RENÉE VALERI

The State of Food Habits Research in France

In this brief survey of food ethnology in France, only studies done by the French on their own food are dealt with.

France has produced many studies of food in the past, including cookery books, culinary and gastronomic literature, but purely ethnological studies of food phenomena are much more recent and have been struggling to find their proper place among the economic, technological, and historical research on the one hand, and a parascientific literature on the other.

In order to explain this, the characteristics of this earlier, scientific or gastronomic literature will first be discussed, so as to throw light on the reasons why it has been thought to fill a place which in reality belongs to ethnology. The character of the research outlined and done by the school of the *Annales* and the school of van Gennep will also be described, along with that of the few properly ethnological studies which have been done.

The title of 'father of French food ethnology' can be attributed to LeGrand d'Aussy, who in 1783 first published his "Histoire de la vie privée des Francais"[1]. This is an extremely valuable compilation of French food habits, largely based on the agricultural writings of Estienne[2] and Champier[3], dating from the second part of the 16th century, with comparative material based on the compiler's own experiences from different parts of France during the second half of the 18th century.

This is the first real treatment of existing statements concerning French food habits. Pure descriptions on the other hand, more or less strongly coloured by contemporary ideas on nutritional value and wholesomeness, are to be found during the 18th century mainly in two kinds of literature. First, there are "direct sources", first-hand descriptions from personal observations, made, for example, by travellers[4] (though for most travellers, food, however exotic, has not got the same value for their chronicles as sculpture, buildings, scenery etc.). In the public archives[5], both national and departmental, popular food habits can rarely be studied for lack of data, since their 'closed' domestic character seldom leaves any traces there, apart from an occasional account book that records the quantities bought of certain types of food. As the consumption of home produce has been the most dominant feature of the traditional diet, it is never possible to obtain a correct image of the relationship of different kinds of food to each other in this way, for the most important product need not be the one that plays the biggest part in the consumption of the producer. The one exception among the archive sources, although its quality is very uneven, is the archives of the Société Royal de Médécine[6], which among other things also contains answers to a questi-

1. P. J.-B. LeGrand d'Aussy, Histoire de la vie privée des Français, Paris 1783 (éd. Roquefort 1815).
2. Ch. Estienne, L'agriculture et la Maison rustique, Paris 1565. Liébaut, L'agriculture et la Maison rustique, augmenté 1570.
3. Champier, De Re cibaria, Lyon 1560.
4. A. Young, Voyages en France en 1787, 1788 et 1789, Paris 1931.
5. Cf. G. Thullier, Note sur les sources de l'histoire régionale de l'alimentation au XIX^e. In: *Annales* 1968:6, 1301—1318.
6. In the Archives of the Academy of Medecine, rue Bonaparte, Paris.

onnaire concerning the food habits of the population in the region where its correspondents were working, as well as about the quality of the water, the climate, the most common epidemics and illnesses about 1775—1785.

Second, descriptions occur in the various compilations from the Age of Enlightenment, e. g. the handbook on agriculture by Olivier de Serres, "Théatre d'Agriculture" (1600)[7] and the dietetic publication by DuChesne, "Pourtraict d'une parfaite santé" (1660)[8]. Those two and Lemery's "Traité des alimens"[9] later became the sources for the description of the use and preparation of different kinds of foods in a long series of encyclopedias and household books, starting with the "Encyclopédie" by Diderot[10].

Under Napoleon, inventories, Descriptions Topographiques, were made of the economical and geographical resources of the various departements. These were of varying value, depending on the author and his degree of interest, if any, in food habits. One of the best, with a lot of details on the food of peasants, towns' people and mountain dwellers, is by Laboulinière[11]. The description of Aude[12] is also good but is coloured by the fact that the author is a baron. During the second half of the century these were followed by the works of rural economists, often very penetrating and full of valuable details. Their concern, however, was mainly with the peasant economy as such, and the food habits are just a part of their description of the living conditions of different social groups, such as proprietors, tenants and day-labourers. There is good material of this kind, for instance, in F. Pariset, "Economie rurale de la Montagne Noire", 1882[13]. From the middle of the century onwards, one can also find articles in local reviews dealing with local food habits. They are, however, always purely descriptive of the food habits in the locality according to some older source that has fallen into the hands of an amateur historian, or represent a compilation of several documents to make a historical sequence.

This pseudo-science should not be confused with two other kinds of literature from the same period. On the one hand, there are the very useful topographical descriptions where the author strives to give an objective image of different aspects of the country. An example is Ardouin-Dumazet, "Voyage en France"[14], where the author travelled through the whole of France describing every characteristic of the different regions, what he saw for himself as well as what he was told by the inhabitants. On the other hand, there are authors who tried to make a serious history of food, the most successful being L. Bourdeau, "Histoire de

7. Olivier de Serres, Théatre d'Agriculture, Paris 1600.
8. Joseph du Chesne, Pourtraict d'une parfaite santé, Paris 1660.
9. Louis Lémery, Traité des alimens, Paris 1702. Augm. by J. Bruhier 1755.
10. Diderot-d'Alembert, Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné ... Paris et Neuchatel, 1751—1772.
11. P. Laboulinière, Manuel statistique du dép. des Hautes-Pyrénées, Tarbes 1813.
12. Baron le Trouvé, Déscription générale et statistique du dép. de l'Aude. Paris 1818.
13. F. Pariset, Economie rurale de la Montagne Noire, Paris 1882.
14. Ardouin-Dumazet, Voyage en France 1901 (about 40 vol.)

l'alimentation" (1894)[15]. It has become a classic, although the shortcomings — impossible to avoid in a work of such wide scope — become more and more evident as knowledge advances. This book, of course, like the later one by A. Gottschalk, "Histoire de l'alimentation et de la gastronomie ..."[16], deals with several countries, and not only France.

Another type of literature on food began to flourish during the first half of the 19th century with Grimond de La Reynière and Brillat-Savarin, and seems to be having a revival in our days, e. g. with the works of R. J. Courtine[17]. Gr. de La Reynière, "l'Almanach des gourmands" (1803)[18] was followed by a number of books on "l'Art culinaire" by writers and gourmets forming, especially from the Restoration onwards, a literature extensive enough to fill the voluminous "Bibliographie gastronomique" by G. Vicaire[19].

Brillat-Savarin was in a way a successor and perhaps a pupil of Lémery and his colleagues, but started a new kind of approach to food research which he baptized gastronomy, "physiologie du goût"[20]. Cookery to Brillat-Savarin and his successors however, was bourgeois cookery, and that remained the case until a hundred years later when with the development of folklore studies and interest in regional customs, one of his "pupils", the journalist expert on gastronomy and the accepted specialist on French 'haute cuisine', Curnonsky, discovered the regional cookery of France, and united the two fields (gastronomy and folklore) in a few books which form very valuable inventories (especially as they are the only ones that are fairly complete) of French regional cookery[21]. However, they have one serious lack in that they never give the source of the information nor the recipes. They are very exhaustive from the culinary point of view and, somewhat absurdly, are the most often cited works in the bibliography of literature on food and food habits (divided into provinces) made by Arnold van Gennep in 1937[22].

In the introduction to the part of the bibliography concerning food habits called "Folklore épulaire" (alimentation, cuisine), v. Gennep explains what falls within its limits, namely, "certain local dishes (and their recipes) and, on the other hand, those which without being local, are only prepared on certain, more or

15. L. Bourdeau, Histoire de l'alimentation; substances alimentaires, procédés de conservation, histoire de la cuisine. Etudes d'hist. générale, Paris 1894.
16. A. Gottschalk, Histoire de l'alimentation et de la gastronomie depuis la Préhistoire jusqu'à nos jours. Paris 1948.
17. Weekly chronicles in *Le Monde* and a number of books, for instance: R. J. Courtine, La gastronomie (Coll. Que sais-je?), Paris 1970.
18. Gr. de La Reynière, L'Almanach des gourmands. Paris 1803.
19. G. Vicaire, Bibliographie gastronomique. Paris 1890.
20. J.-A. Brillat-Savarin, La Physiologie du goût. Paris 1825.
21. Curnonsky (pseud. de Sailland, Maurice)-M. Ruoff, La France gastronomique; guide des merveilles culinaires et des bonnes auberges françaises. Paris 1920 — Curnonsky-A. de Croze, Le trésor gastronomique de la France; répertoire des spécialités gourmandes des trente-deux provinces. Paris 1933. — A. de Croze, Les plats régionaux de France. Paris 1928.
22. A. van Gennep, Manuel de Folklore français contemporain; t. IV, bibl. méthodique (fin) ... p. 923—938. Paris 1938.

less ceremonial occasions (periodic feasts, passage and family feasts, episodical feasts)". He also points out that he cannot guarantee that all the regional recipes are really originally regional, that many of them have been obtained in hotels or restaurants. He also states that the literature on the slaughter of the pig is of no interest, that the preparation is the same in different parts of France. In this he is wrong. He also, unfortunately, gives folklore very strict limits: "The economical, statistical and demographic aspects of the food of peasants, working class people and the bourgeoisie is not within the compass of folklore". He also adds an important point that "the regionalist gastronomic movement has really developed only since the war and with the increase in use of the automobile". At this time there awoke, in fact, an interest in regional French food and perhaps a realisation that it was something quite different from the wellknown 'French Food' of Paris restaurants and bourgeois cookery. There was a movement towards discovering French folk culture by the French themselves between the wars, especially during the 1930s, culminating in the exhibition of 1937. Two rather short-lived journals of regional food, "La France á table" and "La cuisine régionale", were founded in 1934 and 1936 respectively. At the same time an inquiry by questionnaires was started by the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires on "Traditional popular food" (l'Alimentation populaire traditionelle, Commission des Recherches Collectives[23], founded in 1935 by L. Febvre), the answers to which are now on microfilms in the archives of the Museé des Arts et Traditions Populaires. The geographical distribution of these answers is quite uneven, and the information about what kind of person wrote the answer is often lacking, but in spite of this the material can give very useful information. Unfortunately, it has been neglected by the scholars (except for the parts on fat, discussed below). A short time after the general questionnaire had been sent out, a more detailed list of questions on "fat used for food-preparation" was sent out. The distribution of answers was different from that of the first questionnaire, and was more dense. These results were treated by Lucien Febvre for the 1st Congrès national de folklore[24], the maps being made by M. Maget. The subject was then re-examined by J. J. Hémardinquer[25], with a reprint of the article by L. Febvre in the *Annales* 1961.

The maps showed a very interesting distributional pattern, with three different parts of the country showing the use of butter, olive oil and pork or goose fat, giving some indication of the different food systems in France and their distribution and overlapping. Unfortunately this theme has not been followed up by later studies.

The main weakness of the pupils or successors of van Gennep is that they have often written single articles on one dish or topic, without trying to place it in

23. This was the third questionnaire sent out by C. R. C.

24. L. Febvre, Essai de cartes des graisses de cuisine en France. In: *Travaux du 1er Congrès national de Folklore.* Paris-Tours 1938. — See also: Encyclopédie Française t. XIV, ch. V, La ségregation alimentaire.

25. J.-J. Hémardinquer, Essai de cartes des graisses de cuisine en France. In: *Annales* 1961:4, p. 747—771.

a general pattern . Others describe the cookery of a region, but rarely attempt analysis or further explanations of exactly whose food habits (class, social and professional categories, ages etc.) they are describing, nor of the variations within the regions they describe. There are, of course, exceptions, e. g. Nelli[26], Veyret-Verner[27], Seguin[28], Dion[29].

The bibliographical work was re-started by M. L. Tenèze in 1954 with "Bibliographie d'ethnographie française" (Revue des Arts et Traditions Populaires, 1956 et seq.).

A NEW TENDENCY WAS FORTHCOMING in the early 1960s, following on the two inquiries directed by L. Febvre, and in some measure complementing the van Gennep school. Those responsible were mainly agrarian and economic historians. J. Meuvret and E. Le Roy Ladurie and their pupils at l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes have been studying the history of famines and of periods of undernourishment and their consequences in epidemics and the lowering of birth rates. The most important and far-reaching contribution to food study, however, is the "Enquête ouverte" : Vie materielle et comportement biologique" of the quarterly Annales S. C. E.[30], founded in 1961 by F. Braudel. So far, about twenty bulletins (often with 2—3 short articles apiece) have been published, most of them dealing with food. Many of these are of great interest for the ethnology of food, e. g. J. J. Hémardinquer : 1961[31], A. Poitrineau : 1962[32], B. Kerbley : 1962[33], P. Couperie : 1963[34], G. Thullier : 1968[35], R. J. Bernard : 1969[36].

It is characteristic of these studies, however, that the economical and social factors, and the agrarian systems are used to explain everything. Food is only considered in statistical quantities and caloric value. This results in a kind of ethnology which neglects cultural factors and takes into consideration a fairly non-differentiated society or, on the other hand, brings out an isolated case without being able to say how representative it is, and what relationship it has with other contemporary food habits in the same area.

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26. R. Nelli, L'alimentation en Languedoc et dans le comté de Foix de 1850 à nos jours. In: *Folklore*, Carcassonne 1950.
27. G. Veyret-Verner, Les différents types de régime alimentaire: Essai d'interprétation géographique. In: *Revue de géogr. alpine*, Grenoble 1957:XLV.
28. J. Seguin, Vieux, mangers, vieux parlers bas-normands. Paris 1935.
29. R. Dion, Histoire de la vigne et du vin en France, des origines au XIX[e] siècle. Paris 1959.
30. *Annales, Sociétes. Civilisations. Economies.* Enquêtes ouvertes: Vie matérielle et comportement biologique. Paris 1961:3.
31. J. J. Hémardinquer, En France aujourd'hui: Données quantitatives sur les consommations alimentaires. In: *Annales* 1961:3. — Hémardinquer, Essai de cartes des graisses de cuisine en France. Avec L. Febvre. In: *Annales* 1961:4.
32. A. Poitrineau, L'alimentation populaire en Auvergne au XVIII[e] s. In: *Annales* 1962:2.
33. B. Kerbley, L'évolution de l'alimentation rurale en Russie (1896—1960). In: *Annales* 1962:5.
34. P. Couperie, L'alimentation au XVII[e] s. Les marchés de pourvoierie. In: *Annales* 1963:8.
35. See note 5.
36. R. J. Bernard, L'alimentation paysanne en Gévaudan au XVIII[e] s. In: *Annales* 1969:6.

Against this background stand two studies which attempt to give a larger part to cultural factors. The first is a synthesis by F. Braudel[37] of food habits and food production in the modern era, mainly in Western Europe. The other, by J. P. Aron[38], is more of a monograph that deals with a crucial period in the history of French cookery and food consumption, the first half of the 19th century, which saw the shaping of Parisian restaurant cookery and of its ideological reflection, 'gastronomy'. Nevertheless, these studies lack any attempt at analysing the food system as a cultural entity.

Few of the ethnologists themselves have been working in France. Most of the research is carried out abroad, mainly in the French colonies, nowadays in a wide range of countries, sometimes in Europe but preferably farther away. The work of those have worked in France (and also abroad), has been dominated by the techno-economic perspective, especially during the 1950s[39], with a tendency to relate everything to technology, leaving little place to food, unless as an important part of the household budget.

In 1965 Lévi-Strauss published "Le Triangle Culinaire"[40], an attempt to transfer the structuralist method to food study. He found in analysing cooking methods that they can be classified as if in a triangle, the angles of which are "cru", "cuit" and "pourri" (raw, cooked and rotten). Inside this triangle there is a smaller one with fried, smoked and boiled at the angles. He also discussed the intermediate forms and gave examples of the differences between e. g. the use of boiled and fried ('grille') food which exists in many traditional societies. This interesting article, reprinted in a somewhat changed form in the third volume of Lévi-Strauss' Mythologies, "Les Manières de Table"[41], as "Petit Traité d'Ethnologie culinaire", must be considered the most revolutionary event in French food research for many years.

A pupil of his, Y. Verdier, is now starting to give food ethnology a place of its own in French research. Her first study, "Repas bas-normands"[42], is based on meals, considered in their daily, weekly and annual setting, this being a "way to define the ordinary and the extra-ordinary and to obtain a model for the food categories of the two villages considered". In 1969 she published, also in *l'Homme*, an outline for food ethnology[43] with suggestions for subjects of study. It is to be hoped that this appeal will be heard.

IT MIGHT SEEM STRANGE THAT A COUNTRY LIKE FRANCE, the food of which has a world-wide renown, lacks any serious and penetrating literature on what the

37. F. Braudel, Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme (XV^{e}-XVIII^{e}s. s.) Paris 1967.
38. J.-P. Aron, Essai sur la sensibilité alimentaire à Paris au 19^{e} s. Paris 1967 (Cahier des Annales 25).
39. L. Wylie, A village in the Vaucluse. 1957.
40. L. Bernot et R. Blancard, Nouville, un village français. Paris 1953.
41. C. Lévi-Strauss, Le triangle culinaire. In: *l'Arc* 26, 1965, p. 19—29.
42. C. Lévi-Strauss, L'Origine des Manières de Table, Paris 1969, p. 396—411.
43. Y. Verdier, Repas bas-normands. In: *L'Homme*, 1966, p. 92—111 (Paris).

French people *really* eat, why and when[44]. The explanation probably lies in a convergence of various factors. On the one hand, the history of French food as well as of other parts of French culture, from the Renaissance onwards, often becomes the history of the food of the royalty and upper classes. This might be a consequence of the very strong policy of centralization started in France at that time. On the other hand, as J. P. Aron has pointed out, after the Revolution the bourgeoisie adopted the food of the nobility, as a means of acquiring the class-prestige it wanted, forgetting the more popular food it had previously shared with the lower classes. Moreover, this process was connected with the standardisation of national upper-class habits, the provincials taking the bourgeois of Paris as a model. This fact contributed to the overcoming of regional differences which were common before the Revolution even amongst the middle classes. The disdain for popular food was a part of the general disdain for the popular and provincial culture.

Later, the 'gastronomes' gave the Parisian restaurant food habits the supreme place in their philosophy of food, looking with contempt at French food in the regions. It is this ideology of food that for long appears to have prevented French *students* from being aware of a way of cooking which did not correspond to the laws of 'gastronomy'. It is thus only in more recent years, with the revival of a general interest in peasant and regional culture, that a new way of looking at food, more ethnologically orientated, has arisen.

44. Y. Verdier, Pour une ethnologie culinaire. In: *L'Homme* 1969, p. 49—57.

45. The bibliographic notes are just a few examples of the French literature on food and food habits. A more complete bibliography is found in v. Gennep (see note 22), *Revue des Arts et Trad. pop.* (1954 —). We also recommend the bulletins of the *Annales* (see note 27) and the references cited there.