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was developed, and the wars of 1914–18 and 1939–45 contributed to popularizing the use of this butter substitute, an emulsion of various inexpensive fats in water (which of course comes free) and/or milk. Margarine thus contains 16 per cent aqueous matter. ‘Emulsion’ means the dispersion of the aqueous phase in the fatty phase in very small droplets by the action of emulsifying bodies, lecithins, which are rich in phosphorus and stimulate the brain, and of monoglycerides and diglycerides. All of these occur in groundnut, rapeseed and especially soya oil.

Almost all edible oils can be used, including animal oils such as whale oil treated to remove its flavour. Margarine guaranteed to be of all-vegetable origin, of course, contains no such animal oils. The liquid oils used solidify after a chemical treatment, hydrogenation, an improvement introduced in 1910.

In France, artificial colours are forbidden, so the appearance of butter is given to margarine by red palm oil, which is also a source of Vitamin A. Great Britain, Belgium, Scandinavia and the Eastern European countries eat a good deal of margarine, more than the French — not exactly a case of casting pearls before swine, but the French do have expensive prejudices. However, that is all a part of their gastronomic reputation.

Chapter 8

The History Of Bread and Cakes

The Bread on the Board

The Greek gods received offerings of a ritual uncooked bread made of fine flour mingled with oil and wine. This sacrificial offering, known as παύδια, thus united the three basic foodstuffs of bread, oil and wine.

Although mankind had been eating flour before the Greeks — a great deal of it, first as porridge or mush and then made into flat cakes — it was they who made a true art of baking. In the third century of our own era Athenaeus listed at least 72 different kinds of bread with an established tradition behind them. Aristophanes, Antiphanes and Plato praised the outstanding talents of a certain baker called Theanos.

The flat cakes of Middle Eastern peoples might be raised with a leaven of fermenting dough left over from the previous day; Jewish γύρμα were made in this way. The dough was light and well flavoured, but the Jews considered it impure, because it had fermented, and thus unworthy of the Lord. Unleavened cakes of bread, αρίζμα, symbolizing purity, were eaten in his honour on solemn occasions, and constituted the ritual offering. Cooked at home on the hearth, in the embers, on a griddle, or on a stone or tile covered with an earthenware bell, the thick pancake would swell to a certain extent, but assumed no definite shape, and perhaps looked all the more artistic a creation for that. This kind of bread was μαραθή.

However, from the twenty-fifth century BC onwards, judging by the evidence of tomb paintings, the Egyptians began to evolve baking techniques with results that were both creative and predictable. The dough, made from sifted flour — wheat flour, at least for the rich — was kneaded in large earthenware tubs. Its consistency was liquid enough for it to be poured into moulds pre-heated by being stacked in
a kind of oven. The stack of moulds, getting larger towards the top, suggested the shape of an inverted pyramid. This Greek word, meaning ‘cooked dough’, was applied by analogy to the vast Egyptian tombs, although the original connection between the concept of the Great Pyramid and its like and the stacking of bread moulds is obscure. While the pyramids took their name from this baking process, the semi-oval ideograph showing a flat cake denoted the letter T in the hieroglyphic alphabet. Once the dough had been poured into the hot mould it was covered with a slightly larger mould placed upside down on it, and returned to the oven. When baked, the bread was the shape of a twin truncated cone. The Assyrians made dough of mixed wheat and barley flour and placed it in large earthenware vessels heated to a high temperature with embers or hot stones. The vessels were then hermetically sealed with a lid and buried in the ground: the bread inside them was baked on the haybox principle.

The first Greek breads were also cooked in the embers or under a dome-shaped bell, but then the Greeks invented the true bread oven, which could be pre-heated and opened at the front. This was to be the general model for culinary use. In ancient times barley μερα was the staple food. Solon, drawing up laws to regulate everything, even the bread in Athenian mouths, decreed that wheaten bread, ψωμι, might be eaten only on feast days. It was made at home in the form of a round loaf. In the fifth century BC, however, at the time of Pericles, ψωμι could be bought from a baker’s shop. So could μερα, which was cheaper and long remained the staple food of the poor.

Meals consisted of bread or μερα, and accompaniments to bread called ψημα. Oddly enough this way of describing food recurs in Chinese cuisine, where food is divided into rice and the accompaniments to rice. Ψημα meant any food but bread: cornmeal, barley, oats, greens, vegetables, cheese, meat, fish and fruit and wine. Later the word came to be used only for fish, ψημα in modern Greek, the king of foods. In towns ψημα was seldom meat, which was far too expensive for most people, but in the country you might eat your bread either with vegetable produce you had grown or gathered, or with animal foods you had reared, hunted or most commonly fished. The ψημα was usually placed on the flat bread or the μερα, just as it is in the modern pane-bagnat of the Ligurian coast. The custom persists in the Italian Romagna: the piada dates back to a period before the expansion of Rome. A kind of pancake cooked on an earthenware platter, the dish crossed Italy and became piyoc and pissaladiere. It was originally a μερα topped with pickled fish and onions.

From the time of Pericles onwards the art of the Greek bakers lay not only in the mixing of various kinds of bread dough, but above all in the different shapes of the loaves they made, often designed to be appropriate to some particular occasion.

While grinding was a task for slave women throughout antiquity, as it still is in some parts of Africa and the Americas, kneading also seems to have required a female labour force in the kitchen, though we do not know how large a one. The Louvre Museum has a Boeotian terracotta of the end of the eleventh century showing four women in caps shaping oblong leaves while a bearded man, perhaps the baker, plays the flute, no doubt to provide a rhythmic accompaniment for the work, which is done in a kneading trough divided into four sections by deep grooves, useful for catching flour or scraps of dough. The kneading women and their male companion all seem to be naked from the waist up, perhaps to make it easier to model them.

What kind of bread were these women making? Obviously not the koukamitos mentioned in a play by Aristophanes, nor Cappadocian milk bread, both of which were baked in a mould. Βούλτιος, as its name indicates, was mushroom-shaped and had poppy seeds sprinkled on top. Σθητικα was a plaited loaf; θεσσαλικο was marked out into squares. Δαντος, an unleavened bread, was the shape of a flat cake. Αρμαγενος, a coarse rustic bread, was made in country areas. Φωνα was a wheaten bread, and again was for the common people. Δεμομην, a dark bread, made of unboiled rye flour, had the same aperient effect as the bran bread of today. The loaves shown in the terracotta may be ιατροινιο, bread of the market-place, ογρα, quantities of which were sold by retailers. (The Greeks distinguished between the bread-making factory or έρατειον and the bread depository or αρβανίσιον.) Χωνευτο, made from spelt, and σωμαλια, made from fine wheat flour, were popular with more prosperous customers. Hard tack for sailors was made at Rhodes. Ήμερωντος was the bread of Epheus, crescent-shaped in homage to Artemis the moon goddess.

The list had better stop here, since a catalogue of the cakes sold by master bakers or made at home in private kitchens would be even longer. There were at least 80 different kinds, including many regional specialities. Some 50 recipes are known for the breads of Tyana, a centre of bread-making, lists another 30 kinds without further description. The fact that this list is included in the treatise shows that bakers did not confine themselves to making bread. There were no special patisserie cooks until the end of the Roman Empire. Ψιθρα, usually translated simply as ‘cake’, was a plain cake made of oat flour, cream cheese and honey. All varieties other than ψιθρα had their own names, while the term ψωμι, bread, covers any subsequently specified type of loaf.

Ψιθρα, like most small cakes and pastries, was made with cream cheese; butter was almost non-existent, and fresh or ripened full-fat cream cheese was used instead. Alternatively, oil or animal fat might be used. The mixture was sweetened with honey and spiced. Many of these cakes were made to be eaten on particular occasions: at the theatre (εφεδροι and αρτομυρα, cakes rich with fat), or during religious festivities. Cakes for such festivals were made in suggestive shapes which, like the false phallics worn at the Dionysia, were not considered at all indecent. The μωλυζη of Syracuse, made of wheat flour, honey and sesame seeds, were a realistic representation of the female genitalia. They were offered to Demeter and her daughter Persephone during the festival of the Thesmophoria. Crescent-shaped
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ancients and diakonos offered to Artemis were placed between small lighted torches. Katharos, shaped like the breasts of Aphrodite, had no purpose but to give pleasure. The patria was a humorous creation shaped like a shoe and filled with cheese plakeis.

There were also cheesecakes such as myxtopho (containing dried fruit) and horios (made from flour, honey, dried figs and walnuts), but pride of place went to the type called nazau. The Greeks also made a multitude of fritters, cooked either in oil, such as xerokrinos and propyelinos, or in honey, such as the spirally shaped symposion, or in both, such as sphylos. A kind of early boiled pudding called thymon is described by the grammarian and gastronome Polluk: lard, brains, eggs and cream cheese were beaten together, the mixture was wrapped in fig leaves (in the same way as puddings were tied in a cloth layer) and boiled in chicken or kid broth, then unified and given a final cooking in boiling honey. At symposia a sweetmeat called kebabio was eaten, dipped in wine, and it was an Argive custom for a bride to give her bridesmaid a wedding cake.

Despite their close links with the Greeks, the Romans took little interest in baking until the eighth or seventh century BC. The people never actually demanded panem et circennas from Nero or anyone else; the famous phrase comes from a savage and contumacious attack by Juvenal (Satires, X-81) on the decadent Romans of his time, "the mob of Remus", a rabble with its mind solely on its stomach and the frequent availability of free entertainment: "Duas suntres res anxius optat, panem et circennas" [It longs eagerly for just two things — bread and games]. However, the bread was often free, since emperors and careerists made large-scale distributions to ease their consciences or avert popular riots.

Having begun as a porridge of parched cereals before becoming the thicker maza, Roman bread was originally made at home, and the new-fangled foodstuff incurred the disapproval of conservatives such as Cato. Throughout the centuries purists forbade the offering of bread as a sacrifice in the practice of Roman religion, echoing the Jewish concept of the impurity of fermented dough. The sacrificial cake recommended by Cato was the libum, made with cheese and eggs (a pound of flour to two pounds of cheese and an egg).

When bread replaced maza the wealthier classes kept slave bakers; very grand people made these slaved weat kneads to knead the dough and maska to protect it from undesirable drops of perspiration and the breath of a common person. The baking of the raised dough evolved through the usual stages in the embers, on a girdle, under a bell, and finally in a brick oven.

In 168 BC there was a considerable influx of craftsmen bakers (pistores) of Greek origin into Rome. They were also millers and baked bread to order, producing much better loaves than the slaves. The Greeks had established colonies on the Mediterranean shores of Gaul before the Romans did. Several clues — the workmanship of a wine-cup found in the Delome district, other items found in various places — suggest considerable Greek penetration farther inland. The druidic alphabet, the notation of figures and the coinage of Gaul were all Greek. Fond as they were of good bread, the Greeks had trained native bakers to provide for the requirements of their trading posts, and the Gauls, showing talent that was to persist in their modern French descendants, soon became very good at the job. The high reputation of French bread from Japan to America is nothing new. The Gauls, who had already been introduced to beer by the Greeks, soon conceived the idea of using beer yeast as a raising agent: this was the spuma concerta or froth formed on the surface of the liquid by fermentation, and the Egyptians had already discovered its uses. Beer yeast made very light, well-risen bread, which was rightly considered delicious.

Around 30 BC, during the reign of Augustus, there were 329 bakeries in Rome, run by Greeks with Gaulish assistants. Although these immigrant workers had been granted permission to form a collegium — a guild or professional association — they were subject to Draconian regulations, perhaps as a consequence of nationalist feeling, although it has been suggested that there were economic reasons. This baker's 'college' ended up as exclusive a caste as any in India. A baker's son became a baker and could not follow any other profession, even if he married outside. One famous baker, Vergilius Eurysaces, had a monument of almost royal magnificence raised to him after his death, and it stands to this day, but his son was not allowed to enter the priesthood, the law or even the army. A baker had to save the Republic or the Empire before he was granted the right to sit in the Senate, in which case he would resign from the college and cede all his possessions to it.

However, resignations were not common in the college of pistores, since like other such guilds it paid suitable homage to the tutelary god who had granted the requisite talents. It was mainly a professional organization, of course, but there were certain initiatory rites, and it guaranteed the professional and moral probity of its members. Besides the religious ritual of college meetings, there was a sign language known only to the initiates: tocken and passwords which protected trade secrets. Great solidarity united the members of the collegium, and one can see the restriction of bakers to their own social group as simply the price of an honour ratifying the dignity of their trade, 700 years after the first collegia had been set up by the legendary King Numa Pompilius.

Eurysaces' monument has a frieze showing all the stages of bread-making, after the manner of a steinbahn. For its time, it seems remarkably modern, from the delivery of the wheat to the sale of the bread. The grain is shown being ground in a stone mill not unlike a huge vegetable mill of the kind found in kitchens today. The stone turning inside the mill and crushing the grain against the sides is worked by a horse, not by slaves. The frieze shows round loaves being shaped after kneading in a kind of mixer, also worked by a horse. They were then cooked in a brick bakehouse. The tomb of this enlightened entrepreneur provides a good deal of information, and two features are especially striking: first, the evidence of a form of mechanization, with the energy provided by horses, and second, the fact that the customers in the shop are all men, either slaves or free,
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but in any case of the supposedly stronger sex. This apparent sexism is not a personal statement by the architect of the monument, but reflects custom. As we shall see, women did not do the shopping, particularly not women who belonged, in the literal sense of the word, to families prosperous enough to buy their bread from Euryssaces. In contrast to the Greek custom, women never made bread either, except among the very lowest classes (and only the very lowest of the low did not keep one or two slaves as wretched as their masters). There were no women members of the aedilium, although women were found in the colleges of greengrocers, vendors of clothing, and even tavern-keepers. Bread was a masculine business.

Roman bread was usually round, the tops of the loaves being shaped in many different ways, just as there were many different kinds of dough. A batch of loaves abandoned when the volcano erupted is one of the more touching discoveries at Pompeii. The loaves, weighing a pound each and shaped like eight-petalled flowers, in the same way as some modern Sicilian loaves, had been carbonized in their hermetically sealed ovens. While the aedilium, made of fine wheaten flour, had a soft crumb which was much liked by patricians, loaves described as plebeius co suntides and made of coarse mixed flour that had hardly been boiled at all filled more plebeian stomachs. Ostrearius, oyster bread, was eaten with oysters at banquets. Pecorum bread, which contained dried fruit, was cooked in earthenware moulds designed to be used once only and broken to get the bread out. It was eaten soaked in milk sweetened with honey.

Roman cakes included a confection of flaky pastry of the modern Arab kind. It was stretched out thin in separate sheets and contained cheese and honey. Being intended to please — placentia et — it soon acquired the name of placentia. In modern times the word placenta has a different meaning, deriving from the shape of this flat cake. The dough of the placenta was also used to make cakes called arhila, spiro, and placentia, shaped in ways corresponding to their names. Fritters were even more popular than in Athens.

The wedding cake, which we have already encountered in ancient Greece, was not made by the bride's own hands in Rome. Called a confarinas, it was presented by the bridal couple as a pair, and was a cake of spelt wheat flour solemnly offered to Jupiter Capitoline in the presence of the Grand Pontiff and the priestess serving the god, the flamen dialis who tended the flame on which the cake burned. The sacrifice marked the fact that the woman was placed under the manus (jurisdiction) of the man, and was evidence that the marriage was legal and sacred, like the declarations of willingness to cohabit made by bride and groom as 'Gaia' and 'Gaia' Under Tibetius the custom of burning the cake lapsed, and the formalities and nuptial rites were changed. But eventually, and particularly after the eighteenth century, the wedding cake, now as a very fancy confection, became a part of European marriage customs again, no longer burned but shared among the wedding party. We shall be tasting traditional cakes later.

The Gauls of Roman times had proved skilful bakers; the Gallo-Romans of a slightly later date usually made bread at home, in an oven or in the embars. Bread was the basis of a meal in the cereal-growing land of Gaul, even more than in Greece. The high-quality flour from spelt (strina in the Celtic language) made a round and very soft white loaf. However, texts or carved inscriptions relating to bread-making of this period are very rare: there is just one funerary stele at Narbonne. A hollow stone mould for baking cakes has been found at Sens, with engraved ornamentation on the inside including an inscription which some people think was the pastrycook's trademark. Otherwise we have only some representations of vendors (rather than bakers) offering their customers round cakes, sometimes with their tops marked out in diamonds or circles, and strong on a cord. One such scene, now in Dijon Museum, shows a vendor of pastries offering small items of some kind made into garlands for sale. These may be sweetmeats, but it is impossible to identify them, or be sure just what the customer is choosing from one of the six dishes shown.

In the early days of Christianity barley bread seems to have been considered a food suitable for religious penance or legal punishment. St. Patrick, a third-century French saint from Treves, subsisted on barley bread dipped in water and sprinkled with salt. He was anticipating the soup which was to become a staple item of the European diet from the Dark Ages onwards: a slice of bread at the bottom of a bowl, with broth or soup made in a pot poured on to it. The word suppa, from Frankish, was used in Low Latin and has kept its original sense in Dutch sop, to soak, cognate with English 'sop'. Soup poured over pieces of bread is popular in France: garbonne, made of cabbage, bacon and preserved goose is one such example, so is French onion soup and the cabbage soup immortalized by René Fallet.

Bread soon became part of the standard table setting. From the Dark Ages to the Renaissance a thick slice of bread, known as a tretcher and sometimes laid on a kind of wooden plate which could also be called a tretcher, was the base upon which pieces of meat and their accompanying sauce were placed. One tretcher served two people, who thus became literally 'companions', sharers of bread. The wealthier classes in the Middle Ages did not actually eat the tretcher bread, even though it was soaked in good sauce, but threw it to the numerous dogs that roamed the room or the equally numerous crowd of poor people waiting outside the door. They received the tretchers as a windfall, for they were much tasted than the hunk of bread the peasant took out to the field in the day (his hot dinner, eaten in the evening, would be porridge). Gregory of Tours describes such scenes, and young workmen waking to breakfast on bread soaked in bad wine.1 Joan of Arc is known to have liked eating such 'sops' of bread dipped in wine, although modern dieticians would not recommend the practice, which makes both the bread and the wine very indigestible.2
The Symbolism of Bread and Cakes

Bread, the staff of life, has become the prime symbol of nourishment. We speak of ‘earning our bread’; we fear having ‘the bread taken out of our mouths’. Bread demands respect, and is regarded as genuinely sacred, provided by the grace of God as addressed in the Lord’s Prayer: ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ Until quite recently French peasants of the old school would make the sign of the cross over bread before they cut or broke it. Bread placed the wrong way up is sometimes thought to be bad luck, but once, long before Christianity, it was an offering to the dead, even if inadvertently made: when presented with the top of the loaf turned towards the powers of the underworld, it drew them thence, for there was no eating there.

The Eucharistic wafer stamp from Epirus in Greece: these wooden stamps, looking like large seals, were carved with symbolic patterns referring to Christ and the instruments of the Passion—a stylised tomb, the spear and sponge of the Crucifixion. There is an inscription repeated three times at the centre, consisting of Greek or Cyrillic characters which would be transcribed into the Roman alphabet as IS XS NIK, meaning ‘Jesus Christ victorious’—in Greek ‘Iēsou Christos NIKOA’.

The Eucharistic Host, a pure, unleavened bread, is regarded as the bread of life, but in this case spiritual life. St Martin recommended that the communicant receiving it should meditate on the three concepts suggested by its threefold symbolism: affliction and privation (both material and spiritual), preparation for purification (since it is unleavened) and the memory of our origins (‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread’).

The History of Bread and Cakes

The place-name Bethlehem means ‘house of bread’, and it is significant that Jesus was born there.

A distinction should be drawn, in the Church’s various rituals concerned with distributing bread, between consecrated bread and the sacrificial offering of the Eucharistic Host, deriving from the showbread of the Jews. The bread which featured so prominently in payments made in kind in antiquity and the Middle Ages not only helped to compensate for the shortage of actual cash available at the time, but made such transactions more sacred than the materialist payment of money. Payments in kind, sometimes providing a community of canons or monks with all the provisions they needed, safeguarded the recipients’ dignity and their vow of poverty.

Special kinds of bread for Christmas, Lent and Easter, and for harvest and the wine harvest, were ritual tokens of acceptance into the various different grades of rural society or even the right to pursue a trade. Such bread was accompanied by wine, and might be shared with a man’s master or his peers during initiation ceremonies. In Central Europe bread and salt were the tokens of welcome.

Sharing bread in the course of ceremonies or simply at ordinary meals forges bonds which, in principle, will never be loosened or forgotten. Your companions, as we have seen, are those with whom you have shared bread; the word is derived from Latin tēsa, ‘together’, and Janis, ‘bread’.

A bread positive used to be used medically for skin disorders. It had its practical uses, but was probably also employed with the idea that there was a certain magic about bread.

In fairy tales, cakes are often magical or enchanted objects. They arouse the interest of an audience that likes to eat cake and can thus enjoy it vicariously, but their primary function, because they are a suitable sacrificial offering, is to convey a message. The wedding cake in Little Red Riding Hood’s basket, like the butter, shows her respect and love for her grandmother better than any words can do. The cake in Perrault’s story of Peau d’Âne, a version of the Cinderella motif, has the princess’s ring inside it, and acts rather like a bottle containing a message cast into the sea: the significance of the cake is that it is delicious, since it was made by a girl with virtues like its own, and the ring within it is the symbol of the marriage for which the girl hopes.

In nineteenth-century Provence girls of marriageable age made Advent cakes. They were put in a basket and then auctioned to the young men of the neighbourhood, who had of course had the name of the maker of the cake they should buy whispered in their ears. It was up to the lover to raise the bidding as high as possible, amidst much knowing laughter. The cake itself need not be particularly good so long as the young man admired its baker.

In Gascony, aniseed cakes used to be distributed after midnight Mass at Christmas. And indeed there are traditional cakes made and eaten almost everywhere in Western Europe between Christmas and early January. They include the Twelfth Night cake, which is in direct line of descent from the Roman cakes of Janus, after
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before it is cooked under a bell-shaped dome or in a pre-heated oven.

The Taste of Bread

Craftsmen bakers reappeared in the big cities of Europe from the sixtenth century onwards.查理曼大帝, aware of their future economic importance and anxious to ensure that there were enough of them and that they ran hygienic establishments, decreed: ‘Let the number of bakers be always complete, and the place where they work always kept neat and clean.’

Bakeries did not yet have their own bakehouses. As medieval houses were usually made of wood or wattle and daub, any fire could rapidly prove disastrous. Bread ovens were built well away from inhabited areas, usually near a river, with water available to put out flames that got out of control and to work the mills; windmills were not introduced until after the Crusades. In France, mills and bakeries were not separated until the early fifteenth century, when running the two in tandem seems to have led to too many abuses and cases of fraud and speculation.

The baker sifted or bolted the flour, and although he did not necessarily carry out all the operations involved in bread-making himself, he did have the leavener baked to his requirements in the communal oven maintained by the local lord, secular or religious. The oven was not always near the baker’s workshop and often served several bakers. But bread might also be made to order with flour brought to the baker by the customer himself, or by his servant if he were a prosperous man. These customs were common to all Western Europe. The lord’s own bread was baked in his manor house. However, for a long time ovens for family cooking in ordinary private houses, and used for roasting meat or baking cakes, were too small to take the large loaves of the period, and the dimensions of these ovens were laid down by law.

If the baker had five pounds of flour brought to him, he had to deliver seven pounds of bread. A German edict of the seventeenth century, quoted by Maurizio, specifies that 100 pounds of unbolted flour will produce ten pounds of bran when bolted for ordinary bread and 15 pounds when bolted for white bread. A baker would often provide poor people with bread on credit, making sure that he was repaid (sometimes with interest) at the next harvest. The extremely complicated calculations involved allowed plenty of scope for fraud, since the customer might hardly understand them. Of all tradesmen the baker was one who always gave most credit, bread being the last food people could dispense with. Literature and folklore memory are full of stories of the tallies kept in pairs in a customer’s name, one for the customer himself and the other for the baker. When you bought bread you presented your wooden tally and the baker produced his own. He set them face to face so that he could notch them with a single stroke of the knife, a notch

which January is named. Janus, god of the double gate – the gate that opens and the gate that shuts – had two faces and a double mission: to look back at the past, the Old Year, and forward to the future, the New Year.

In all the folk rituals where gifts are solicited, from Roman times on, cakes have been given to children, who represent both our past and our future. These cakes are often anthropomorphic in appearance.

Cakes, as we have seen, were part of the ancient Greek wedding ceremony, and a joint offering by the Roman bridal pair. In Lorraine, tradition demands that the first officially sanctioned kiss between the newly married couple be exchanged across a dish piled with waffles. In Brittany, a proposal of marriage was made by the sending of a cake (cougné or boulennadou). If the proposal was refused, an identical cake was sent to the suitor, but his own was not returned to him. If he was accepted and the wedding took place, the wedding cake had to be as big as possible, sometimes as much as a metre and a half in diameter. The people of Limousin served very hard flat cakes instead of a wedding cake; the bridegroom’s attendants had to break these cakes with their fists.

Cakes were also shared at funerals in country areas, and were the only concession to luxury at a meagre meal without wine. In northern France, each mourner was sometimes given a cake not to eat there and then but to be taken away, or pieces of the cake might be distributed to neighbours and taken to people who had been unable to attend.

Cakes, in fact, are associated with all rites of passage. In Roman Catholic countries, besides the birthday cake and the christening cake there is a cake for a child’s first communion, once a very important occasion. French army conscripts were given brioches ... but if we were to enumerate all ritual and traditional cakes we should find ourselves going all around the world, and there is often more than one possible explanation of a traditional cake’s origin.

Four Stages in the Development of Bread-Making

Pounded grains: the grain is eaten, from the hand, just as it is, either whole, cracked or crushed, either raw or parched.

Dough or porridge: the raw or parched grains are ground into a flour, either finer or coarser as the case may be. Water is added to make a dough which will be raw or, if the grain was parched, pre-cooked. Depending on the amount of liquid, the mixture is either eaten or drunk.

Mere: a thicker dough is mixed and then shaped into a flat or moulded cake, baked on hot stones or a gridle, in the embers, under a bell-shaped dome, or in a pre-heated oven.

Bread: only cereals suitable for bread-making are used: spelt, wheat, barley, oats, rye, buckwheat, maize. Leaven (sourdough from a previous baking) is added to the dough and the dough is left to rise. It may or may not be put into a tin or mould
for each loaf, leaving the same number of notches on both tallies. If any objections were raised the tallies were cut short.

When urban housing began to be built of more durable materials, there was less and less justification for keeping bakers’ ovens well away from them, and Philippe II of France, known as Philippe-Auguste (1180-1223), realizing that the Carolingian safety regulations were now out of date, allowed bakers to have ovens attached to their shops; like the butchers’ shops, these bakeries were confined to the outskirts of towns and situated close to the town walls, because of rats. A decree of Charles VI stipulated that there should be a space between the bakers’ ovens and the adjoining party walls, for safety’s sake, a practice which remained in force. The space was known as the ‘tour du chat’.

St Louis gave town dwellers a dispensation from the obligation to use communal ovens and pay dues for that use. However, that obligation continued in force in rural areas until the end of the ancien régime, for the greater good of the lord of the manor’s finances. The Paris region too retained communal ovens belonging to parishes, abbeys or the diocese. Instead of owning an oven, a baker might rent one, sharing it with his colleagues. Although there was not such strict regulation of the use of ovens now, there were still strict quality controls on the flour and the baking process. Hubert Collin1 quotes a charter of Beaumont in Argyonne specifying penalties in 1350:

The baker who bakes bread must do it properly, and it shall be of marketable quality, well baked and made in accordance with the legal standard, which states that it shall be made of the best wheat on the market or within two deniers of that price. And if, on the contrary, it is found to be poorly baked, or too small in size, the baker shall pay a fine of 5 sols and the bread be given to the poor. And if it is found that he has failed to bake bread every 24 hours he shall pay the same fine. ... And if it is the fault of the man who tends the oven that the people’s loaves were not properly or sufficiently baked, then he shall repay the value of ten loaves.

The man who tended the oven was not the baker himself: his job was to maintain the oven, heat it and supervise the baking.

As the staple food, one that was both ‘of the greatest economic value’ and ‘viewed with mystical respect’, bread in France was under the control of the most important man in the entire kingdom, the King himself. However, the task of regulating the bakery trade was entrusted, in the King’s name, to the Grand Provost of Paris. In his own turn, he delegated the responsibility to the provost of every town. Étienne Boileau, Grand Provost in the time of Louis IX and author of the Livre de métiers (Book of Trades), included the corporation of bakers in his account, although it was not one of the ‘six merchant bodies’ which constituted the trade aristocracy. Both trade and craftsmanship were involved in the making of bread, and the bakers were prosperous enough to pay for the magnificent stained glass window depicting the Life of Christ in Chartres cathedral. They were proverbially held to make good money: not as much as the big butchers, but more than the smaller ones.

The master baker had to obtain a certificate of his skill before he could set himself up in a bakehouse and a shop. In Provence during the Second Empire, and even in the early days of the Third Republic, the master baker was still actually called maître, a distinction he shared with the master fisherman, that other provider of a noble food. The certificate was supposed to be acquired by the production of a ‘masterpiece’, the merits of which were judged by the candidate’s peers, although

1The baker’s cart,’ by Jean Michelin, 1656: at first bakeries were confined to the outskirts of town, for fear of fire, and for a long time bread was taken round the streets by itinerant salesmen.

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formality: some very easy task such as making three scorns of flour (about 156 litres) in various kinds of doughs and differently shaped loaves, the number and weight of which were supposed to be known only to initiates. After two or three years of apprenticeship the aspiring journeyman took an oath on the holy relics or the picture of the patron saint of the bakers' corporation. This patron saint was first St Peter, then St Lazarus, and finally St Honoré, who still holds the post. The journeyman promised to conform to the statutes of the community of which he was becoming a member, and swore that his health was good. He then had the right to train an apprentice. Journeymen or nœttes were not allowed to carry swords, or to wear breeches over their underwear in case they were tempted to go out. They might not wear hoods either.

Standing in for the King in his relationship to the Provost of Paris, the officer known as the 'Grand Panetier' (Grand Panthe) presided over the Maitre (a kind of committee) of the bakers' corporation. His official post at court, ensuring responsibility for preserving the royal bread, allowed him to pursue a number of other profitable activities. The post of Grand Panetier continued in existence until 1719. The bakers' corporation, like other corporations, was abolished by the French Revolution.

The first genuine treatises on bread-making in French were written by Malouin, *L'art du meneur, du boulanger et du vermicelier* (1775), and Parmentier, popularizer of the potato, *Le parfait boulangier* (1778). Parmentier and Cadet de Vaux opened a School of Baking, which was closed by the Convention.

As mentioned above in the discussion of cereals, bread can be made only with a suitable flour which contains enough diastatic power to let dough ferment and rise, and enough gluten for it to increase in volume. As Maurizio writes: 'Like porridge, flat cakes and pasta can be made from a wide variety of fruits and seeds, but our bread-eating civilization has gradually limited the number of cereals used to those which will make the raised bread we like.' Except in times of famine and hardship, when bread has been made with anything available, its composition has been strictly regulated by the authorities, to preserve quality and prevent fraud, and to avoid wasting so precious a commodity as flour.

Most flour has been made of wheat since the twelfth century. The price of wheaten bread set the standard of prices for other breads made of barley or rye flour, oatmeal or millet, which had of necessity to be cheaper. And wheaten bread, except by specific request, has been of remarkably similar quality everywhere - although not surprisingly the weight of a loaf varied according to the price of wheat, though the price of the loaf itself might remain the same. There were many contentious three-way disputes between the authorities, the bakers' corporation and consumers, none of which was ever able to obtain the support of either of the other parties. In 1594 the bakers of France were obliged to mark their loaves for purposes of identification if they were restrained to be checked. The French law controlling the price of bread dated right back to the reign of the seventh-century Merovingian King Dagobert, and was not abrogated until 1981. The price of the
THE THREE SACRAMENTAL FOODS: OIL, BREAD AND WINE

Salt used in the dough also had to be included in the price of bread. A tax known as the gabelle was paid on salt, and bakers economized with it as much as possible. Bruyeret-Champier tells us that only luxury breads were salted in the sixteenth century. Olivier de Serres confirms that statement in 1600, but it seems that the omission or inclusion of salt varied from region to region, for Montaigne, a native of Bordeaux, explains in his Essais that while he had his own bread made without salt by his private baker, this did not seem to be the custom of the country. It was generally incumbent on bakers to salt their bread. The Swiss obeyed the Planct general of 1386 which made it a legal obligation, although an Englishman — the English, like the Swiss, being law-abiding citizens — was surprised to find that the French in the time of Louis XI salted their food and particularly their bread so lightly. Other travellers to France made the same comment in the time of Louis XIV. At the time of the Revolution, when the price of salt dropped from 14 sous to 1 sous, bakers were able to indulge their liking for both salt and liberty. Arount 1630 someone had the idea of making a luxury (and therefore salted) bread with milk, made even lighter and softer by the addition of beer yeast, a method of raising dough that had been almost forgotten. Marie de Medici, renowned for her greed, liked it so much that it was called Pain à la Reine, after her. Fifty years later the medical faculty frowned upon this bread, but the fashionable précieuses of the time would not give up: their breakfast coffee or chocolate would not have tasted so good without it. Soft bread of this kind was banned under Louis XV: affairs of state were going badly and the people, obliged to eat hard bread, were discontented. As Necker said later: 'The people will never listen to reason on the price of bread.'

After 1650 bakers had almost stopped bolting their own flour. They now bought flour of varying degrees of whiteness from mills. But white wheaten bread took another two centuries to become common fare, and in particular to replace the porridge or mush that could be made of other cereals. The Encyclopédie, edited by Diderot, undertook the nutritional education of the masses and informed them that, 'As porridge is not fermented, it is indigestible.'

The Technique of Bread-Making

Technically speaking, the bread that appears on our tables daily is made by the following process.

Bread consists of a cooked dough made of wheat flour (and various additives, those permitted in France being 2 per cent bean flour, 0.5 per cent ascorbic acid, 2 per cent soya lecithin, 2 per cent salt, 60 per cent water) which has been fermented by the action of yeast (1 to 2 per cent).

Water is added to the flour and additives to swell the insoluble substances and dissolve the soluble ones.

The dough is kneaded to obtain a smooth, homogeneous consistency. The kneading used to be done by hand, but electric beaters are now employed. They incorporate more air into the dough and make it whiter.

The glucose contained in the flour ferments, producing bubbles of carbonic gas which raise the dough and swell it as they escape. The raising agent used to be leaven, a sourdough from the previous baking. Today compressed industrial yeasts are used; they belong to the family of beer yeasts or Saccharomyces cerevisiae, are more active and work faster.

The fermented dough is divided into pieces which will be the finished loaves. They are then put to rise a second time at a temperature and for a length of time determined by the urgency or otherwise of the baking. This operation is called proving.

The loaves are baked in the oven at a temperature of 250°C. In the heat the bubbles of carbonic gas which result from fermentation swell again, and the bread increases in volume until the starch, turned to dextrin by the heat, caramelizes on the surface of the loaf, forming a firm crust once the evaporation of the water in the dough stops.

French pain de campagne, country bread, is made by the traditional sourdough method. Viennese bread is made of a particularly fine flour, with malt and powdered milk included. Bran bread has bran added to the usual bread flour. Gluten bread is enriched with gluten and contains 20 per cent of prouts compared with the 7 per cent in ordinary bread. Unsalted bread is enriched with starch, and is not really completely saltless, since the flour itself contains some mineral salt. The proper term is ‘hyposodic bread’. It does not rise as easily as ordinary bread. Wholesal bread is made of unbolted flour, with nothing removed. Enriched breads may be sweetened and are cooked in this way.

Our Daily Bread

The traditional image of the average Frenchman is of a character wearing a beret, carrying a little of red wine in a string bag, and with a baguette stuck under his arm. It may come as a surprise to the British, used to believing that French bread is in every way superior to the standard white sliced loaf of United Kingdom supermarkets (where, however, many alternatives are now available), to learn that our average Frenchman is no longer happy with his baguette. An opinion poll taken for a commission set up by the governing body of the bakery trade in 1982 found that 75 per cent of consumers complained of the quality of their bread. The bakery trade was already worried: whereas daily bread consumption was 600 grams of bread per head in 1880, it had sunk to 300 grams in 1950, and was barely 180 grams in 1977.

Of course it was not unknown for people to complain of the poor quality and
flavour of their bread in the past. In 1895 the famous Dr Gallippe said that today's white bread is so good as to be like the coarse brown bread our fathers ate. A hundred years before, the Abbé Jacquin, author of a work on La santé, described bread of the time of Louis XVI as 'a pitiful thing', while 'the ignorance and knavery of the bakers exposed the health and life of the people to every danger. Bread is the staple food, the most universal food in Europe, and the most essential; it is surprising, therefore, that in a kingdom such as France there should be so little control over the quality, weight and price of bread.'

In 1958 Professor Terroine, speaking to the Medical Association of the Paris Hospitals, seemed to believe that the consumers rather than the bread itself had changed: 'So far as the regret expressed by certain consumers for the disappearance of bread made with traditional leaven is concerned. I cannot say that I attach much importance to it when people of my own generation claim that they cannot digest today's bread as well as the old kind. I don't dispute what they say, but I think the fault is in them rather than the bread.'

If modern bread does no harm, might it do too much good? Western civilization is obsessed with weight, and as our standard of living rises we tend to eat more meat, charcuterie and out-of-season vegetables and fruit. We may be eating less bread than before to keep our figures. Professor Trémollières, an authority on nutrition, says that 'bread must be regarded as the staple of our diet. There is no reason to reduce bread consumption, and eaten sensibly it will not mean weight gain.'

Shall we, perhaps, find ourselves eating bread out of a sense of duty rather than for pleasure, in order to stay healthy? For it cannot be said, despite pronouncements by the medical profession, that the three-quarters of French people who complain of their bread are wrong. Shall we find ourselves abandoning the ancient prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread', for an indignant request to have our appetizing bread returned to us?

What exactly do people dislike about modern bread, the cheapest of our foodstuffs? Quite a number of things: its consistency, its flavour, its poor keeping quality. The national baguette of France is gradually giving way to so-called speciality breads, which although they look good and, despite being industrially produced, have rustic names, are often just one more trap for the unwary in the attempt to exploit people's feelings. However, there are still excellent bakeries where 'old-fashioned' bread is produced, and where the bakers themselves make a fortune, which proves that good bread and profit are not incompatible. The bread may not look quite as pretty as supermarket baguettes, but it is very much better to eat. Really good bread makes you feel happy just to smell it, look at it, bite, chew and swallow it. It is worth going across town to find it. It is worth more than its slightly higher price. A baguette made with good traditional yeast should be golden, smelling of wheat, creamy inside and full of irregular holes, and with a nutty flavour. It can be savoured slowly, as it used to be, when the consumption of bread was almost a religious act. The other types of loaves made by these old-fashioned bakeries - round loaves, brown loaves, cobs, sourdough bread - leave a pleasingly acidulated flavour in the mouth, and can still be enjoyed the day after baking, when they are not quite so fresh, but by no means stale - mature like a ripe fruit.

So who is to blame for the poor quality of modern bread? First, of course, the consumer, who has regarded the low price of bread as something sacred since the time of Dagobert, little as he now feels called to exercise self-denial in the face of the petrol pump or the cigarette packet. The baker is guilty too: he is a small industrialist nowadays rather than a craftsman, and his chief source of pride is usually the neon sign on his shop-front. Nobody wants to knead the dough by hand in a wooden trough for an hour, although it is possible that the perspiration of the human hand is part of the magic that brings the dough to life. However, even if you do believe in magic, kneading by electricity is no sin so long as the rate of mixing is 40 strokes a minute. The mixers tend to go faster, however - and 'faster, faster' is the cry of our times - kneading at twice that rate, 80 strokes a minute. Not only is this rash rush not the way to make good dough, it actually injures the cells. Much the same thing happens in mashing potatoes, and it explains the difference between mashed potato put through a vegetable mill or sieved by hand and mashed potato made with an electric mixer, when the pulp of the potato becomes a sticky, malodorous glue because of the way the starch in it has altered. Of course the bread rises faster and faster when electrically kneaded. In fact it ferments too much and starts digesting itself, hence the lack of flavour. Additives also obliterate or falsify the proper flavour of bread, and can cause wind: they include 0.30 per cent of malted flour and 2 per cent of bean flour (and this at a time when we are desperately trying to dispose of a European grain mountain). Ascorbic acid, soya lecithin, propionate of calcium, pesticides, preservatives and bleaching agents are also found in bread flour.

The baker says, 'Today's flour is often of poor quality and difficult to make into bread without additives. It's the farmer's fault.' The farmer says, 'I have to sow the most profitable wheat, high-yielding varieties such as the English Mary Huntmans or the Dutch Clément. They provide an increase of 10 to 25 per cent in production from the same arable area. At last I can pay my debts and buy new equipment.'

The baker says, 'This high-yielding wheat does not make good French bread. It is all right for the soft breads they make in the Scandinavian countries but not for our baguettes.' You might think someone would point out that increased production means grain surpluses. If there is too much wheat, what are we doing with it? And there must be far too much wheat, since we are eating less and less bread. Echoing the Abbé Jacquin in the time of Louis XVI, two centuries ago, a baker from Brive recently asked the press,

Do the consumers know that bread is the only widely eaten food product not protected by any law? Society today seems to think more of animals
than human beings: meal for animal feed is protected and controlled, but there are no checks or protection for bread flours. The state has no control over the varieties of wheat grown, their treatment while they are grown and stored, the way they are made into flour or the baking of bread. We are unable to make good bread because we cannot know the quality of the flour we are using, and you cannot make good bread without good flour, any more than you can make good wine from poor grapes.

Laurent Vielmont of Brete waxet bitter.

We once knew what our basic material was like, but today we do not know the exact composition of the flour delivered to us. The millers are allowed to make a profit from bad flour, at the expense of flours of better quality. 'Bakeries' hold demonstrations faking up bread-making to try to persuade us that acid-based products sold as pastilles or powders and christened 'improvers' for the occasion can be a substitute for high standards of baking and the quality of the flour.

We seem to be on the way towards a synthetic conveyor-belt bread made by robots in computer-programmed industrial bakeries. Most of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries have very few independent bakeries run by true master bakers left. Perhaps the day will come when the last such bakeries are classified as protected historical monuments to be visited. As Samuel Wesley said of the monument erected to one Butler, 'He asked for bread and they gave him this stone.'

Special Cakes for Sundays

The bakers of France made cakes too until one day in 1440 when a specialist corporation, the corporation of pastycook, deprived them of the right to do so. The pastycook had begun by making pies - meat pies, fish pies. Their pâté de payre (pear tart) had a layer of crème pâtissière under the fruit. They also sold wine. Some of their creations are still in existence, such as almond croquembouche or cracknels, marzipan turnovers, cream cheese tarts, and cream darioles. They also made biscuits, including the famous Reims biscuits; the word in French is used both for biscuits in the English sense and for a type of plain sponge cake, but in any case these biscuits were bis cot 'twice cooked' - hence the name in both French and English. Even flaky pastry, the invention of which has been attributed to a cook employed by Catherine de Medici, already existed in the fifteenth century.

THE HISTORY OF BREAD AND CAKES

Romans had known how to make a kind of flaky pastry sheet by sheet, like modern filo pastry, but the new method of adding butter, folding and rolling meant that the pastry would rise and form sheets as it did so. Louis XI's favourite marzipan turnovers were made with flaky pastry. Fritters could be bought from pastycooks or made at home, like the rather similar schaudle and gimbette, a kind of jumble. Oubliers started as a sort of wafer, like the wafers used for the Host (their name comes from panes oblivionis) and then became thicker like waffles, cooked between two irons. The waffle-makers broke away from the pastycooks and formed a separate corporation. Oubliers were sold in the streets.

With Arnaud de Villeneuve and his 'healthy' recipes, the late Middle Ages saw a craze for almond cakes such as pygmaudos, allegedly an aphrodisiac. Many such delicacies came to France with Catherine de Medici, they included Italian delicacies such as macaroons and frangipane (flaky pastry filled with almond cream, invented by a member of the Fosspagne family of Rouen).

From the sixteenth century onwards convents made biscuits and fritters to be sold in aid of good works. One convent at Nancy was famous just after the Revolution for its macaroons. Missionary nuns took their talents as pastycooks to the French colonies. The nuns of Lima had a great reputation after the sixteenth century, and chocolate owes a great deal to the convents. The puff pastries called flanfoullentinos were first made in the seventeenth century in a convent of that name whose inmates offered the pastries to their guests.

Sugar and chocolate had now arrived on the scene; from the time of Louis XIV onwards those delicacies became extremely popular, as we shall see later. Butter, in widespread use at least in the northern half of France, was the secret of making biscuits, the most famous were sold at Flechner's on the corner of the rue Saint-Anne and the rue Saint-Paul in Paris. Croissants came from Vienna at the same times as ices. Their crescent shape was supposed to celebrate the defeat of the Turks in the siege of 1683. It was said that a baker going to bake a batch of bread had raised the alarm.

The Twelfth Night cake, eaten in France and England alike and containing a bean, started in France as the gourdet, a cake very popular at Court in the sixteenth century. It was invented by a monk of that name who made cakes at the Louvre palace when not busy hearing the confessions of King Henri III's favourites. Its dough was of the savarin type, raised either with beer yeast or baker's yeast, of the same kind as the Alsatian kugelhopf, which the monk must have known. The guests attending a gathering were divided by seven, and a gourdet was made for each set, in an octagonal mould so that there would be a slice left for God each time. The bakers, despite the rift between them and the pastycooks, clung to their right to make Twelfth Night cakes. The corporation sent one to the King of France every year, thus bitterly offending the pastycooks, who took the matter to law and in 1718 obtained a legal ruling that no one who was not a pastycook might use butter, eggs and sugar in making cakes for sale. But there were such food shortages in 1740 that no Twelfth Night cakes were allowed to be made, even by pastycooks.
Wedding cakes were now architectural masterpieces of the pastrycook's art, fashioned out of intricately assembled sweetmeats. It became fashionable in the seventeenth century to celebrate christenings with wonderful cakes as well. But simpler, homely cakes were regional specialties of the French provinces, while ursats were a family treat, their pastry cases filled with fruit in season or with crème patisserie.

The kugelhopf was made in Lorraine before it became an Alsation specialty, and came from Poland with the early eighteenth-century King Stanislas, who abdicated his crown in 1736 and received the duchies of Lorraine and Bar. Sweetened yeast cakes of this kind were common in Austria, Poland and Silesia. Legend has it that the King splashed his kugelhopf generously with rum and Malaga-flavoured syrup intending to flambé it for fun, and called this invention by the name of Ali Baba, being very fond of that hero of the Thousand and One Nights, his bedside reading. After his death, his pastrycook went to Paris and exploited his royal master's invention commercially. The baba au rhum soon became known simply as a baba.

There were many yeast cakes and buns and fruit breads in the British Isles as well; these were generally regional specialties, made of an enriched dough that might contain butter, milk, sugar and dried fruit, spices or other flavourings. They included the Scotch bun, various spice cakes and saffron cakes, Sally Lunn (the name may be a corruption of French saule lune, a sun and moon cake), Chelsea and Bath buns, and hot cross buns traditionally eaten on Good Friday.

Gastronomy flourished in the nineteenth century, when the Genoese sponge cake was first invented. Known as pain de Gênes in France, it should not be confused with the génoise which is a kind of almond topping. Its name celebrates the siege of the city of Genoa by Massena in 1800. A rather grisly detail is that the cake is flavoured with almonds because all the besieged citizens had to eat before they surrendered was 50 tonnes of almonds. Madeleines, made with a basic batter of the pound-cake type, are thought to have come from Commercy, and to have been invented by a cook called Madeleine Paumier, not, as is sometimes claimed, by Talleyrand's chef Avice. Faure, a chef working for the famous pastrycook Chiboust, invented the Genoese sponge and also had a hand in the creation of the gâteau saint-honoré, so called in honour of the patron saint of pastrycooks. It is garnished with choux pastry puffs, and choux pastry is also used in making éclairs and choux à la crème, and a kind of chocolate éclair known as a religieux (reign), though no one knows why.

The art of the pastrycook has embraced various new introductions, such as glucose, cornflour, and icing sugar, and biscuit-making has now become a considerable industry.

The History of Bread and Cakes

The Ritual of Becoming a Master Baker

The new baker, after four years of practice, had to go with all the other bakers and the 'maître-cuisin' to the house of the master of the bakers, with a new earthenware jar filled with walnuts and rolled flax, and utter the following words: 'Master, I have served and completed my four years. When the assistants had confirmed the truth of his statement, the master gave him back his jar, which he was to throw against the wall of the house, and then all entered. They were given 'fire and wine', and each of them paid the master one denier in return.

A relic of this custom is found in the decree promulgated by Louis XIII. During the first three years of their training, new master bakers paid the Grand Panetier, as head of the master bakers' corporation, 52 deniers, and at the end of the three years they brought him 'a new earthenware or stoneeware pot, containing a plant of rosemary with its root, its branches being hung with comfits, oranges and other suitable fruits in season, the said pot being filled up with sugared almonds.' Later on the fire of the pot of rosemary was comminuted to a lout d'or.

The Grand Panetier, we are told in L'Etat de la France for 1749, was paid a salary of only 800 francs, and normally officiated only at great ceremonies and festivities. On such occasions, when the King left his bedchamber to go to Mass, the server of water tried three times from the top of a balcony or staircase, 'Missive ... Grand Panetier of France, set the King's table!'

In the Middle Ages the post had been more important and better paid. The Grand Panetier's office was one of the departments of the king's gêbet', and its staff consisted of the Grand Panetier himself, with a salary of 1600 francs, 12 butlers, four assistants, one man to supervise the crockery, two porters and a laundress. This staff had to set the King's table, and subsequently to wash and put away everything used: plates, dishes, cups, linen and left-over bread.

A. Dubarry, Histoire anecdotique des aliments, Paulin, Paris, 1880
Chapter 9

The History of Wine

From the Vine to Wine

Aujourd'hui, l'espace est splendide.
Sans mors, sans éperon, sans bride,
Partons à cheval sur le vin,
Pour un ciel Terreque et divin.¹

[Space is magnificent today. Riding without bit, spur or bridle, mounted on wine, let us set out for a magical and divine heaven.]

The Greeks did not actually invent wine. They did even better: in making the god Dionysus its patron, they immortalized it.

We do not know the precise geographical origin of the grapevine, *Vitis vinifera*, 'the vine that bears wine', or rather bears the grapes from which wine can be made. It is generally thought to have come from the southern Caucasus, situated between Turkey, Armenia and Iran. This is more or less where Noah, famous as the first of all drunksards, is supposed to have landed his ark after the Flood: a pleasing coincidence. If the findings of Soviet scientists are to be believed, the bases of some jars of considerable diameter containing fossilized wine lees have been found in the Mount Ararat region near traces of wood - acacia wood, not wood from the cedars of Lebanon - which may once have been part of a large ship.

However, the grapevine was already growing in Western Europe during the Miocene, the third epoch of the Tertiary period, when monkeys first made their appearance in Africa. The impression of vine leaves has been found in the tufa rock near Montpellier, much to the satisfaction of the wine-growers of the Hérault area. The pips of grapes of a pre-*vinifera* vine have been found on many Mesolithic sites such as that at Castiona outside Parma. Vines in their wild state grew all over the central part of the northern hemisphere, a temperate zone which was divided