

CHAPTER EIGHT

A TASTE FOR SUGAR

Exotic spices and the prestige protein ingredients of meat, poultry, game and fish were fundamental elements of mediaeval cuisine, the cuisine of the rich and of the towns. In this chapter the focus turns to another prestige ingredient: sugar, and to the types of dishes in which it featured, the evolution of which parallels the rise of sugar. Although these dishes might be thought to belong to the realm of 'international' cuisine - pies could be found in all mediaeval towns, sugar in all affluent households - yet there was diversity.

Once again can be discerned some of the same characteristic features in Mediterranean cuisine which have already served to differentiate it from that of northern France - for example, a Mediterranean predilection for a touch of sweetness in sauces and brouets, for a balance of sweet and sour. Since sweetness is basic to many of the dishes to be considered in this chapter, the first question to be asked is this: Did the Mediterranean peoples have a sweeter tooth than their northern neighbours?

SUGAR

"And wherever they went, the Arabs brought with them sugar, the product and the technology of its production; sugar, we are told, followed the Koran."¹

Thus sugar cane arrived in Mediterranean Europe (southern Spain and Sicily) well before the first record of sugar in European commerce, at Venice in 996.² The rest of the story is familiar: crusaders in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean discovered these 'honey reeds', tried them and liked what they tried. The consequence of this discovery was that Europeans were soon in control of sugar production in the territories they had conquered, while far-sighted Venetian entrepreneurs were establishing sugar plantations and refineries in their colonies of Crete (Candi) and Cyprus. By the start of the twelfth century, sugar was available throughout Europe - at a price! Its commerce, like that of spices, was dominated by the Italians, although Catalan and Provençal merchants took their share; in 1153 the town of Narbonne collected a tax on all sugar entering the municipality, whether by sea or road.³

When first introduced into Europe, sugar was classed with spices, presumably because its origins were geographically similar, and because it was sold by apothecaries-spice merchants who, having adopted Arab pharmaceutical practices, used it in the preparation of

electuaries and other sugar or syrup-based medicines.

In dietetics, sugar was classed as hot, like spices; it was believed to purify the body in general, and to benefit the chest and kidneys in particular. Its greatest virtue, however - and in this respect it was practically unique among foods - was that it was considered appropriate for all temperaments and all ages, in all climates and all regions, truly the universal panacea. The thirteenth-century Provençal dietetic describes an electuary of 'sucre rosat' (rose-scented sugar) and 'diarrhodon à la rhubarbe' to be taken first thing in the morning to 'reconforter le coeur'.⁴ Other sweeteners, like honey and fruit 'robs', also played a part in Arab medicine, presumably to temper the bitterness of many medicinal herbs and plant products.⁵ The role of sweet ingredients in pharmaceutical medicine is important in understanding the travel of sugar from spice shop to kitchen, which migration was certainly completed before the middle of the fifteenth century, since Platina included sugar with honey in a group of basic culinary staples, while spices and herbs were classified separately. In fourteenth-century Florence, the apothecaries-spice merchants prepared and sold "cordiali, giuleppi e confetture", while in Pistoia they also made "cialde" (a sort of wafer) and "pan pepati" (gingerbread).⁶

Platina wrote that "the ancients used it just as a medication, and because of this no mention of sugar is made in the records of their cooking. From melted sugar

with almonds, ... pinekernels, hazelnuts, coriander and anise seeds, cinnamon and many other things we make desserts."⁷ It is generally agreed that the pharmaceutical role of sugar preceded its culinary one. "We can see sugar in the role of preventive medicine rather than cure; and from that view it was only a step to regarding sugar as a positively health-producing ingredient in the daily diet."⁸ However, the causal relationship implied here is open to doubt. I suggest that Mediterranean cuisines adopted sugar either as an alternative to their traditional sweeteners of honey or concentrated must, or in the context of a complete recipe, a new dish borrowed from Arab cuisine. The theory that medicine facilitated the acceptance of sugar into cuisine is relevant only in those instances when the new ingredient replaced other sweeteners.

A similar tradition of sweetening is absent from northern cuisine, and sugar entered by three routes: in convalescent foods (a corollary of its medicinal properties), through its implicit association with dried fruits (which featured in many Lenten dishes), and again, as part of a composite whole, a new dish directly or indirectly modeled on an Arab original. This fundamental difference in the way in which sugar became incorporated into the cuisine can explain why, at least up to the end of the fifteenth century, sugar was more widely used in Mediterranean than in northern French cuisine. (It should be noted that English culinary texts of the fourteenth and fifteenth century show an extraordinarily high usage of

sugar. The recipes also call for almonds far more frequently than do those of northern France, and it is possible that these two ingredients were commonly paired, as they were in Arab cuisine, and that their presence is traceable to an Arab connection not yet thoroughly elucidated.)

SUGAR IN ARAB CUISINE

In Arab cuisine, sugar was an essential ingredient in the kinds of dishes Rodinson groups together as "douceurs et pâtisseries" or in modern parlance, desserts.⁹ Almost without exception, these recipes (represented in A Bagdad Cookery-Book as Judhab, Khabis, Halwa, Khushknanaj, Mutbaq and Qata'if) are sugar-sweet.¹⁰ Further, almost all the recipes include almonds, as though sugar and almonds were as inevitable a combination as today's strawberries and cream. There may have been a good reason for this association; according to the Tacuinum Sanitatis, which is based on (or inspired by) Arab writings of the eleventh century, eating sugar with almonds will counteract any possible harmful effects of almonds on the intestines. The almond-sugar combination today is so familiar to be unremarked, but it is worth emphasising in Arab cuisine, because it also appears in non-dessert recipes.

Almost all the other mentions of sugar in the Bagdad non-dessert recipes - and sugar is used more frequently than any other sweetener - associate it with almonds; these recipes are mainly in the chapter entitled Sour

Dishes: "Some sour dishes are sweetened with sugar, syrup, honey or date-juice; others are not sweetened but served in their natural bitterness."¹¹ Several others are in the chapter entitled Simple and Sweet Dishes, where again the sugar-almond partnership is frequent. Neither sugar nor almonds appears in any fish recipe. It should perhaps be stressed that the sugar+almonds combination appears stronger than that of almonds+sugar - in other words, where there is sugar there are usually almonds, but the presence of almonds does not automatically imply the inclusion of sugar.

SUGAR IN MEDIAEVAL EUROPEAN CUISINE

Having demonstrated the durability of the sugar-almond association in Arab cuisine, the next step is to look at the ways in which sugar was used in mediaeval European cuisine. In the earliest northern French texts of the thirteenth or early fourteenth century, sugar is rarely mentioned; neither is honey, nor any other sweetener. Clearly, there is no established tradition of adding a touch of sweetness - for whatever reason - to sauces and brouets, and the occasional instances of sugar usage are in convalescent foods and Lenten dishes. The appearance of sugar in Lent is at first inexplicable; it was surely not intended to compensate for the saltiness of dried fish, since sugar is never associated with such ingredients. But it was customary to include naturally-sweet dried fruits - dates, figs and raisins - in Lenten dishes; and honey,

apples, nuts, figs and dates were all ranged on the side of 'Caresme' in its battle with 'Charnage'.¹² Sugar, too, was sweet, so by implication it became a Lenten ingredient. (Dried fruits and nuts appeared more often in Lenten dishes than at any other time of the year, possibly because they varied the monotony of fish and legumes, possibly because they were store-cupboard provisions, like dried peas and salted fish. In Byzantine monasteries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, dried fruits and nuts were included in the fast-day diet, from which meat was excluded, replaced by seafoods, legumes and cereals.¹³)

Similarly, in the Viandier of the late fourteenth century, the use of sugar is practically confined to convalescent and Lenten foods. By 1393 (when the author of Le Menagier had access to additional documentary sources) sugar appears more frequently in the recipes - sprinkled on to fried delicacies, in and/or on several almond-thickened sauces and brouets. After another hundred years, the fashion for sweetness and sugar (the one was indistinguishable from the other) had gained even more ground.

Sweetness, then, seems to have been an acquired taste in northern France. It was also an expensively acquired one; at the end of the fourteenth century a pound of sugar cost 8 sols, nearly as much as a moderately-priced spice such as cinnamon, and although it entered into fewer dishes than did cinnamon it was almost certainly used in greater amounts than was a spice. Like spices, sugar

became one of the hallmarks of courtly cuisine. Almost half of Chiquart's banquet recipes include sugar, an unusually high proportion, despite the quasi-duplication (meat and fish versions) and emphasis on the most prestigious dishes of court cuisine. Like those of the fifteenth-century Viandier, the recipes very often call for both sugar and almonds, particularly in brouets.

In Mediterranean regions, however, a preference for sweet tastes seems to have ancient origins - unless it is somehow intuitive. In the late thirteenth-early fourteenth centuries, when the use of sugar in northern France was fairly limited, sugar - and other sweeteners such as honey and concentrated must - were common, and sometimes interchangeable, ingredients in the recipes of the Latin Liber. More importantly, sugar was used in ways which were also typical of Arab cuisine: with almonds or almond milk, or sprinkled on fritters (this latter use also accords with the Roman custom of pouring honey over fritters). The recipes of Anonimo Toscano and the slightly later Anonimo Veneziano show a similar pattern, with sugar the predominant sweetener, especially on fritters, but honey and concentrated must also used occasionally. A preference for sweetening Lenten dishes, or foods for invalids, was not as noticeable as in northern French recipes. Almonds were sometimes associated with sugar, but the partnership was not mandatory.

A more liberal, spendthrift attitude shines through these Italian recipes - dishes often encrusted with sugar even when sugar was already included in the dish. In

Catalan cuisine the habit of sweetening appears to have been even more common, perhaps because this region was more open to Arab influence from Andalusia and thus more likely to adopt Arab tastes, such as the balance of sweet and sour. Excluding those which are simple instructions for preparation or carving, close to one-third of Sent Sovi recipes include one of the three standard sweeteners, commonly associated with almonds, in brouets, in sauces for roast meats, particularly poultry, and in cereal 'spoon dishes'. The practice of sweetening was apparently long-established, but in the early fourteenth century sugar was still scarce and/or expensive. Almost all the sweetened recipes offer alternatives to sugar, sometimes remarking that honey can be substituted "if you don't wish to use sugar" or "if you are in a place where sugar is unavailable".¹⁴

From the Italian and Catalan recipes, one might assume that the use of sweet ingredients was more common in the Mediterranean, and that cooks had a greater familiarity with sugar and other sweeteners, manipulating the flavours with more confidence. The custom can be traced back to the Roman era and is illustrated in the recipes of Apicius: "Il n'est guère de recettes d'Apicius où il (le miel) ne figure."¹⁵ An analysis of these recipes showed that about 60% were sweetened with either honey, concentrated must, sweetened wines, or dried fruits.¹⁶ Concentrated must ('sapa') was well-known to the Romans and was a natural product of the warm Mediterranean environment, whereas in northern France

ripening the grapes was a far more risky operation.

Thus when sugar became available as a culinary ingredient in the Mediterranean it was not as an unknown; it simply joined the corps of established sweeteners and was interchangeable with them. In addition, it featured with almonds in dishes that were clearly Arab borrowings (Bramangere, Brodo bianco, Quinquinelli).¹⁷ That it carried a higher prestige than honey and concentrated must (because more expensive, and a novelty) is evident from its decorative applications, when its function was less to sweeten an already-sweetened dish but to make its presence crystal clear.

'Nothing succeeds like excess' could well have been the Mediterranean motto of the late fifteenth century. By this time sugar had all but displaced honey and concentrated must, although honey retained its popularity for home preserves (because, being already liquid, it was easier to use?) Two-thirds of the recipes in Libre del Coch contain sugar and on average, one in six was served under a layer of sugar and cinnamon.¹⁸ Mestre Robert, however, counsels moderation in the use of sugar in meat-based dishes, since an excess of sugar can destroy the harmony of flavours.¹⁹ Almost all of Martino's torte were dressed with sugar and rosewater. The craze for this new-found luxury in northern France is manifest in the reckless emphasis on sugar in the menus appended to the printed edition of Le Viandier; one banquet offered 'poussins au sucre' in the first course, 'cailles au sucre' in the second, then a selection of mostly sweet

'desserts', while in another menu the third course consisted of "Pyjons au sucre et au vin aigre. Tartres au sucre. Tremolectes au sucre. Most. Banquet de mouelle."²⁰

Despite these examples of apparently indiscriminate ostentation, the main reason for the higher proportion of sugar in later mediaeval recipe books was the elaboration of more sweets, in modern parlance - tartes, torte, fritters, creamy-textured 'spoon dishes'. On the other hand, this development may well have been consequent on a greater availability of sugar at a cheaper price; at the end of the fourteenth century, loaf sugar in Paris cost 8 sols per pound, but by 1477/78 its price was about 5 sols/pound.²¹ The same price trend can be seen both in northern France and in the Mediterranean, and shows that sugar had become firmly established as a kitchen essential among the upper classes. During the next century the sugar habit spread downwards to all but the very poorest citizens.

CONFITS

To consider sugar purely as a culinary ingredient would be to neglect its very important role in confectionery and preserves, where its use is likely to have been a direct consequence of its medical affiliations. Spices were thought to aid digestion (and sweeten the breath) and so were offered at the end of a meal; the medicine was much more appetising with a sugar coating. Aniseed, for

example, "confortano la natura e vertude dello stomaco per bene cuocere la vivanda".²² The 'espices de chambre' of the fourteenth century, however, were more than just spices. For the wedding feasts arranged by maistre Helye the order from the 'espicier' included 'orengat' (candied orange peel); 'chitron' (candied citron); 'anis vermeil' (aniseed); 'sucre rosat' (rose-scented sugar); and 'dragee blanche'.²³ An even more sumptuous selection is described by Eustache Deschamps in his satirical picture of life-after-marriage, when he offers a detailed (if possibly exaggerated) account of the typical bourgeois dinner party of fourteenth-century Paris:

"Après diner vient le mestrie
Des dragoirs faire et apporter;
Lors couvient ses gens enhorter,
D'avoir sucre en plate et dragee,
Paste de roy bien arrange,
Annis, madrian, noix confites,
Et o les choses dessus dictes,
Couvient pignolat qui refroide
Et Manus Christi qui est roide,
Et autres espices assez,"²⁴

Italian menus of the fifteenth century similarly announce spice-sweet tidbits to conclude the banquet: marzapan, sugar-coated (and sometimes gilded) fennel seeds, "confetti d'ogni sorte".²⁵ In Valencia, "Il n'y a pas de fêtes dignes de ce nom sans confit", and a confectionery order of 1420 lists candied ginger, lemon peel and gourd; quince paste; sugar-coated aniseed,

pinenuts, almonds and pistachios; and dragees.²⁶ These same delicacies appear, at intervals, throughout the Avignon papal accounts of the previous century; for Clement VI, it was not uncommon to order 500 pounds of 'confette' each month.²⁷

Recipes for almost all these sweetmeats are supplied by a Catalan text of the fifteenth century, Libre de totes maneres de confits.²⁸ This is, to my knowledge, the first recipe book entirely devoted to the art of confectionery, and its origin in Catalonia is probably not entirely accidental. Refineries were established in the capital in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the capital provided by wealthy Barcelona businessmen and the expertise brought in from sugar-producing regions, such as Sicily.²⁹ Not only was the crude sugar refined but it was also used for 'confits'. The book shows clearly that conserves could be made with either sugar or honey, although sugar was more likely to be used by the professional specialist and honey by the domestic cook. Recipes for a range of preserves which could be produced with the resources of the ordinary (but upper class) domestic kitchen are given in most of the recipe collections of the mediaeval period - green almonds and walnuts preserved in honey, candied gourd and orange peel, quince and apple pastes. These should perhaps be thought of less as sweetmeats, symbols of affluence, than as preserves, a manifestation of the 'waste-not-want-not' mentality epitomised by Aesop's ant.

Sugar itself was expensive, but confectioner's

sweetmeats were even more costly - which does not mean that they were offered sparingly. The 'espices de chambre' for the wedding feasts arranged by maistre Helye alone cost almost as much as all the spices, sugar, almonds and cereals ordered at the same time.³⁰ In a six-month period in 1342, the apothecary Jacques Melior supplied nearly a ton of various sugared spices and sweetmeats (at 4 sols per pound) to the court of Clement VI.³¹ Francesco Datini apparently thought nothing of spending 4 lire on a pound of 'pinocchiato' (a sort of pinenut nougat which, as an elaborate 'pièce montée' was placed on the table at the start of a banquet, presumably to be eaten at the end), which made it more than twice as expensive as sugar, at 36 soldi per pound.³²

Such confectionery products emphasised the role of sugar as a conspicuous symbol of 'richesse' and 'largesse', - and, in a less subtle fashion, so did the sugar 'sculptures' which Florentine confectioners elaborated, decorating tables with mythological figures and pastoral scenes.³³ The symbolic value of sugar persisted in decorative usages, where sugared spices, dragees and sugar itself ornamented (and labelled?) certain prestigious dishes such as blanc manger and jellies. As a sign of wealth and generosity, its role was complementary to the other functions - as a simple sweetener, or as a therapeutic element in a dish - but there is no doubt that its success as a prestige ingredient prompted the expansion of the sugar industry, both in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, in the second half

of the fifteenth century, which in turn encouraged an even greater use of sugar in the sixteenth century. It says something for the 'addictive' qualities of sugar that, once established in the cuisine, it did not share the fate of spices, to be eventually displaced by other, more modish, accessories.

This chapter examines a diversity of dishes, all prevalent in mediaeval cuisine, in which sugar, or another sweetening agent, was a typical ingredient. Although it was infrequently used in the basic pies, sugar became increasingly important in the 'tartes' and 'torte' which can be considered as an elaboration of the simple pies, and all pastries will thus be considered in the present context. The various groups of dishes illustrate the uses of sugar in mediaeval cuisine, and demonstrate the Mediterranean 'taste' for sweetness, which distinguished its cuisine from that of northern France.

BLANC MANGER/MENJAR BLANC

Blanc manger typified a group of sweetened purees, the 'spoon dishes' or 'vianda de cuyllera' of Catalan cuisine.³⁴ It was one in a list of luxury 'spoon dishes' enumerated by the (hypothetical) gluttonous ecclesiastic in his request for dietary advice: "I also eat," he explained, "res de cullera, he ginestada, avellanat o pinyonada, celiandrat o arroc ab cucre e ab let d'amenles."³⁵ Recipes for these characteristic Catalan dishes are given in both the Sent Sovi and Libre del Coch

and similar dishes appear to have been equally popular and renowned in Italy, but in northern France there was only blanc manger, albeit in several very slightly different variations.

Common to the earliest Catalan recipes is the use of almond milk, rice or rice flour, and sugar.³⁶ These dishes were of a solid, porridge-like consistency (the recipe instructions say that it should be as thick as "morterol" or "ffarines") and were glamorised by a sprinkling of sugar or toasted pinenuts. These same features are equally typical of the northern French recipes for Blanc manger, from the earliest ones of around 1300 to those of the later editions of Le Viandier. However, there does not seem to have been much development of the genre beyond Blanc manger in northern France, whereas in fifteenth-century Catalonia and Italy this type of sophisticated, prestigious spoon dish existed in great variety. Mestre Robert includes about 16 recipes, and Martino almost as many. The fundamental ingredients are still present, although the almond milk may sometimes be replaced by sheep or goat milk, and the almonds may be combined with other nuts or seeds (hazelnuts, pinenuts or hemp seeds).³⁷

The preference for almonds in mediaeval Mediterranean cuisine has already been noted; it derived partly from a greater availability of almonds at a cheaper price, but also from a closer contact with Arab cuisine. Blanc manger was undoubtedly inspired by an Arab dish or recipe, although an exact source cannot be identified. As its name

implies, Blanc manger was white - "as white as snow", instructs one recipe.³⁸ Similar, but of a rich gold colour through the addition of egg yolks and saffron, was Genestra (or Genestrada), and it, too, was probably of Arab inspiration. The 'Ginestra' of Martino is almost identical to the 'Malmoma' of Anonimo Veneziano, which in turn has a counterpart in the 'Mammonia' of the Latin Liber, itself apparently related to the Arab Ma'muniya.³⁹ Catalan recipes for Ginestrada/Genestada are similar, although they contain no chicken, and are possibly related to a different version of ma'muniya (Rodinson mentions three).⁴⁰ The origins of the dish apparently became lost or confused, for in the fifteenth century a recipe for 'Genestrata bianca' appears.⁴¹ The northern French 'Genesté' has no apparent affinity with 'genestra', apart from its saffron-yellow colour.⁴²

Recipes for Blanc manger show great diversity; no two recipes were identical in a total of 37 from French, Catalan, Italian and English texts.⁴³ Flandrin suggests that blanc manger, in northern French cuisine, was a light, bland, refreshing dish, perfectly suitable for convalescents, while in Italy it was a rich, spiced dish loaded with prestige.⁴⁴ This distinction, if valid, might explain the elaboration of the genre in Mediterranean regions, yet these classifications would need to have been firmly established before the fourteenth century, since in both Du Fait du Cuisine and the Vatican manuscripts of Le Viandier are details for making red,

green and yellow Blanc manger (of the most elementary kind, almond milk thickened with starch or rice flour) which implies that it was then considered an important dish.⁴⁵ Further, 'Blanc manger parti' appears in three of the proposed menus in Le Menagier, and the recipes for different types of Blanc manger, to suit either ordinary days, meat or fish days, confirm the permanence of its prestige.⁴⁶

It is curious that one particular dish was adopted and individualised throughout mediaeval western Europe, while the genre to which it belonged developed principally in the Mediterranean region. Both the ingredients and the sources of inspiration for the genre were particular to that region, which might partly explain the localisation of the genre, but another reason for the lack of development in northern France might have been that there already existed a range of dishes which fulfilled the same functions, such as those based on milk and cream ingredients which were less plentiful in Mediterranean regions.

SWEETS:FRITTERS

Although descriptions of mediaeval dinners and feasts, and menus for those, are relatively scarce, some idea of the basic structure of the meal - insofar as a mediaeval dinner was bound by a formal and recognised pattern - can be elicited. From the menus of Le Menagier and Le Viandier (fifteenth-century edition) it appears that some dishes,

such as pies, could be served in almost any course, but the final course, before the spiced wine and sweetmeats, consisted mainly of sweet dishes - 'lait lardé', 'flaonnes succrez', 'croutes au lait', 'darioles', 'crespes', 'pipefarces', 'lescheffrites sucres', and 'tartes'.⁴⁷

The plaint of the daughter of the Count of Anjou, a long list of the fine foods she once enjoyed at her father's table, passes from meat and game to fish and finally to "gauffres et oubleez, / Gouieres, tartes, flaonciaus, / Pipes farces a grans monciaus, / Pommes d'espices, dirioles, / Crespines, bingnes et ruissoles".⁴⁸

Eiximenis refers to the typical order of a lavish dinner in Catalonia, a succession of meats then "A la fi de taula: flaons e formajades, o formatge frit ab mantega o fus al foch damunt cubert de cucre e posat en pa torrat".⁴⁹ In Italy 'torte' and 'tartare' were traditional components of the final course at the end of the fifteenth century.⁵⁰

The universally-appreciated sweet ending thus consisted of similar types of dishes - baked pastries (flaons, torte), which will be considered subsequently, and a miscellany of small fried morsels which, for the sake of convenience, will be grouped together as fritters. These mediaeval 'fritters' - the 'frittelle' of the Italian cookery books - are not necessarily related to the fritters of today, but their common bond is the cooking process: frying.

Mediaeval fritters were typically small, probably bite-size morsels to be eaten in the fingers; even

'crespes' may have been quite small. Chiquart specifies that the 'pastez nurriz' are to be "bien petites et haulteletes", the 'bunyols' of the Sent Sovi are to be "com un hou" and Anonimo Veneziano decrees "rafioli pizoli", which demonstrates an early understanding of the principles of frying.⁵¹ The 'frittelle' of Martino form a reasonably coherent ensemble, but otherwise the nomenclature is confused; the "crispelli, ovvero fritelle ubaldine" of Anonimo Toscano are not comparable with the 'crespes' of the northern French texts and the Sent Sovi.⁵² Even cooks and scribes seem to have been confused, taking an each-way bet with "Crispelli de carne, overo tortelli e ravioli".⁵³ In Catalan cuisine, one type of fritter is referred to alternately as 'bunyols' and 'resoles', and in northern France, where 'pastez' were typically large and oven-baked, 'pastez norrois' were small and fried.⁵⁴

FRYING MEDIUM

Despite the many differences in nomenclature, the common denominator of this group is frying, whether deep-frying or shallow-frying (and, by a not unreasonable extension, included in this category are 'gauffres', made from a batter cooked between two well-greased irons).

The analysis of techniques of fish cookery showed clearly that frying was more favoured in Mediterranean regions than in the north of France, mainly as a result of the relative abundance and cheapness of olive oil. It is

also possible that a predilection for fried foods in general, among Mediterranean peoples, was consequent upon their familiarity with, and fondness for, olive oil which, as the frying medium, may have been preferentially chosen over other fats. Throughout mediaeval western Europe, oil was the natural frying medium for any Lenten fritter, and it is obvious which recipes are intended for Lent or for fish-days even when this is not explicit in the recipe title. In northern France, the use of oil for frying seems to have been strictly confined to Lent, but in Mediterranean regions oil may have been used even when it was not obliged. One Catalan recipe suggests oil as an alternative to pork fat for fritters which are definitely not Lenten, and recipes in Anonimo Toscano leave the choice ('lardo o oglio') in the hands of the cook.⁵⁴

Outside of Lent, fresh pork fat was the most common cooking medium in both Mediterranean regions and northern France; it is referred to as 'saindoux', 'sain de lart porc doux', 'strutto', 'grasso di strutto', 'lart dolc', etc, and was most likely rendered pork fat - lard, in the modern English sense. To some extent, fritters were thus a seasonal food, to be made in the winter months when fresh pork fat was abundant. The author of Le Menagier writes that 'Rissolles en jour de char' are 'in season' from the start of October, and Mestre Robert notes that 'broscat' are to be made in the month of November, since that is the time to eat fresh pork.⁵⁵ Even outside the fresh pork season, however, fritters were still cooked and eaten,

although the pork fat might have been slightly salty.⁵⁶

Butter made an appearance as an alternative frying medium in several recipes of Le Menagier and, in the following century, in those of Martino. Either pork fat, oil or butter could be used, almost indiscriminately, for non-Lenten fritters in the recipes of Martino, and the same options are later repeated in Mestre Robert's work. These are some of the first indications of what Flandrin has called 'l'essor de la cuisine au beurre', which was to culminate in the division of Europe into two broad culinary zones: a northern region, where butter predominated, and a region of olive oil in the Mediterranean.⁵⁷

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN ...

Customarily served at the end of the meal, fritters were typically sweet, doused with either sugar or honey. In the fourteenth century, this touch of sweetness appears to have been more particular to Mediterranean cuisine; the batter-coated, fried slices of cheese known as 'lesques de fformatge' in Catalan cuisine are to be served with sugar, according to the recipe in the Sent Sovi, those known as 'pipefarces' in northern French cuisine are served plain, according to the recipe in Le Menagier.⁵⁸ It was earlier suggested that northern French cooks may have been less familiar with the use of sugar and other sweeteners, while Mediterranean taste seemed to require a certain

prodigality with sugar (or honey), and almost all Mediterranean fritter recipes include one of these two sweeteners at some stage. By the fifteenth century, when sugar usage had become more widespread, these distinctions were blurred.

The emphasis on sweetness is not the only feature distinguishing Mediterranean fritters. Their popularity in this region is attested by the duplication of recipes among the various texts, especially in the fifteenth century, and by their diversity. Mediterranean recipes show that, especially in Italy, fritters existed in greater variety than in northern France, where the basic types were 'crespes', 'gauffres' and the fried, pastry-wrapped 'rissolles', 'bingnetz' and 'pastez norroiz'. Italian fritters were often based on fresh cheese (a relic of Roman cuisine), flavoured with fresh herbs or their juices, or with elder flowers. Some were made with a yeast-raised dough, like Catalan fritters, a practice which was apparently unknown in northern France. The basic fritter of Catalan cuisine used an egg-enriched bread dough, as did several Arab fritters such as Fata'ir and Luqam al-qadi, small pieces of leavened dough fried in sesame oil then dipped in syrup and sprinkled with sugar.⁵⁹ Similarly, the more extravagant fritters of sweet, rich fillings inside a dough, for which recipes are included in Italian texts and the Libre del Coch, had an affinity with the sanbusaj of Arab cuisine. These were triangular fried pastries, filled either with a spiced meat paste or a sweetened almond mixture.⁶⁰ (After

frying, they were doused with syrup and sugar.) There is a clear relation between the latter variant and both the 'Quinquinelli' and 'Panades de sucre fi' of Mediterranean cuisine.⁶¹

Pastry-wrapped fritters were also part of northern French cuisine, but they commonly had a meat (or fish) filling, sometimes sweetened with sugar and/or dried fruits. These are the 'Pastez norrois', the 'Rosseolles' and 'Rissolles'.⁶² Whether they have a linguistic relation to the Italian 'Rafioli' (or 'Ravioli') is not clear, although they do have a vague culinary rapport with the 'Rafioli friti' described in Anonimo Veneziano and the 'Ravioli' of Anonimo Toscano, which were hashes of boiled meat, herbs and fresh cheese, fried in pork fat.⁶² The significant difference was that these Italian ravioli were not enclosed in a pastry but fried as they were. The title 'rafioli friti' possibly indicates that these were exceptional, since the standard procedure for pastry-wrapped ravioli in Italian cuisine was cooking in a liquid, like the ravioli of today, and serving with spices and grated cheese. Boccaccio describes this custom in one of the stories of the Decameron; in the mythical land of Bengodi, the people did nothing but cook "maccheroni, e raviuoli" in chicken stock, and helped themselves to the mountain of grated Parmesan nearby.⁶⁴

Whether the 'pastez norrois' derived from or were inspired by the meat-filled sanbusaj is difficult to verify; nor can it be assumed that the Italian fried

ravioli, a type of meat or fish fritter, had their origin in the sanbusaj but became divested of their pastry covering in the course of their evolution. What is clear is that the fried pastries of northern French cuisine were significantly different from the fried pastries of Mediterranean cuisine, which were commonly filled with mixtures of nuts and sugar, or fresh cheese and herbs. Incidentally, the fillings for these small fried pastries were often similar to the fillings of the larger 'torte' in Mediterranean cuisine.

Fritters belonged to that class of dishes to which mediaeval cooks liked to apply their art, and in their evolution became progressively more sophisticated and elaborate. However, while the Mediterranean (Italian) fritter was characterised by the use of fresh cheese and almond milk, northern France developed a distinctive style of fritter based on eggs and milk or cream ('Lait lardé' and 'Cresme frite').⁶⁵ This is a natural development in a region of dairy products; Gilles le Bouvier, writing at the start of the fifteenth century, described the Loire as dairy country, producing milk and cheese; Normandy as a "païs ... de bestial blanc et rouge".⁶⁶

While it might be argued that the Italian 'frittelle' and northern French 'crespes' are too dissimilar to be considered in the same category, they demonstrate clearly the differences between the sweet morsels which came out of Mediterranean and northern French frying pans. In fritters can be seen the confluence of two streams of Mediterranean preference - preference for frying,

preference for sweetness - which were not shared, to the same extent, in northern France.

The form of southern French fritters is open to conjecture. Pansier records the term 'aurelheta' ("cibus qui ex pasta in oleo frigitur beignet vulgo oreillette)" in a fifteenth-century Provençal/Latin glossary, but no mention of 'frittelle' can be found.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, it would not be unreasonable to imagine, in southern France, similar fritters to those in Italy and Catalonia.

PASTRIES: PASTES, TOURTES, TARTES AND FLAONS

Like fritters, the 'torta' and the 'flaon' were customarily offered at the end of a dinner, and were usually sweet. Mediaeval pastrycooks did not, however, limit their efforts to 'desserts', and from their kitchens, came a diversity of baked goods, from pies, plain and fancy, to tartes, torte and flaons. For the sake of convenience, all such pastries will be considered in this chapter, although not all were sweet, nor traditionally served at the end of the meal.

The pastrycook and cook belonged to separate, and specialised, professions. In mediaeval Provence, 'fourniers' (who operated ovens), 'pistres' (who made bread for retail sale) and 'pâtissiers' were clearly distinguished from one another.⁶⁸ In any large, systematised kitchen - such as at the court of Savoy - cooks and pastrycooks worked side by side, but independently; the fillings for pies and tarts were

prepared by the cooks, but the pastrycook did the rest. (Chiquart explains that, once the filling is ready, the cook should "appeles votre patissier que on face les crostes et qu'il les mecte dedans le four").⁶⁹

To bake inside a pastry crust was an alternative to roasting and baking for many meats and fish; Eiximenis logically groups the three together under the heading of "pietances".⁷⁰ In northern France were baked 'pastez', which found a counterpart in the Italian 'pastero', 'pastello' and 'coppo', and in the Catalan 'panada'. They generally contained one main ingredient, seasoned and spiced but not sweetened, totally enclosed in pastry, and in this study all such pastries will be termed pies. It must be remembered, however, that not all 'pastez' are pies; 'pastez norrois', for example, are classed with fritters.

If 'pastez' were a fairly coherent group, so, too, were 'torte' and 'tartes', which were clearly distinguished from pies; mediaeval cooks and their patrons apparently appreciated the distinctions. In a fifteenth-century northern French farce, the heroes are two vagabonds who, having tricked the pâtissier's wife into giving them a 'pâté d'anguille' which had been set aside for the master, then turn their wits to procuring his 'tarte'.⁷¹ In mediaeval English cuisine, the basis of the discrimination was the content of the pastry cases; while a 'pasty' usually had one principal ingredient as its filling, a 'pye' contained a mixture of ingredients.⁷² Nevertheless, the type of filling was

not the only clue to the identification of a mediaeval pie; there may well have differences in the type of pastry, too.

PASTRY: SHORT OR STRONG

For a pie, the recipe will often say, in rough translation, "Make a crust, place the filling on the crust, cover it and bake". This implies that pies were free-standing and of diverse forms, depending on what was inside. The banner of the pastrycooks of Tonnerre displays, at the centre, a round pie (from the surface of which emerge the heads of two birds) and around the edge eight pies of irregular shape.⁷³ The pastry crust was like a pot in which the meat cooked; Martino advises his readers: "If you don't know how to make a pastry crust, (for pastelli), cook it in a pan, like a torta."⁷⁴ The pastry, therefore, must have been quite strong and rigid. In the printed edition of Le Viandier, the recipe for Pastés de gigotz de mouton insists that the "la croste soit forte et espesse, affin que la substance n'en ysse".⁷⁵ If, as was often the case, the pie filling was substantial and not pre-cooked, the pie would need to be baked for several hours, by which time the pastry would be tough, hard and inedible, its role purely structural; in function it was not unlike the terra cotta claypots rediscovered by today's kitchens. (English treatises on carving and serving at table advise removing the top of the pastry, then serving the contents.⁷⁶)

Martino's torte, on the other hand, were generally cooked in a pan, directly over hot coals; more coals in the concave lid of the container cooked the torte from above. Because of the type of fillings habitually used - either part-cooked, or not requiring much cooking - torte did not need a long baking; because the pastry had the support of a pan, it did not need to be so firm and strong. Thus the pastry was to be "sottile".⁷⁷

Rarely does one find a recipe for pastry in any mediaeval culinary text - indeed, the more usual instruction is "Ask the pastrycook ..." - and it is difficult to know how the pastry doughs for the various 'torte', 'tartes' and 'pastez' were made. For Coppo di polli the pastry is made with flour and hot water: "falla molta dura", because it is to be moulded into the shape of a 'coppo', rather like a shallow bowl, or perhaps a beret ("fa la pasta per lo coppo, a modo di berretta").⁷⁸ In the fifteenth century, however, developments in pastry-making (particularly in Italy, where pasta was already a tradition) allowed torte to use a more delicate, edible pastry, perhaps a type of shortcrust. In the fifteenth-century printed Viandier a pastry very close to shortcrust is prescribed for 'Talemose' and 'Tartres couvertes' ("soit destrampe la crouste d'oeufz et de beurre") and Catalan and Italian recipes describe how to make a pastry of oil, flour and water, kneaded together.⁷⁹

Pies, then, seem to have been relatively crude and unrefined, the most basic form being simply a piece of

meat baked in a tough and not necessarily edible crust. Torte and tartes, on the other hand, were more elaborate and sophisticated, a sign of the culinary progress of the fifteenth century.

PIES

Pies epitomised the cuisine of the town, a mediaeval fast-food. Neither extravagant nor status-defining, pies were bourgeois fare, to be bought in the street by anyone with a few sous to spend. In the towns they could be purchased ready-made; "pas de ville sans pâtissier" wrote Stouff of mediaeval Provence.⁸⁰ In Paris in 1440, the corporation of pâtissiers was granted the exclusive rights to make pies of meat, fish and cheese, and the streets resounded to the cries of street hawkers, "Chaus pastez", which Eustache Deschamps forever identified with Paris.⁸¹ Pies were the accessories to seduction in the fabliaux; the shoemaker's wife, taking advantage of her husband's absence at market, invites her priest-lover to share her 'tartes et pastez' and the merchants wife, in similar circumstances, offers her priest-lover "char cuite en pot, pastez au poivre".⁸² In mediaeval Provence pies appeared at least weekly, possibly daily, on the pope's table, and the Frères mineurs of Avignon and the archbishop of Arles (whose household had its own oven) enjoyed pies on special feast days or when distinguished guests were present.⁸³ In the suggested menus of Le Menagier, pies are rarely omitted; most menus include at

least one, some as many as three, with no apparent rule governing their place in the dinner, although they were not usually served in successive courses.⁸⁴

Both Le Menagier and Le Viandier (fifteenth-century printed edition) have a large number of recipes for pies, but the recipes follow a common pattern and are given in abbreviated style. Almost any meat or fish went into these pies, from capons and partridges to the 'ordinary' meats of beef, pork and mutton, more often than not whole (chickens and small birds, fish), or in largish pieces (beef loin, 'bouly' larde, conger eel). According to the author of Le Menagier, pies are to be made on a large scale: "Nota. Patez douivent estre au large et la viande a large dedens".⁸⁵ Usually these pies included spices (particularly ginger, a relatively cheap spice) and fat in some form (such as salted lard, chopped or in slices); sometimes a spicy, bread-thickened sauce would be poured in through a hole in the lid at the end of baking. It is a common fallacy that modern French pastry-less pâtés are direct descendants of the mediaeval pastez. In name, certainly, but in form and content it is more likely that they developed via the later tourtes which had, in turn, borrowed some of the refinements of Italian torte.

Chicken was accorded a particular treatment which was almost universal in mediaeval cuisine. It was either brushed with a mixture of beaten eggs (or yolks), verjuice and spices, or this sauce was poured into the pie near the end of baking. In Le Viandier, it is called Sauce Robert; in the Sent Sovi, Alidem, a name which Grewe

believes to be of Arab origin.⁸⁶ In a good example of recipe evolution, by the second half of the fifteenth century the procedure was being applied to veal, small birds, almost anything cooked in a pie crust, whole Mestre Robert suggested substituting orange juice or good wine vinegar for the verjuice.

Yet underneath this apparent uniformity were variations in content. The chicken - raw in northern French recipes - might be parboiled or pre-fried in Mediterranean recipes.⁸⁷ Another indication of culinary refinement in Italian cuisine is the relative complexity of pie fillings, which demanded either more ingredients, or more labour, or both. Fresh cheese, eggs or egg yolks, and fresh herbs are blended with the meat in the recipes of Anonimo Toscano, pinenuts and raisins in Anonimo Veneziano.⁸⁸ Further, the meat, or primary ingredient, was sliced or diced or chopped into small pieces, which would allow quicker and more even cooking.⁸⁹ These mixtures were closer to those of torte than were the unadorned contents of northern French pies, and one might assume that such Italian pies were ranked somewhat higher in the gastronomic hierarchy.

This relative complexity is perhaps the only feature distinguishing Italian from northern French pies. The duplication of recipes in Italian texts attests to the prevalence of such pies, although whether they were equally typical of the Mediterranean region as a whole is unverifiable. There are few Catalan recipes, in either the Sent Sovi or the Libre del Coch, and it is possible that

pies were almost entirely the product of specialised pâtissiers. For southern France, all that has been discovered is that the Frères mineurs at Avignon enjoyed pies of chicken, pigeon and eel. ⁹⁰

Pies belonged to a group of popular and widely consumed foods in which distinctions - social and regional - were not of great relevance; they could almost be considered part of 'everyday' cuisine. In Italian cuisine, social distinctions were apparently more important than in northern France, and were demonstrated by the complexity of the pie contents. Anonimo Toscano describes how to make pies of poultry and pies "da ciascun giorno", of beef, pork, legumes and other vegetables, ingredients of less prestige than poultry. ⁹¹ Similarly, Martino's recipe for "crostata", halfway between a pie and a 'torta', can be either sweetened or "bruscha secundo il comuno gusto", thus affirming the elevated social status of sugar. ⁹² In the realm of pastries, regional differences are more in evidence in the higher-status torte, tartes and flaons.

TORTE, TARTES AND FLAONS

It was not only their more sophisticated pastry which distinguished torte/tartes/flaons from pies. According to Lacroix, the names 'tourte' and 'tarte' in northern France referred to pastries containing herbs, fruits or preserves, and 'pâté' to those containing any kind of meat, game or fish. ⁹³ The difference, however, was more subtle; fillings for torte and tartes were more

elaborate, in that they called for a greater number of ingredients and were more demanding of time, labour and expertise. Significantly, they often contained, or were emblazoned with, sugar. These characteristics are all typical of a high-prestige dish, although at the same time they are illustrative of the culinary progress of the fifteenth century. Recipes for torte and tartes are far more prevalent in fifteenth-century texts than in the very early ones.

While pie fillings were predominantly 'meaty', torte, tartes and flaons often had custard-like fillings based on milk or fresh cheese and eggs; when meat or fish was included it was usually reduced to a sort of hash or paste. Thus between two layers of tender pastry - or on just one crust - was a relatively smooth-textured, firm-yet-soft filling. It is easy to imagine such dishes today, in the guise of a provincial French 'tourtière' or a Genoese 'torta Pasqualina'. Whether or not the torta, tourte and tarte have a common etymological origin, it is clear that in a culinary sense they have followed different evolutionary paths.⁹⁴ Torte predominated in Italy, tartes in northern France.⁹⁵ Northern French tartes differed from Italian torte in two fundamental respects: typically they had only a bottom pastry crust, and they were destined to be cooked in the oven (several recipes specify oven-baking). On the other hand, Italian torte generally had both top and bottom crusts, and very frequently were cooked in a kind of camp oven (testo, tiella, tegamo), an earthenware or metal vessel which

could be placed directly over hot coals, or surrounded by coals. A concave cover, or lid, could hold more coals to cook the torta from above. This was obviously a very common practice - the habitual phrase of Martino is "dandoli il focho ... di sotto et de sopra", while another recipe specifies "pone in tiolla calefacta, aliam tiellam desuper apponendo" - although ovens, private and communal, were also used.⁹⁶ It is clear that this domestic arrangement was considered an acceptable alternative to the oven in Italy. From the northern French texts, it appears that oven-baking was the prevalent method of cooking.

OVENS AND FUEL

This alternative baking practice seems to have been characteristically Mediterranean. The early Romans cooked cakes such as the placenta in or under a 'testum' which was surrounded by hot coals. The essential feature of this utensil was that it was earthenware; it appears to have been variable in form, either a deep pan or a shallow dish, which might double as a lid.

Although the name became corrupted in later centuries, the utensil remained in use. The 'testo', a wide, shallow earthenware plate has been identified in archeological excavations in Italy and is mentioned in early Italian recipes: "miti dentro do croste in el testo"; "meti in fra doe croste in uno testo caldo"; "micti quisti bactuto tra dui croste nil testo ... et da

fuoco ad questa vivanda di sopra et di socto
brasia".⁹⁷ From these references, the 'testo' was
clearly the dish in which the torta was cooked, but
perhaps it also carried the implication of the 'camp-oven'
baking practice.

In other texts are found the forms 'tiolla',
'tiella', 'tegamo' ("mette insieme in la tegamo").⁹⁸
Other regional variants (teglia, tegola, antian) are
documented from at least the fourteenth century.⁹⁹

There is some confusion as to whether these were more like
a lid or more like a pot; both interpretations seem valid.
The utensil could also be made of metal; "se tu la fa in
testo de ramo, la vole poche foco; in testo de terra ge
volo assai foco".¹⁰⁰ The 'testo' depicted in the
illustration accompanying 'panis cocto sub testo' in a
Tacuinum Sanitatis manuscript is apparently of metal, and
here has the form of a shallow, concave plate on which are
placed hot coals, and which covers a large cauldron-
shaped vessel sitting directly over the fire.¹⁰¹

Of similar etymology as the Italian 'tegamo' is the
Provençal 'tian' and Catalan 'tia'. 'Tian', and other
variations, was apparently localised in the southern
Mediterranean regions of France, and was current in the
fourteenth century, although an isolated reference to a
tian has been noted in an inventory from Marseilles at
the end of the thirteenth century.¹⁰² The tian is
presumed to be a "poêlon couvert pour cuire à l'étouffée",
the counterpart to the Sicilian 'tigamu', typically of
copper or bronze and sometimes equipped with a lid.¹⁰³

Certainly, the 'tegame' could have been used for this purpose, just as it was also used to cook food in the oven ("mandali in forno in uno tegame ... e quando li calamari serano cotti cazali de la olla o tiella"), but it could also have been used as a kind of camp-oven to cook torte.¹⁰⁴ A second study of mediaeval household inventories in mediaeval Provence showed that the tian was present, although nowhere near as prevalent as a frying pan; unfortunately, there is no indication as to whether it was made of metal or earthenware, nor of its possible purpose; the fact that it was relatively rare suggests that it was either a novelty or a luxury reserved for the rich, or both. Assuming the tian, whether copper or earthenware, to be similar to the tegame/testo, one might conclude that in Provence, as in Italy, one of its principal uses was to cook torte, as an alternative to baking in an oven. In Catalonia, too, pies (panades) and torte were cooked in this way.¹⁰⁵

Northern French recipes usually instruct that the pie or tart be "mis au four" or "portez au four"; in only two recipes - both decidedly Italian in style - is the dish cooked between two sources of heat.¹⁰⁶ 'Tourteurs' and 'tartoires', although rare, were listed in fourteenth-century inventories in Burgundy; they were made of metal, and shaped like a frying pan, but there is no indication that they were equivalent to the testo.¹⁰⁷ Another utensil, equally rare, may have been used as an oven-substitute; the "trappe d'arain a fere tartres".¹⁰⁸ Several English recipes refer to a 'trap'

used for cooking tarts, and the Latin Tractatus suggests that tarts can be cooked either in an oven or "sub trapa".¹⁰⁹ In other recipes, the same 'trapa' is used to braise, or 'cuire à l'étouffée'.¹¹⁰ This utensil clearly belongs to the same family as the testo/tiella/tegame.

Cooking between two direct sources of heat seems a logical result of the need to economise on fuel. Braudel has implied that wood was less than plentiful in many Mediterranean regions, and this is confirmed, for Genoa, by the account of a fourteenth-century traveller, Gilles le Bouvier.¹¹¹ Similarly, Stouff notes that bakers in mediaeval Provence were obliged to ensure sufficient supplies of wood for the duration of their leases.¹¹² Thus a practice which originated much earlier, possibly before Roman times and possibly as a response to fuel scarcities, persisted, for the same reason, in the mediaeval period. However, this domestic oven-substitute might also have been considered a means of avoiding the risks associated the communal oven, where one's pie might be tampered with or (accidentally) swapped, as Sacchetti described in his story of the gourmand Noddo d'Andrea.¹¹³ Alternatively, cooking the torte at home may have been an upper-class affectation, as in thirteenth-century Paris where "toute maison bien montée avait son four", albeit one reserved exclusively for pastries, and probably a small-scale version of the standard bread oven.¹¹⁴

To conclude, one cannot assume that the camp-oven

exemplified by the testo/tegame was characteristically Mediterranean, but it was definitely more typical of this region than of northern France. Whether the different styles of torte and tartes evolved in response to the different cooking practices is problematical; there is no obvious reason why camp-oven baking should favour a double-crust torta and oven baking a single-crust tarte. There were, however, other features by which a torta differed from a tarte, chief amongst which was the composition of the filling.

FILLINGS

Tartes, in northern French cuisine, were customarily open-faced, the filling poured or spooned into a prepared and part-cooked pastry case. There were two basic types of filling: one for Lent, of ground fish, eel or fish roe plus wine, almonds or almond milk, and saffron; and one for the other days in the year, based on cheese (fresh or old, mashed or sliced or grated) plus eggs and milk or cream. In one recipe for Tarte jacobine (also known as Flaons cochus), chunks of eel were stood upright in the pastry case and the custard mixture poured over.¹¹⁵

Between tartes and flaons the dividing line - if ever there was one - is not clear. For the author of Le Menagier, flaons are always 'sucré', tartes are not; but a century later, when the use of sugar was far more widespread, the printed edition of Le Viandier instructs that tartes are to be liberally doused with sugar ("grande

quantite de sucre", "sucre a grant foison").¹¹⁶

Likewise, Martino's torte of the same century were customarily topped with sugar and rosewater, although sugar was rarely used in the earlier recipes.

Italian torte differed from tartes in that they generally had top and bottom crusts (sometimes the top crust was replaced by a layer of 'lasagne'). Cheese was also an important basic ingredient of the filling, but more often fresh cheese (or curds) than hard, and as much as a medium for other flavours as a filling per se. Under the title *Casciata*, Anonimo Toscano gives a fundamental recipe (fresh cheese, eggs, hashed lard, pepper) which can be made with the traditional top-and-bottom crusts, or simply with a single base crust.¹¹⁷ To the basic mixture could be added a puree of green herbs, or of onions, or of gourd ('zucche') which variants appear as separate recipes in other Italian texts.¹¹⁸ The basic recipe itself appears in more sophisticated guise in Martino, as *Torta bianca*, and again serves as the base for other variants.¹¹⁹

Such interrelationships demonstrate the coherence of Italian torte, as a family of recipes. For example, most of the torte recipes in Anonimo Toscano have echoes in the *Latin Liber*; most of the recipes of Anonimo Veneziano can be found, with slight modifications, in at least one of the other Italian recipe collections; a good proportion of the recipes in Martino have similarities with recipes in earlier manuscripts. A similar pattern of duplication is evident in the northern French texts; the recipe for

"flaons et tartes" appears in two editions of Le Viandier and Le Menagier, and Le Menagier's recipe for Tarte Jacobine is very close to both recipes of the printed Viandier. Between the two series of recipes, however, there is very little common ground, and they apparently form two discrete sets, which serves only to emphasise the geographic localisation - the torte being typically double-crust pastries cooked in a kind of camp-oven, predominating in Italy; and tartes, open-faced and oven baked, in northern France.

It was earlier suggested that torte and tartes carried a higher prestige than pies, although these signs of prestige were also part of the general culinary evolutionary process towards increasing sophistication of the fifteenth century. Platina hints at this, rather enigmatically, when he says: "For our sophisticated gullets want torta created from birds and whatever fowl you will, not from pot-herbs. ... Therefore, whether these be Pythagorean or French, henceforth we will call them torta."¹²⁰ Torte and tartes were more visually exciting, often coloured, often recklessly extravagant with sugar, and usually far more complex than pies. (Tarte Jacobine was constructed with successive layers of cheese, eel and 'ecrevisses'.)¹²¹ Additional clues to their prestige are to be seen in the insistence on heavy spicing ("ponderosa de specie") and in their displays of craftsmanship, as in a torte with sectors of different colours.¹²²

The most elaborate showpiece was the extravaganza

variously known as torta parmesana, tourte parmerienne, torte parmeysine, tourte pisaine or tourte lombarde.¹²³ This was a dish of international repute, and almost every mediaeval culinary text either mentions it or includes a recipe. The recipes appear to be the product of individual artistic endeavours, but the feature common to all is an unparalleled complexity (some of the recipes are almost too complicated to follow). As a centrepiece to be seen and admired, it was often constructed on a grand scale (Chiquart indicates that it is a job for three cooks) and filled with a diversity of ingredients, from fried quarters of chicken to different varieties and colours of ravioli.¹²⁴ Unlike many purely ornamental entremets, however, this was also a dish to be eaten; Chiquart suggests it in a supper menu, and the author of Le Menagier chose to include the 'tourte pisaine' in the roast course of a dinner.

In Catalan cuisine, torte and tartes may have been the province of the specialised pastrycook, as were possibly pies; the Sent Sovi mentions "fflaho" but does not offer a recipe, while the Libre del Coch includes only two. In the use of fresh cheese, of sugar and rosewater, and of the camp-oven style of baking, the recipes of Mestre Robert are obviously closer to the Mediterranean model than to the northern French one. Given the existence of tians in southern France, one might further assume that similar torte were prepared here, too (the word 'torta' is included in a Provençal-Latin dictionary, written in the second half of the fifteenth

century).¹²⁵

CONCLUSION

While pies remained relatively undifferentiated throughout Europe, their refinements - in the form of torte and tartes - had particular regional associations. In their separate evolutions, torte and tartes depended more on local resources than on imported ingredients or recipes, meat-day torte typically using fresh cheese, tartes often made with cream. In fritters, too, a similar differentiation can be seen, but in addition the Mediterranean fondness for fried foods probably influenced the development of a greater diversity of fritters in this region.

Some of the more elaborate Mediterranean fritters, however, seem to have taken their inspiration from Arab models. This cultural influence, which has been noted previously (in sauces and brouets, for example) is one of the primary causes of difference between Mediterranean and northern French cuisines. It is present again in the group of dishes typified by Blanc manger, a group which was far more diversified in Mediterranean than in northern French cuisine.

The Arab culture was also responsible for the introduction to western European countries of sugar, an ingredient which seems to have been accepted earlier, and with greater enthusiasm, in Mediterranean regions. Sugar may well have been cheaper here than in northern France,

but the Mediterranean regions had long had a tradition of sweetening with honey, a custom which does not seem to have been common in northern France.

Thus, in the domain of sweet (or mostly sweet) dishes, the differences which existed between Mediterranean and northern French cuisines were again more prevalent in the higher-prestige dishes, and again attributable to differences in both natural resources and cultural development. The part of natural resources - for example, the widespread availability of honey and oil in the Mediterranean - is not insignificant, even for prestige dishes but, as will be seen in the next chapter, it is far more determinative in the domain of everyday foods.