffed with the chopped tentacles, while Mestre Robert suggests cuttlefish and squid in an almond sauce, octopus boiled and eaten with Salsa verda.[116]

Oysters and mussels could be placed directly over hot coals or in a pan, to open and cook, then seasoned with verjuice; clams were similarly prepared, then finished with chopped fresh herbs or an almond sauce.[117] Small crustaceans were usually boiled in wine and water and dressed with vinegar, larger ones cooked in the oven.[118] The one complicated dish was stuffed prawns (or crabs), in which the cooked meat was ground with almonds and herbs, plus cheese and egg yolks if permitted, the shells then filled and fried.[119] Mestre Robert used lobster for a Lenten 'Menjar blanch', and in the Sent Sovi cooked lobster was finished in a spiced sauce with fresh herbs and almonds.[120]

Similarly in northern French cuisine, mussels were steamed open and eaten with vinegar or verjuice and parsley, while oysters went into a 'civé'.[121] 'Escrevisses' and lobsters ('langoustes') were prepared in the same way as in Mediterranean cuisine, but instead of stuffed prawn tails northern French cooks made a 'grave' of prawns, and other fried fish, in a spiced almond sauce.[122] Only with cephalopods did northern French and Mediterranean cuisines differ significantly, and this difference is probably a consequence of greater abundance

and variety of these fish in Mediterranean waters. Cuttlefish seems to have been the only species commercially available in northern France, and could be bought either fresh or dried. According to the recipes, it was apparently heated in a dry pan, when much of its moisture would be exuded, then fried, with or without onion, and served with a garlic sauce.[123]

Thus in this domain of fish cookery, the minor differences can probably be attributed to natural rather than cultural causes. Crustaceans and molluscs were probably far less plentiful than fish, from either sea or rivers, and were of less regular supply. Platina notes that lobsters and crabs were of seasonal availability; further, he says lobsters should be cooked alive and other crustaceans and molluscs should be very fresh, thereby implying that such species would have been consumed chiefly along the littoral, rarely reaching the markets of inland towns.[124]

SALTED, DRIED AND SMOKED FISH

Of all the possibilities for Lent and for fast days, salted fish was the last resort - and yet, because of the difficulties of maintaining adequate supplies of fresh fish, it was also a necessary resort. Barrels of salted fish were often purchased prior to Lent and stored against such an eventuality.[125] This practice was apparently so common that the association of salted fish with Lent was inevitable.

Salted fish was the food of the poor, the cheapest of all fish. When Pope Clement V distributed rations to the poor and needy, they invariably included salted herrings, yet he and his court feasted on more luxurious delicacies.[126] At the Avignon market, salted bogue, picarel and sardines were worth only 10 deniers per pound, but the same species, fresh, sold for 13 deniers per pound.[127] The ordinary people of fifteenth-century Tours survived on salted and dried fish during Lent, although fresh river fish was available for important guests.[128] Salted fish was notably absent from the purchases of the court of Burgundy at Bruges, but in Tuscany, Francesco Datini was sometimes obliged to supplement his preferred diet of freshwater fish with salted tuna, herrings or trout.[129]

Almost all the mediaeval cookery books considered in this study include recipes for salted, dried or smoked fish - it is not always possible to know which method, or methods, of preservation have been used. Thus protected against the mischief of time, such fish could voyage far from their place of origin, and patriotic relationships are less relevant than for fresh fish. Salt cod from Cornwall appeared in Mediterranean regions, salted whale from the Atlantic sustained the Parisian poor during Lent. Nevertheless, some differences between northern France and Mediterranean regions can be discerned, particularly in the types of salted fish available and eaten.

More types of salted, dried or smoked fish are mentioned in the recipes of Le Menagier than any other

mediaeval cookery book, and the species named are chiefly fish of northern waters, the 'round' rather than 'flat' fish. Yet the salting of fish was an important industry along the Mediterranean coast, and a great variety of fish - tuna, sardines, anchovies, eels, mullet, sea bass, sea bream - was thus preserved.[130] Near Montpellier, fishermen used to salt large numbers of eels from the coastal lagoons and export them to inland cities.[131] Market regulations in Provence sometimes stipulated that any unsold excess of fresh fish be salted.[132]

The Mediterranean region was both an importer and exporter of salted fish. At Barcelona arrived salted and dried tuna from Sicily, salted anchovies from Malaga and salted tuna, herrings and sardines from Portugal and Castille.[133] Marseilles exported salted fish to Sardinia, Genoa, the Languedoc and the kingdom of Aragon.[134] Among the purchases of salted fish by the papal palace in the fourteenth century are salted mullet and eels from Martigues, tuna from Marseilles and Montpellier, and salted herrings, cod and whalemeat from the Atlantic coast.[135] Salted herrings, as well as salted sardines, tuna and eels, passed through the Aix-en-Provence toll on their way to inland centres.[136] Both salted herrings and salted tuna were available in fourteenth-century Florence.[137]

The ubiquitous salted tuna was clearly a fundamental resource in Mediterranean regions and, according the anonymous poet of late thirteenth-century Genoa, the Lenten diet was based on chick peas, broad beans and

salted tuna.[138] The techniques of tuna-fishing had been passed on to the fishermen by the Arabs, around the tenth century, and for mediaeval Sicily tuna fishing - and salting - was an important industry.[139] (The Romans, too, had appreciated salted tuna, but it was imported from Byzantium.[140]) Different forms of salted tuna were known by different names, a source of some confusion. The most common term used was 'tonnina' ('tonyina', 'thynno') which could equally apply to the fresh fish; Mestre Robert mentions "tonyina salada co es sorra".[141] Salted tuna imported into Barcelona from Sicily was known as 'sorra', and other preparations included 'moxana', presumably dried tuna, and 'bada'.[142] One interpretation of 'sorra', quoted by Grewe, describes it as the middle section of the tuna, the most flavoursome part, which is precisely what Platina and Martino term 'tarantellum' or 'terantello'.[143]

Small quantities of salted tuna were exported to Flanders, and it may well have been available in Paris; the 'soret' served with vinegar in one of the Lenten menus of Le Menagier may have been 'sorra' prepared in the Italian fashion - boiled, then put into vinegar.[144] The typical Lenten fish in northern France, however, was the herring ("King Herring, who mounted the throne on Ash Wednesday, and stayed there, however much his subjects grumbled, until Easter Sunday"), and herrings appear in the first course of every Lenten or fish-day menu in Le Menagier (and only four times in the 18 meat-day menus).[145] They came in two guises - preserved in salt

('harens blans"), or salted and smoked ('harenc sors'). There are no specific recipes for salted or smoked herrings in the northern texts, which would indicate that they were either cooked in a very simple way, or not at all.

The traditional accompaniment to boiled salted fish in northern French cuisine was, as for salted meat, mustard. The author of Le Menagier also proposes a slightly more refined treatment, with wine and sliced onions. Italian custom, as already mentioned, was simply to marinate the cooked fish in vinegar, while Catalan recipes include spices or a rich, sweet-sour sauce plus raisins, almonds or pine nuts. All salted fish was soaked in water before cooking, although it could sometimes be bought already soaked and ready for cooking.[146]

Freshwater fish were also salted - trout and alose, for example - but they do not appear to have been as common as salted marine species. On a domestic scale, salting for short-term conservation was also practised; the author of Le Menagier mentions salting half a pike, to preserve it for as long as a week, and Martino describes in some detail the process of 'carpionar', by which carp (or trout) could be kept for a month (they were first brined, then fried).[147]

The lack of detail about salted fish in the cookery books confirms its lowly status throughout mediaeval western Europe. However, one difference between northern France and Mediterranean regions can be identified: the predominance of salted herrings in the former, and the

popularity of salted tuna around the Mediterranean.

CONCLUSION

While some of the distinguishing characteristics of Mediterranean and northern French cuisines, as identified for meat, poultry and game, are equally relevant in regard to fish - such as the prevalence of nuts and citrus juices in the former, of bread-thickened sauces in the latter - other differences between the two cuisines, in the realm of fish, relate more to geography and differences in natural resources. Most freshwater fish had a widespread distribution throughout mediaeval western Europe, but marine species were notably different between Mediterranean and northern waters. One consequence of this diversity was a different range of salted fish in each environment.

Culinary techniques also varied according to natural resources - frying was favoured in Mediterranean regions, where oil was more plentiful, cheaper, and of better quality than in Paris, and where a household could possibly be self-sufficient in oil. Frying was also a popular technique for fish in Arab cuisine, and an elaboration of the basic method was borrowed and, as escabeche - fried fish with a vinegary sauce - diffused throughout the non-Arab Mediterranean world. This particular dish was not part of northern French cuisine in the mediaeval period.

In fish cuisine, differences between northern France

and Mediterranean regions are to be found more in the dishes using sea fish than in those based on freshwater species, and the reason for this is probably the differences in the ingredients themselves. Freshwater fish, it is suggested, were the same everywhere, and thus were treated in the same way. This rationalisation is in apparent disagreement with the findings of the previous chapter, where it was argued that pork was treated differently in northern French and Mediterranean cuisines, although the pigs themselves were presumably similar. However, the status of pork, and attitudes towards the meat, were not the same in each region, whereas freshwater fish was universally esteemed.