

BARBARA KETCHAM WHEATON — *Savoring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300 to 1789*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983. Pp. xxi, 341.

One aspect of social history which tends to be overlooked all too often by scholars is the history of cuisine, even though the food which people ate and the manner in which they did so tell us a good deal about any society. Barbara Ketcham Wheaton has helped to redress this neglect by providing a fascinating and enlightening summary of the evolution of French alimentary practices from the Middle Ages to the French Revolution. Her book should prove to be of interest not only to medievalists, experts in Early Modern France, students of nutrition and food sciences, but also to cooking buffs who enjoy reliving and retasting the culinary past.

Ms. Wheaton, whose background is primarily that of a French cook and food critic, has transformed herself into a historian of French cuisine with relative ease. To be sure, both scholars and gastronomes could find points to quibble about in her study if intent on doing so. The narrative is a bit repetitive due to the author's attempt to combine the thematic and chronological approach. At times too, Ms. Wheaton seems to be carried away by her enthusiasms, for example, when she makes a somewhat forced and artificial comparison between medieval illuminated manuscripts and banquets. Some historians might find the work to be slightly elementary in places; we are reminded, for instance, that the potato did not exist in medieval France. Then too, scholars would prefer having the best or most recent works on French history cited in the footnotes of those sections tying in cooking trends with the social, political or economic matrix of the times. The gastronomically oriented reader could take umbrage with some of the author's judgements on taste or cooking procedures, or her personal remarks about the attractiveness of certain recipes. Still, it must be remembered that Ms. Wheaton has set for herself the almost impossible goal of trying to write a book appealing at the same time to the professional and the amateur, the scholar and the cook. When this dual objective of the work is taken into consideration, the reader becomes more appreciative of the extent to which the author has succeeded in a very difficult task. Perhaps a key to her overall success lies in the verve, humour and sympathy with which the author writes about her topic, her felicitous style making this a most entertaining as well as informative book.

Basing her work primarily upon old cookbooks, treatises on gastronomy, memoirs and letters, Ms. Wheaton traces with skill the general evolution of French cooking after 1300. The Middle Ages were marked by the feast or banquet which was intended to demonstrate the power of the host; among the wealthy there was a mania for heavily spiced foods, while on all social levels the common cooking procedure consisted of tossing all sorts of motley ingredients — meat, fish, vegetables — into a common cauldron. After debunking the belief that French cuisine changed substantially in the sixteenth century due to Italian influences, the author shows how medieval cooking methods continued into the Renaissance. The banquet did give way to the collation, the fork was introduced, and the French showed a growing desire for sweets due to the increased sugar supply. However, *haute cuisine* did not really commence until the seventeenth century. It originated in the kitchens of the aristocracy, while regional and bourgeois cuisine spread among the lesser classes. Taste and cooking procedures were also undergoing a mutation by the mid-seventeenth century. The consumption of exotic animals (i.e., peacocks, swans, dolphins, etc.) declined, while the use of confectioneries grew. Moreover, basic rules and mixtures were adopted which standardized cooking, a tendency encouraged by the growing number of cookbooks. In the eighteenth century the court festivals of Louis XIV's period were superseded by the intimate supper party, a development inspired by the Regent himself. At the same time many of the old medieval recipes were slowly replaced by what contemporaries referred to as a "*cuisine moderne*"

(p. 197) or “*nouvelle cuisine*” (p. 213), consisting of smoother sauces, moderation in the use of seasoning, and increased stress placed upon preserving the taste of individual ingredients. By the eve of the French Revolution many of the basic concepts, ideas, techniques and recipes which were to dominate French cuisine until the mid-twentieth century were already in place. As the author explains, with the “*meilleure cuisinière de Paris*” (p. 151) preparing delicacies for those who could afford them, “gastronomy, with all its fine perceptions and foolish fads, was accepted as one of the facets of the Parisian kaleidoscope” (p. 229).

To some the most appealing part of the entire book might be the last segment in which Ms. Wheaton provides a panoply of pre-1789 recipes tried, tested and adapted by herself. Although present day gastronomes will perhaps find some of the presentations, such as “Oeufs à la Romaine,” too spicy for modern tastes, a personal testing of one of the eighteenth century recipes, “Asperges en petits pois,” has shown it to be quite good and not that distant from dishes current today. Believing, as Ms. Wheaton does, that “old cookbooks” are “portals to the past”, giving us through “our senses of smell and taste... the same sense of immediacy that being in old buildings, hearing period music, and seeing works of art can do for our bodies, our ears and our eyes,” the idea behind this concluding section is to enable “readers to savor... the past for themselves” (p. 235). After reading this book many historians might agree that this means of reliving the past can prove to be as pleasant as it is edifying.

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ELLEN G. FRIEDMAN — *Spanish Captives in North Africa in the Early Modern Age*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Pp. xxvii, 215.

In this study, Ellen G. Friedman examines one aspect of the prolonged war of privateering waged by European Christians and North African Muslims during the early-modern period. This *guerre de course*, variously described as a “miniature war” or as a series of “little wars”, has until recently lay hidden in History’s darkened recesses — more a subject for literature and legend than for historical analysis. However, its importance is now being firmly established. In *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Fernand Braudel links the activities of the corsairs, both Christian and Muslim, to the rhythms of economic life in the Mediterranean and to the pattern of urban development. In *Gunpowder and Galleys*, J.F. Guilmartin uses privateering to confirm the small-scale, entrepreneurial character of sixteenth-century galley warfare. And in *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier*, Andrew Hess argues that this conflict between maritime “frontiersmen” was instrumental in destroying the unity of the Mediterranean world and intensifying the divisions between Christian and Muslim civilizations.

Friedman refrains from making grand generalizations of this type. Her aims are more modest and her approach is essentially that of a social historian intent on recreating the experiences of a particular segment of society. Her segment consists of those Spaniards taken captive by North African corsairs during the period 1575-1769 — at least, those who appear in the records of the Spanish redemptionist orders, the Order of Our Lady of Mercy (Mercedarians) and the Order of the Holy Trinity (Trinitarians). On the basis of these and other, supplementary records, Friedman attempts to answer such questions as: who were the captives; in what circumstances were they captured; how were they treated; and how were they redeemed?