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Bruno Lauriou. *Une histoire culinaire du Moyen Age* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), pp. 476 €65.00 ISBN 2 7453 1085 2.

Pepper, ginger and saffron—these three ingredients are frequently found in medieval recipes. But then, what about these recipes: was there a set of them that was characteristic of the entire Middle Ages? What are the sources that tell us about them? These are the kinds of question to which Bruno Lauriou tries to provide answers in his *Histoire culinaire*. As he explains in his “Postface,” this book is composed out of articles published earlier (p. 391), but that doesn’t diminish the readability of the book, which is handily structured into three overall themes. Part I treats of the available source material, part II of the various types of food in use in the Middle Ages, while part III treats of varieties in, and the evolution of, tastes.

Part I opens with an introduction, which addresses above all the current state of knowledge with regard to the source material. There is a respectable number of extant culinary texts: only from Western Europe, there are about 150 manuscripts from the period 1300-1500, single sources of which many are still inedited. There is thus much work left to be done. Admittedly, these manuscripts don’t furnish direct evidence of “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist in der Küche.” But fortunately, historians don’t have to rely exclusively on recipe books. There are other sources (p. 12), including bills, literary texts, menus, lexicographic works, conversational exercises, satirical writings, proverbs and archeological findings. Incidentally, taken by themselves, the culinary manuscripts provide insufficient testimony of the heterogeneity of medieval cuisine. Lauriou concludes part I with the observation that culinary history is still a young discipline with much work still to be done, notably in the domains of comparative and multidisciplinary research. His detailed bibliography (pp. 391ff) shows, however, just how much has already been achieved in this discipline.

Of the four chapters of part I, the first testifies to the re-emergence, in the Western Europe of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, of a body of culinary literature, of which the earliest were authored by professional cooks. Chapter 2 describes the recipe book of Johannes of Bockenheim, the cook of Pope Martin V, an edition of whose *Registrum Coquine* is appended, together with a glossary translating the most important terms. It is worth mentioning here the role of the Church calendar, as Johannes distinguished not only between recipes for “fat days” and fast days, but also had a separate register for fish. In other works, too, do we find particular sections offering fastday recipes. Lauriou also discusses the influence of Apicius on medieval cuisine and what in some European languages is called “kitchen Latin” (dog Latin).

Part II (pp. 155ff) takes us *in medias res*: its five chapters discuss various types of food and of preparation, treating of such different things as the popularity of pepper or the making of stuffings. We hear of the prominent role of cinnamon, ginger, saffron (also used as a dye), sugar and *graine de paradis*, the taste of which seems to resemble cardamom, and further of clove and nutmeg, many of which were first introduced as a consequence of the Crusades (*ca.* 1100-*ca.* 1300). However, some initially exotic and precious spices could over time acquire a ‘vulgar’ reputation, as happened with pepper, which became marginalized in aristocratic diets. Others were first introduced, or rather prescribed, because of their reputed medical qualities. Others again were employed in the embalm-

ing of corpses, and Laurioux suspects that the proverbial odor of sanctity (*odor sanctitatis*) must have been that of spices. The author further embroiders his tale with a chapter-long discussion of spiced wines. His attention is furthermore attracted by the varieties of pasty foods—after all, potatoes were as yet unknown—and by the uses of wine and beer in England and on the Continent, not only for ordinary drinking, but also in recipes, as was the case in the addition of beer to the dough of apple beignets (p. 247)—a recipe, incidentally, that is still being used on New Year’s eve by the author of this review. The final chapter of part II deals with *farçissage* and provides a typology of the fillings and of the cavities, as it were, to which they were applied. Most famous are of course the tales of banquet dinners where entire orchestras were made to step out of giant pastries.

Part III, entitled “variations in taste,” deals with the range and evolution of tastes in the Middle Ages. One of the questions that is thrown up here has to do with the stipulated strong Arabic or Saracen influence, but Laurioux concludes that there was much less of it than has been assumed. The “Saracen soup,” for example, most certainly bears a misleading name, for it contains wine and bacon, ingredients that are anathema for a Muslim (pp. 308-9). However, the observed variety of regional cuisines renders it difficult to speak in general terms about the ‘medieval cuisine’ *tout court*. A prominent example of variety (to this day, of course) is displayed on regional cheese platters, which are discussed in the last chapter of this book.

Maybe because of the character of his book as a collection of earlier articles, Laurioux did not deem it necessary to draw the various strands into a knot in a detailed conclusion. This is a pity, because the miserly two pages of his “Postface” with its commonplaces don’t do justice to the detailed contents of his book. May Laurioux really boast that “une société entière ... se révèle” in his fourteen chapters, considering that culinary history as practised by him must essentially remain a history of elites? This is not to say that Laurioux should have insisted, page after page, that the greatest part of the population was glad if they had anything to eat, but this proviso should have been made somewhere.

Overall, his chapters add up to a nice, very readable and well documented whole, which offers a pleasant combination of learned analysis and anecdotal evidence. The attached tables and maps profitably visualize a variety of aspects, although one misses illustrations. The bibliography of primary and secondary sources, of which the latter contains more than 500 titles, is awe-inspiring, even though the manner of referencing the literature in the footnotes by author name plus number is cumbersome, as it forces the reader constantly to jump to the general bibliography. Somewhat disappointing, too, is Laurioux’ neglect to translate unusual terms and phrases, and his limitation to an *index ciborum*, at the expense of a more user-friendly general index.

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