



**Review Essay: Melitta Weiss Adamson, ed. *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe: a Book of Essays***

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More generally, one must question such a strict homology between genre and worldview. Ramey suggests a historical evolution of social attitudes was occurring, but the genres often overlapped temporally. Furthermore, many disagreements could be found among various epics or romances in their representations of the Saracen. Ramey also never really provides a definition or theory of genre, and indeed, in some chapters she conflates what are traditionally seen as different genres. Without an analysis of the formal or social motivations which might have determined such genre-specific viewpoints, the genre-based approach seems too rigid and arbitrary. Researchers in the field will find the book interesting at times, particularly in the readings of individual texts, but too schematic and reductive to be fully convincing.

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Melitta Weiss Adamson, ed. *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe: a Book of Essays*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 304 pp. ISBN 0415929946.

This is a very welcome publication. Despite medieval food being something of a growth industry recently, its regional dimension has not received much attention. Books and articles either concentrate on a single country or do little to discourage the inference that western Europe shared a single cuisine. Beyond western Europe, publication has been sparse (the most important exception being the recent publication of Maria Debínska's *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland* in English). There remain some gaps in the Europe presented by this collection: nothing on Scandinavia, and a big gap between Italy and Constantinople. Nevertheless, to have brought so many regions together in a single volume is an achievement for which we owe Dr. Adamson and her contributors considerable gratitude.

Perhaps inevitably, the chronological focus of the chapters varies: most are "Medieval," but Italy is "Medieval and Renaissance." The chapter on the Low Countries is a translated article by Johanna Maria van Winter, originally published in German. Ostensibly covering only the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when cookbooks appear, it in fact begins with household accounts of the fourteenth century onwards. From these sources it is possible to track changes between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, as for instance an increase in butter consumption and a wider availability of imported spices. Nonetheless, the bulk of the middle

ages is omitted. This chronological dislocation means that a reader wishing to compare and contrast the various regions will often be at a disadvantage.

The range of this collection extends beyond the middle ages, at both ends: it begins with a chapter on the classical tradition, often seen as the foundation of the cuisines of the middle ages (whether it really was is a question not attracting much attention from the contributors). It is rather surprising, however, that Dr. Adamson, an expert on medieval Germany, has written the chapter herself, given the number of scholars active in Greek and Roman food history. Again, it is a surprise that the chapter does not deal with the regional variations that are the focus of the collection, although it does survey Byzantine diet which, as Adamson points out, continued the classical tradition when it began to die out elsewhere in the former Empire. Despite these caveats, her chapter will provide useful background for readers who are not themselves food historians.

As an early medievalist, I was gratified that the chapter on Britain does not neglect the early middle ages. This is no more than one would expect from Constance Heiatt, an Anglo-Saxonist as well as an expert on Middle English cookery texts. With respect to these latter, she emphasizes the similarities with Arabic and Italian cuisines, rather than French influences. She also identifies what may be specifically British features, such as flowers and fantastic “subtleties.” My only reservation would be that “British” and “English” seem to be taken as synonymous. It is true that medieval sources from Scotland and Wales are very scarce, but this need not mean that their diet and cookery were the same as those of England.

The chapter on northern France is by Terence Scully, who concentrates on the later period, as usual because that is when the surviving texts originated. However, he is not under the illusion that culinary texts and cookery are coterminous. He points out that the texts relate only to elite cookery, finer points and unusual recipes; the basics are taken as read. He also draws attention to the important role of oral transmission in medieval French cookery, an observation that must apply with similar force to other regions. Although there is a wide range of recipes in Scully’s texts, he shows that they are very standardized, with the same recipes reappearing in most collections, no doubt a feature of their belonging to the kitchens of a highly sophisticated, and competitive, aristocracy. He also pursues the regional theme of the book by comparing northern French cuisine with Italian.

From southern France, by contrast, only a single medieval cookbook survives, but Carole Lambert, who has edited it, exploits it thoroughly, comparing it with sources from other regions in order to isolate its distinctive features. There are similarities with Italian and Catalan cuisine, largely due to Arab influence. Numerous contrasts can be drawn between the

north and south of France, perhaps most obviously in the use of Mediterranean ingredients, but less predictably in the extensive use of the oven in southern cookery.

Arab influence again accounts for much of the difference between north and south in Italy. For the north, Simon Varey's chapter is based on close examination of Platina's *De honesta uoluptate*. This is a very different work from the recipe collections of the north, as much scholarship as cookery. Platina clearly knew his Apicius well, and was a man of the renaissance rather than the middle ages. Beyond Platina's text, Varey is able to demonstrate regional variations within mainland Italy, each court having its own favourite dishes, and competing in magnificence with its neighbours. This is a significant contrast with France, let alone England, where the number of courts was much more restricted.

No medieval cookbook survives from Sicily, but Habeeb Salloum is able to identify many features of Sicilian cuisine which can only be due to Arabic influence, looking at historical sources, later cookery, and the Sicilian language. The influence of Sicily's Norman conquerors, by contrast, was negligible.

Spain, the other main area of Arab influence in Europe, is also fortunate in having a fourteenth-century poem listing the culinary specialities of various parts of the country. With this starting point, Rafael Chabrán examines the geographical, ethnic and religious diversity of medieval Spanish cuisines. Not only Arabs but Sephardic Jews made an important contribution. Of all Spain's cuisines, Catalonia's is the best documented, and also the most cosmopolitan, due to its links with the kingdom of Naples and its extensive trading activities.

In Adamson's own chapter, on German-speaking lands, she does food history a service by pointing out that the "barbaric" diet of the early Germans is largely a product of the prejudices of Tacitus and Caesar, drawing a contrast with "civilized" Roman cuisine. In medieval sources we meet with similar contrasts between aristocracy and peasantry. Peasants, of course, feature only as the butt of ridicule, but that need not mean that information about their diet is inaccurate. Adamson assembles a much more rounded picture of medieval German cuisines than would be obtained from cookbooks alone. She suggests a shift in emphasis in the tenth and eleventh centuries from animal foods to cereals.

No concluding chapter sums up the contrasts, or connections, between the regions covered here, but some points emerge from a reading of the book. In the first place, the Mediterranean area seems to have been much more receptive to wider influences than northern Europe. This may have been partly due to the attitudes of peoples used to thinking of themselves as being at the centre of the civilised world. Climate must also have played a part; it is much easier to adopt exotic fruits or spices if one can

grow them at home. And if one cannot, extensive trade links make it easier to obtain them. The spice trade certainly reached northern Europe, but supplies must have been unreliable and for most people prohibitively expensive, until the “voyages of discovery” brought the trade under western European control. Secondly, it is clear that the picture of fashions, including culinary ones, moving in a fairly straightforward manner from Italy to France and from France to England is hopelessly over-simplified. Some seem to have jumped straight from Italy to England, while the range of influences on the north was much wider than has usually been allowed for. However, the more exotic influences did not extend far down the social scale. By bringing these and other fascinating points before the reading public, Melitta Weiss Adamson et al. have done us a service we can best repay by pursuing further studies within the regional framework they have established.

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Gloria Allaire. *Andrea da Barberino and the Language of Chivalry*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997. xiv + 182 pp. \$59.95 ISBN 0813015286.

As the author of this study points out, starting in the twelfth century, Old French and Breton narrative traditions circulated in Italy. Stories about Charlemagne’s battles against the Saracens in Spain, and tales about the knights of Arthur’s round table flourished for approximately four hundred years. This vogue culminated with Pulci, Ariosto, Boiardo, and Tasso, who fused the various traditions together and reworked them into magnificent works of literature. While scholars have studied the many sources which inspired these authors, they have generally not emphasized the production of Andrea da Barberino. Rather, he has been merely listed among the numerous sources, and given no sense of prominence. Because of this, critics have not given him the respect that he deserves. There have been several reasons for this, most notably, an incomplete and imperfect understanding of his works, and the lack of critical editions of his works. Gloria Allaire attempts to address this general oversight through this painstakingly documented and well researched philological analysis. By returning to the manuscripts themselves, she is able to reconstruct his literary corpus more fully than has been previously accomplished. In this way, she demonstrates that Barberino was instrumental in the development of the chivalric epic as a literary genre. By bringing forth this study,