



Cuisine, Gastronomy and Medicine in the Middle Ages : A Reappraisal

Bruno Laurioux

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MESA DOS SENTIDOS & SENTIDOS DA MESA

VOLUME I

Carmen Soares
Anny Jackeline Torres Silveira
Bruno Laurioux

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Destina-se esta coleção a publicar textos resultantes da investigação de membros da rede transnacional DIAITA: Património Alimentar da Lusofonia. As obras consistem em estudos aprofundados e, na maioria das vezes, de carácter interdisciplinar sobre uma temática fundamental para o desenhar de um património e identidade culturais comuns à população falante da língua portuguesa: a história e as culturas da alimentação. A pesquisa incide numa análise científica das fontes, sejam elas escritas, materiais ou iconográficas. Daí denominar-se a série DIAITA de *Scripta* - numa alusão tanto à tradução, ao estudo e à publicação de fontes (quer inéditas quer indisponíveis em português, caso dos textos clássicos, gregos e latinos, matriciais para o conhecimento do padrão alimentar mediterrânico), como a monografias. O subtítulo *Realia*, por seu lado, cobre publicações elaboradas na sequência de estudos sobre as “materialidades” que permitem conhecer a história e as culturas da alimentação.

Carmen Soares é Professora Catedrática da Universidade de Coimbra (Faculdade de Letras). Tem desenvolvido a sua investigação, ensino e publicações nas áreas das Culturas, Literaturas e Línguas Clássicas, da História da Grécia Antiga e da História e Culturas da Alimentação, da Dietética e do Património Alimentar. Desempenha funções de Coordenadora Científica do Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos e de Diretora do doutoramento em “Patrimónios Alimentares: Culturas e Identidades”.

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MESA DOS SENTIDOS & SENTIDOS DA MESA

VOLUME I

**Carmen Soares
Anny Jackeline Torres Silveira
Bruno Laurioux**

**IMPrensa da Universidade de Coimbra
COIMBRA UNIVERSITY PRESS**

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Carmen Soares, Anny Jackeline Torres Silveira, Bruno Laurioux

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FOREWORD

In the broadest sense of the word, “table” refers to universes where products, people and ideas interact with each other. Food is part of this and is considered from all its pre-consumer stages: plant growing and harvesting, husbandry and hunting, production of processed food, distribution and sale, and cooking. By engaging multiple activities and arts (agriculture, cooking, dietetics, trade, etiquette, aesthetics and visual arts), the “table” brings together several agents of production (particularly cooks, serving staff and cultural entertainers), and also the table companions whose interaction happens in a unique and exclusive communication time and space.

A place for sustenance, but also of delight, learning, worship, and sociability, each “table” depicts mindsets and serves as a metaphor for values enabling the transformation of those who interact and participate in it. The “table” is, therefore, a space for the senses, both physiological and intellectual. The sensory perception of the products, spaces and people span all the food chain and its agents. Smells, sounds, tastes, colours, and textures are perceived by those who prepare and consume goods and experiences out of different ingredients-food-medicine.

From the synesthetic experience brought by food, as well as by its surrounding environments, comes the **Table of the Senses**, inseparable of the multiple cultural, political, religious, aesthetic, social and economic meanings around it. These **Senses of the Table** are captured and transmitted through different ways (written, oral, pictorial, or material).

Vol. I of *Table of the Senses & Senses of the Table* gathers 16 chapters, organized around three central themes. It starts presenting four studies on **Senses at the Table (Part I)**. At the beginning, ch. 1 focuses on verifying the scientific significance for gastronomy of the pre-history of mankind, based on archaeological, literary, and comparative studies between today’s hunting and gathering communities and primates. Then, there are two reflections on Greek classical antiquity realities, one focused on the analysis of wine vocabulary, used to express wine’s colour, smell, taste and texture, found on literary texts (ch. 2), and the other centred on the main role cooks portrayed in Greek comedy, recognized in the pleasure of taste, and how it legitimized their profession as a form of knowledge or expertise (ch. 3). Ch. 4 is about the literary and pictorial presence of the senses at the table of Spanish Modern Age. Royal and court banquets displayed tables of delicacies, as they were magnificently portrayed in Brueghel-Rubens’s “Five Senses”, or in the fictional abundance in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*.

Part II – Therapeutic table, healthy table, and unhealthy table presents seven studies reflecting the sometimes harmonious, sometimes conflictual relationship between food and health. The existence of a gastronomic discourse in the Middle Ages is demonstrated in ch. 5, leading to a re-evaluation of the relationships between cooking, gastronomy and medicine. Bread, the primordial food since classical antiquity, is an object of study for the long term, bearing in mind the demonstration of its consumption, simultaneously as food and preventive medicine, in medieval and modern Portugal (ch. 6). The interest in the therapeutic properties of food made Italian humanist doctors rediscover Latin farming treatises, as sources of knowledge, not yet corrupted by medieval authors (ch. 7). The analysis of a 1500s manuscript, by an Italian doctor at the service of Princess Joanna of Austria, King Sebastian of Portugal's mother, allows us to get acquainted with the medical practice of the time, particularly a set of recipes and remedies against indispositions and diseases related to eating habits (ch. 8). Due to their sweet taste and recognized medicinal properties, canned fruit quickly moved from the apothecaries' shelves to become confectioners' goods. In the 18th century Barcelona this even caused several conflicts between agents of the two trades (ch. 9). Religious houses had their own apothecaries, and it is easy to understand how they worked, mainly due to the study of their expense's registries, such as the Book of Revenue and Expenditure of the convent of Santa Anna 1859 – 1871, in Coimbra (ch. 10). Closing Part II, we have an analysis of the effects of the Spanish influenza pandemic on the food habits of the sick and the healthy in Brazil in 1918 (ch. 11).

Eating by/with pleasure, eating for physiological need, or eating wisely are different contexts discussed in **Part III's Table of delights, table of sustenance, economic table**. Throughout the five chapters, the reader faces four fictional and real portraits of Brazil, as a colony and as an independent country, and one comparing Italy and the Soviet Union after World War II. The *Treatise of the Land of Brazil*, by Pero Magalhães de Gândavo, allows the reflection on the abundance of delights as a promise to the future Portuguese settlers (ch. 12). Clearly opposed to this is famine, present in two case studies: mid-19th century Ceará, where the changes in the human landscape (rural exodus) and natural disasters (such as drought) are behind it (ch. 13); scourged by the war, Italy and the Soviet Union published cook books which allow us to understand today the countries' strategies to fight food shortage, ensuring the survival of middle and lower classes, but also how they worked as ideological propaganda (ch. 14). At the end of the book, there are two case studies that have in common the influence of public policies in the construction of a Brazilian food heritage and in institutional food practices. Firstly, we analyse four products registered as national intangible cultural heritage (cheese of Minas Gerais, "brote capixaba", Bahia's acarajé and the sweets of Pelotas) and two as municipal heritage (Pouso Alegre's cornflour pastry and Nova Lima's "queca"), correlating factors such as taste, survival and economy

(ch. 15). Finally we study the impact of the National School Food Program and which food was offered Paraná's public state schools in the 1990s and 2000s, reaching the conclusion that low nutritional value, along with sugary refined cereals and fat from processed food, contributed to the students' health problems (ch. 16).

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CUISINE, GASTRONOMY AND MEDICINE IN THE MIDDLE AGES: A REAPPRAISAL

COZINHA, GASTRONOMIA E MEDICINA NA IDADE MÉDIA: UMA REAVALIAÇÃO

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ABSTRACT: The link between cuisine and medicine has been put by the late Jean-Louis Flandrin in the core of an history of food representations, tastes and practices in Europe. From the 17th and 18th centuries, this link would have become less tight, allowing the emergence of an independent gastronomy which had its own norms and principles. Such a theory postulates that in the Middle Ages 1) cuisine and medicine kept together a close and even a consubstantial relationship and 2) a clearly identified gastronomy did not exist. By studying some specific forms – as the list – which characterize a gastronomical discourse and allow to distinguish it from both the culinary and the medical discourse, this paper wants to reconsider the complex relationships between three knowledges.

Keywords: Middle Ages; European Food History; Gastronomy; Culinary History; History of medicine.

According to what we can call the “Flandrin’s theory”, cuisine and medicine were closely linked up in the Middle Ages. When this connection has disappeared or at least has faded – during the “Ancient Regime” and the 19th century –, gastronomy could appear as a distinct and independent discourse: it was the “emancipation of gourmandize” (“émancipation de la gastronomie”), as Jean-Louis Flandrin wrote in a little-known paper¹. This is obviously a crucial point, with implications not only in the history of food habits and representations, but also, more broadly, in the cultural history of Modern Europe.

But the starting point of Flandrin’s argument is situated in the Middle Ages, especially the Late Middle Ages. When it was hypothesized by him in

¹ Flandrin 1993: 186-192.

1993, this theory was indeed based on two medievalists' important PhD, which were still unedited – and unfortunately remain unedited today².

Flandrin's theory was adopted enthusiastically by Modernists like Florent Quellier, and even by Medievalists like Terence Scully³. The interpenetration of cuisine and medicine became an article of faith, a dogma of Food History.

Nevertheless, in the last thirty years much research has been done, especially on the core of the argument, that is to say Medieval dietetics, as expressed by physicians. The important book that Marilyn Nicoud wrote on *Regimina Sanitatis* is focused on 13th–15th centuries⁴, just after the introduction of the Greco-Arabic medicine and dietetics in Western medical schools, through translations of works written by Isaac al-Israëli⁵ or Ibn Butlân⁶, among others.

Even before the Salerno “take-off”, Medieval dietetics existed and its study affords some interesting insights on the changing relationships between cuisine and medicine and on some food habits during the Early Middle Ages⁷.

In culinary affairs, too, the research has progressed during the last decades. Recently a team of philologists and historians discovered in one Cambridge library a hitherto unknown collection of recipes dating back to the 12th century⁸. These recipes were undoubtedly devoted to cooking⁹ but their style is quite different from most of later cookbooks¹⁰, which were produced by professional cooks working inside great princely court¹¹. The use of Latin and the context

² Grieco 1987, to be published in Chicago University Press; see the partial abstract in Grieco 1999, reedited under the same title in Grieco 2019:104-117. Patni 1989.

³ Quellier 2010; Scully 1995.

⁴ Nicoud 2007.

⁵ Jewish physician working mainly in Kairouan during the 10th and 11th c. Eighty-two copies of his *Universal and / or Particular Diets*, translated in Latin at the end of 11th century, are still known (Nicoud 2007: vol. II, 989-1006).

⁶ Ibn Butlân, a physician of the 11th century born in Bagdad and dead in Antioch, was the author of a Health manual on the six non-natural things, known as the *Tables of Health* (*Ṭaḡwīm al-Sibḥa*) and translated in Latin between 1254 and 1266 under the title of *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, with an obvious success: at least 29 manuscripts of the complete translation, and 9 for the short version, which is richly illustrated, are preserved. Edition of the Arabic Text and French translation by Elkhadem 1990. For the Latin text, see the recent article by Mendelsohn 2013, with related bibliography.

⁷ Pucci Donati 2007; Laurioux 2016.

⁸ Cambridge, Sidney Sussex College Library, MS Δ 3.6., f. 19r-v, ed. by Gasper & Wallis 2016.

⁹ The first rubric of the collection, which could have been its title, says: “*Incipiunt diversa genera pictavensium salsamentorum*”, that Gasper and Wallis translate as “Here begins various kinds of Poitou condiments” (Gasper & Wallis 2016: 1384).

¹⁰ See the first recipe: “*Petrosilini et salvie succum cum aceto distemperatum cum pipere et allio. Fortiter trito commisce et cum his carnem sulcitam comede*” (ibid.).

¹¹ Laurioux 1997a.

of a manuscript which is mainly medical indicates another social and cultural milieu, that of learned physicians¹².

But in this paper, I would like to insist on the third term of the threesome, that is to say gastronomy. Like the “third man” in the famous movie by Carol Reed, we have to search for it but it is maybe the most important character of the story¹³.

1. We have to *search* for gastronomy because, in the Middle Ages, it remains impossible as an explicit discourse. The reason is ideological: for the Medieval Church, seeking pleasure in food belongs to *gula*¹⁴.

Gula was considered by theologians as one of the seven “capital sins” that can lead Christians to hell. Pride, avarice, anger, lust, sloth, envy, are not sins strictly speaking but vices, perverse tendencies that can create sins, the chapter heading (this is the meaning of *capita*) of criminal acts that are condemned by Christian ethics¹⁵. It is also the case for *gula*. One manuscript of *Verger de Soulas* (*Orchard of Consolation*), copied around 1300, gives a very concrete image of this problem¹⁶. From the *gula* fruit spring seven leaves, that is to say seven conducts, results of *gula* and all to be condemned: stupid joy (*inepta letitia*), indecency (*scurrilitas*), stupor of senses (*ebetudo sensus*), filth (*immunditia*), logorrhoea (*multiloquium*), debauchery (*crapula*) and drunkenness (*ebrietas*)¹⁷. Nothing that can be celebrated in a discourse with the benediction of the Church.

The usual translation in English as “greed” or in French as “gourmandise” does not fit with the complete meaning of the Latin *gula*. It insists on the quantitative aspect, the gluttony. But in *gula*, there was also a qualitative dimension, that middle French translated by “friandise”¹⁸.

One of the most important scholars of 13th century, bishop Robert Grosseteste distinguished six sins linked to taste: 1. “consuming immoderately food and drink” (*sumere immoderate cibum et potum*); 2. “enjoying fine meals” (*delectatio in delicatis prandiis*); 3. “taking care of seasoning” (*procuratio salsamento-*

¹² For this milieu and its importance in the production of cookbooks, see Laurioux 2006a: 237-238; Laurioux 1997b: 244-245; Weiss-Amer 1992.

¹³ See the illuminating remarks of Gasper & Wallis 2016: 1382-1383.

¹⁴ See the summaries given by Quellier 2010: 15-43; Laurioux 2011: 43-47; Montanari 2015: 125-152.

¹⁵ Casagrande & Vecchio 2003.

¹⁶ Paris, BnF, MS fr. 9220, f. 6r; see the picture in Laurioux 2011: ill. 1.

¹⁷ Laurioux 2011: 44, ill. 25. This typology was already present in the *Moralia in Job* (XXXI, 45, 87) by Gregory the Great (6th century): “*De ventris ingluvie, ineptia laetitia, scurrilitas, immundicia, multiloquium, ebetudo sensus circa intellegentiam propagantur*” (quoted by Barata Dias 2014: 86). About the building of the *gula* and *gastrimargia* notions, see Montanari & Prosperi 2012: 7-55.

¹⁸ As in the *Condamnation de Banquet* by Nicole de la Chesnaye (beginning of the 16th century). See Laurioux 2011: 65.

rum); 4. “eating big lunches with avidity and pleasure” (*sumere grossa prandia cum aviditate et delectatione*); 5. “beginning to eat without need and finishing to eat in pleasure” (*incipere ex necessitate et terminare in delectatione*); 6. “wishing to eat before the canonical hours” (*desiderare prevenire horas canonicas*)¹⁹.

The scandal here is clearly to seek pleasure (*delectatio*). If sins nr 1, 4 and 6 were the fact of a glutton, nr 2, 3 and 5 can be attributed to a person that we would call today a “gastronome” or a “gourmet”.

2. In fact, the figure of “gastronome” was not unknown in the moral and theological literature that Robert Grosseteste probably read. Some of the most characteristic authors of the “Renaissance of the Twelfth century”, such as Guillaume de Conches, Hugues de Fouilloy or Alain de Lille, gave very vivid descriptions of persons who make “a God of their stomach”²⁰. These persons were not called gastronomes – and it is not surprising because the word *gastromia*, already rare in Ancient Greek²¹, had been totally forgotten in Western Europe until it came back in some texts of the 16th and 17th centuries²².

The most precise author is probably Hugues de Saint-Victor, master of an important Parisian monastic school during the first half of the 12th century²³. In one of his more widespread textbooks, the *Training for Novices* (*Institutione novitiorum*)²⁴, he explains to his pupils that food discipline requires knowing not only *how much* and *how* they must eat (*quantum et quomodo sumat*) but also *what*

¹⁹ Casagrande 2002: 49.

²⁰ Bible, *Epistle to Philippians*, 3, 19: “(17) *Imitatores mei estote, fratres, et observate eos qui ita ambulant sicut habetis formam nos. (18) Multi enim ambulant quos saepe dicebam vobis, nunc autem et flens dico, inimicos crucis Christi, (19) quorum finis interitus, quorum deus venter et gloria in confusione ipsorum, qui terrena sapiunt.*” Interestingly, this sentence, that Saint Paul had probably directed against Christians who wanted to impose the Jewish food prohibitions to new converted Pagans, was interpreted as a moral condemnation of *gula*. See for instance Hugues de Fouilloy: “*Occidit enim pingues eorum quorum deus venter est. Deo si quidem ventri templum est coquina, altare, mensa, ministri coci, immolate pecudes, parate carnes, fumus incensorum, odor saporum.*” (*De claustris anime*, middle of the 12th century, quoted by Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum Historiale*, XXVIII, 41, “De cibo exquisito”).

²¹ It was just used by Chrysippus alleging that it was the title of the famous poem by Arcestratus (as related by Atheneus 1969:18-19). The modern critic believes that the real title of Arcestratus’ poem was rather *Life of Pleasure* (*hedupathia*): Olson & Sens 2000. See also García Soler 2012.

²² The occasion was the translations of Atheneus’s *Deipnosophists* in Latin, first by Natale Conti, *Athenaei* 1556, and later by Jacques Daléchamps, *Athenaei* 1583, and in French by Michel de Marolles, *Athénée* 1680: 7, § VII. See Laurioux 2020: 49.

²³ Poirel 1998.

²⁴ Known by 238 manuscripts, according to the *Fama* database: <http://fama.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/268352>. I used *Hugonis de S. Victore* 1854: col. 925-952; see also *Hugues de Saint-Victor* 1997: 5-116.

they must eat (*quid sumat*)²⁵. In fact, Hugues exposed at length all the foods that his pupils were not supposed to eat, if they did not want to sin. Precisely everything that the Medieval gourmets liked.

Thanks to Hugues' description, we know that Medieval gourmets expect to get very (Hugues says *too much*) precious and delicious food (*nimis pretiosa et delicata expetat*), that they ask rare and unusual food (*rara et insolita requirat*) and that they desire sumptuously and carefully prepared dishes (*laute et accurate praeeparata concupiscat*)²⁶. To stop the ardor of their appetite, Hugues says, some gourmets send a multitude of servants in every country, who climb mountains or explore deserts for unknown roots, draw very small fishes from deep abysses, collect out of season fruits in dry bushes.

“Others, Hugues adds, want to prepare food by themselves, inventing endless kinds of cooking, frying and seasoning of foods, desiring them – like pregnant women use to do – sometimes soft, sometimes hard, sometimes cold, sometimes warm, sometimes boiled, sometimes roasted, seasoned sometimes with pepper, sometimes with garlic, sometimes with cumin, sometimes with salt”²⁷.

Describing this true gastronomic passion, Hugues de Saint-Victor used words (like *excogito*)²⁸ and ideas that he could have taken from old authorities as Seneca and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* or from recent humanists – as Marbode of Rennes – who often used themselves sentences or examples of the Ancients²⁹. It does not seem that we have here only *topoi*.

3. One contemporary of Hugues, the great humanist and political philosopher John of Salisbury attests the existence of such gastronomical conducts – we

²⁵ Hugonis de S. Victore 1854: col. 950; *De institutione novitiorum*, XIX, “*De triplici observatione disciplinae in cibo, et primo quid comedendum*”.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.: “*Alii superstisiosum nimis in praeeparandis cibis studium adbibent, infinita decoctionum et frixurarum et condimentorum genera excogitantes, modo mollia, modo dura, modo frigida, modo calida, modo elixa, modo assa, modo pipere, modo allio, modo cumino, modo sale condita, secundum consuetudinem praegnantium mulierum desiderantes.*”

²⁸ Hugues used this verb also in the development of his *Didascalicon* (II, 25) about the *venatio* (hunting), one mechanical art which includes cookery: “*Pulmenti item multa sunt genera, Lucaniae farcimen, minutal, afrotum, mortisia Galatiae, et cetera quaecumque princeps coquorum excogitare potuit*” (Hugonis de Sancto Victore 1939: 42–43). This “*princeps coquorum*” probably refers to Apicius, as in Pliny's *Natural History*, 9, 64: “*M. Apicius, ad omne luxus ingenium natus, in sociorum garo – nam ea quoque res cognomen invenit – necari eos praecellens putavit atque e iecore eorum allecem excogitare*”.

²⁹ See the seventh poem (*De voluptate*) of the *Liber decem capitulorum*, written between 1096 and 1123, published in *Marbodo di Rennes* 1998: 54–64; rather free translation in French by Ropartz 1873: 61–65.

would say in the “real life”³⁰. In his famous *Policraticus* (VIII, 7, 735d), he tells of a dinner which lasted 15 hours and was organized in Southern Italy at Canosa (in Puglia) by “some rich man”. This host, as John writes,

“gathered exquisite food (*congressit delicias*) from Constantinople, Babylon³¹, Alexandria, Palestine, Tripolitania of the Barbary coast, Syria and Phoenicia, as if Sicily, Calabria, Puglia and Campania were not sufficient to provide an exquisite meal”³².

Maybe this list of provenances all around the Mediterranean Sea refers to spices then imported in Western Europe from Islamic countries³³. Southern Italy was indeed an important place for the “Saracen connection”³⁴.

Let us return to our starting point. Gastronomic conducts and interests can be observed as early as the High Middle Ages. The problem is that they were denounced more than described³⁵. We can draw a parallel with the documents about Medieval heretics which were mainly produced by theological opponents and Church prosecutors.

To find direct discourses from Medieval gourmets, we can imagine the forms that they might have taken, on the basis of gastronomic circles studied by André Tchernia for Ancient Rome³⁶. There were probably lists of renown foodstuff, recipes to prepare these foods and controversies on the best qualities of them³⁷. In fact, we *have* these texts, but embedded in other texts, which hide them: general lists like the *Concile d'Apostole*³⁸; cookbooks as the one that can

³⁰ Searching examples for the sin of *gula* – which has to be condemned of course – John pretends to find them not only in the past but in “our own age” that “has added its errors to those of our ancestors”. He identifies a guest of this banquet, probably John “Belles Mains”: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 2004: 944-45, s.v. “Canterbury, John of” (*contra Dictionary of National Biography* 1908: 197-98, s.v. “John Belmeis”). See also Pouzet 1927.

³¹ Cairo or even Old Cairo (Fustat).

³² *Ioannis Sarisberiensis Carnotensis* 1909: vol. I, 270-271.

³³ Rodinson 1968, Engl. transl. Rodinson 2006. Laurioux 1985, revised French version in Laurioux 2005: 157-196. See also my paper on “The Spices and the Transmission of the Arabic Culinary Knowledge in Europe”, to be published in *The Islamic Sciences in the Western World (Middle Ages-Renaissance): Exchanges, Transmission, Influence*, Acts of the Congress of Amann (2017).

³⁴ Peterson 1980; Wilson 1981; Rosenberger 1999; Marín 2004; Laurioux 2005: 305-335.

³⁵ It will be the case until the Late Middle Ages: Laurioux 2011: 59-70.

³⁶ Tchernia 1997.

³⁷ These kinds of texts are supposed to be a characteristic of the so-called first French gastronomic discourse in the beginning of the 19th century: Ory 1998.

³⁸ Main manuscript: Paris, BnF, fr. 837, f. 225^v-226^r (beginning of the 4th quarter of the 13th century according to Lefèvre 2005: 205). See Laurioux 2020: 58-60.

be linked with a real gastronomic circle, the *Brigata Spendereccia* of Sienna³⁹; and letters from and to Petrarch concerning the quarrel about the superiority of Burgundian or Italian wines⁴⁰.

Around 1467, Platina linked together these separate forms with dietetics and agronomic prescriptions, and also extracts from historical texts⁴¹. The result was the very first book on gastronomy in Europe – an inclusive gastronomy. In the next years, my task and my hope as a Medievalist will be to understand how the different traditions that converge in the *De Honesta voluptate* emerged during the Middle Ages.

³⁹ See Laurioux 2014.

⁴⁰ See Laurioux 2019.

⁴¹ Milham 1998; Laurioux 2006b.

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