

# ANN ARBOR

## CULINARY HISTORIANS

### TRADITIONAL & MODERN IN MOROCCO



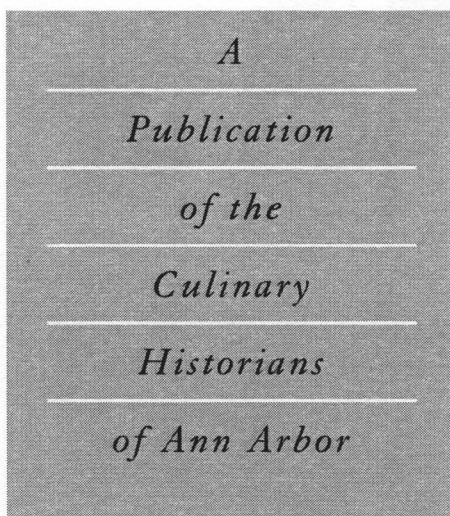
### THE *Huileries* OF OUEZZANE

by Fran Lyman

**O**n a brilliant November afternoon, Mohamed Feddal and I set out to visit the olive mills of Ouezzane<sup>1</sup>. As late as the last century it was the boundary between the lawless tribes and the governed provinces. Its sheikhs were powerful and influential.

Unlike last year, when fall and winter were sodden and cold, this year the country is parched. No rain has fallen in this rainy season, except for a few showers in September. The nearby mountains are often shrouded with clouds, but no rain falls, except for the occasional abortive sprinkle that doesn't even settle the dust. Farmers wait and suffer stoically like farmers everywhere. The Biblical respect for water is terribly relevant here.

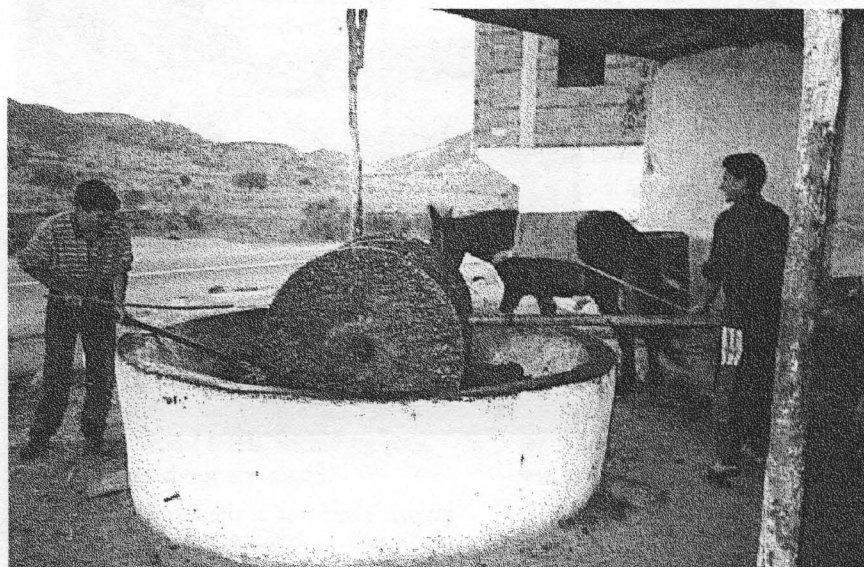
This year, the olive harvest is late and sparse. In the low sun, girls are still harvesting olives, beating and shaking the branches with sticks to shower the olives and leaves onto the plastic sacks spread on the ground. Down they bounce, green, purple and black... all degrees of ripe-



ness. We stop to take a picture, but the girls shriek and run away when they see the camera. Images of humans, be they photos or drawings, are forbidden by Koranic law. The men working in a vegetable patch down the slope—their brothers? husbands?—run toward us shaking their fists.

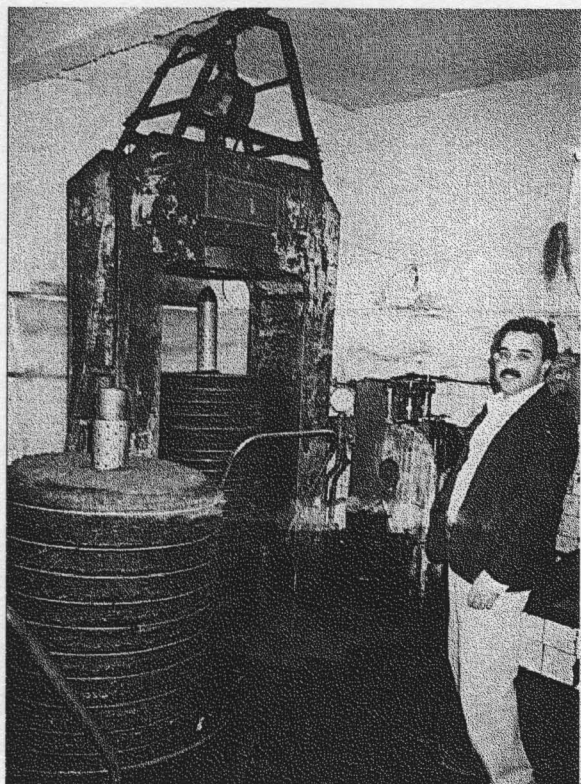
Outside of Chefchaouen we begin to see small mills as we wind along the valley. Near the mills, women sit hunched over mounds of olives, sorting them. Donkeys have brought the bagged olives to the nearest mill, and dumped them into huge piles after being weighed. Laughing and chatting as they sort, the women put olives into piles... green, purple and black. The green and purple will be cured for table use, and some of the black will be combined with preserved lemons or hot pepper sauce. Most of the black olives will go into the mill to be crushed for oil.

The mill itself has two basically simple parts: the basin, made of concrete with a millstone set into it where the olives are crushed, and the press, where the oil is extracted. The crusher is basically the same in all mills, but the presses vary greatly, from homemade to giant hydraulic presses from Italy. The majority of small mills are powered by muscle, donkey or human. A donkey turns the millstone inside the basin, and men turn



*A donkey pulls a millstone around a concrete basin to crush olives outside Chefchaouen, Morocco.*

Photo: Fran Lyman



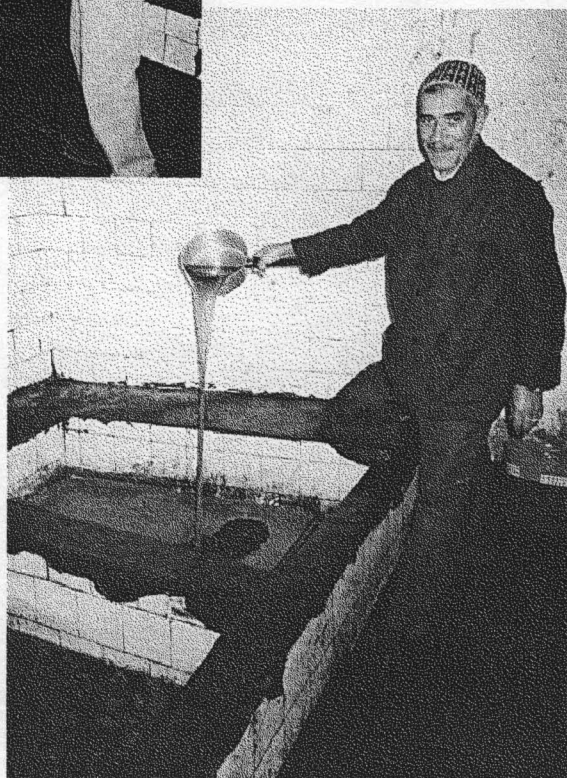
*Above: A large hydraulic olive press in Ouezzane, Morocco. Right: A man in Ouezzane shows the oil that has just been pressed from olives.*

the screws of the presses.

In Ouezzane, mounds of golden mandarins, scarlet tomatoes, peppers, carrots, cucumbers, and sacks of couscous, beans, lentils and spices glow in the mercury vapor lamps of the main street. There is a painted millstone mounted on a concrete tripod proudly displayed at an intersection. The *huilière*<sup>2</sup> operates 24 hours a day during the harvest. Olives are auto-fed down a pipe from the reservoir above the mill, where a double millstone continually revolves. Since it is time for the evening meal, the crusher is still, but the big red

hydraulic press is still extracting. They will begin again at 10 p.m.

Everyone at Ouezzane seems to have a few olive trees somewhere. They may bring their olives to be pressed at 40 centimes a kilo (about 3 or 4 cents). Or they may sell their olives to the mill for 3 dirhams a kilo (20-25 cents). The mill sells oil to the public at 15 dirhams a liter (\$1.60). One hundred kilos of olives will usually yield 15-20 liters of oil. Now it is 6:30 p.m. and time for mint tea, bread and honey (a special treat in honor of a



Photos: Fran Lyman

guest). The bread is the flat whole grain loaf, made daily by the women of the house and baked in the community oven. There is nothing like it for flavor and texture. People disperse to do their

errands in the town, and dinner follows at 9:30... a delicious *tajine* of chicken with preserved lemons, preceded by a salad of tomatoes, cucumber and onion dusted with cinnamon.

*Member Fran Lyman wrote this piece last November while working with the Peace Corps in Martil, Morocco. She is scheduled to speak about Moroccan foodways at the CHAA meeting on January 16.*

#### Notes

1. Ouezzane (wehz-ZAHN) is a town in northern Morocco about 120 miles northwest of Fez and not far from the coastline. Huileries (wheel-REE) is the French term for oil mills.
2. Huilière (wheel-YARE) is the French term for an oil mill operator.

**Editor:**  
Randy Schwartz

**Graphic Design:**  
Rhonda DeMason

**CHAA President:**  
Julie Lewis

**CHAA Founder and  
Honorary President:**  
Jan Longone

#### V

For information about anything in this publication, contact:

Randy K. Schwartz  
2222 Fuller Court, #1101A,  
Ann Arbor MI 48105  
rks1@gateway.net

# MOROCCO

## AS

### CULINARY

### BRIDGE



by Randy Schwartz

**T**oday, the cuisine of Morocco is world-famous for its elegance and high art. When we think of the *souqs*, the open-air markets of this region with their fragrant and colorful food stalls, we think of multilayered combinations of flavors and textures. We think of dozens of varieties of *tajine*, a ragout of lamb, vegetables or other morsels, often incorporating such elements as olives, preserved lemons, almonds and prunes, and served with the spicy chili paste *harisab*. We think of *bstilla*, a pastry of translucent filo dough stuffed with pigeon meat, crushed almonds, saffron, sugar and cinnamon. Or we think of *mesfuf*, a couscous steamed with butter and with raisins or dates, mounded and gaily decorated with white sugar, ground cinnamon, and slices of hardboiled egg, and often served with yogurt or buttermilk. The respected chef Paul Bocuse once commented that the foods of Morocco stand with those of France and China to form the three truly great national cuisines of the world.

However, when we look back to the Middle Ages in Morocco and the rest of the Maghreb region (northwest Africa), we are surprised to find that simple soups and porridges were dietary staples, and that a stigma of unhealthful and immoral living was often attached to the con-

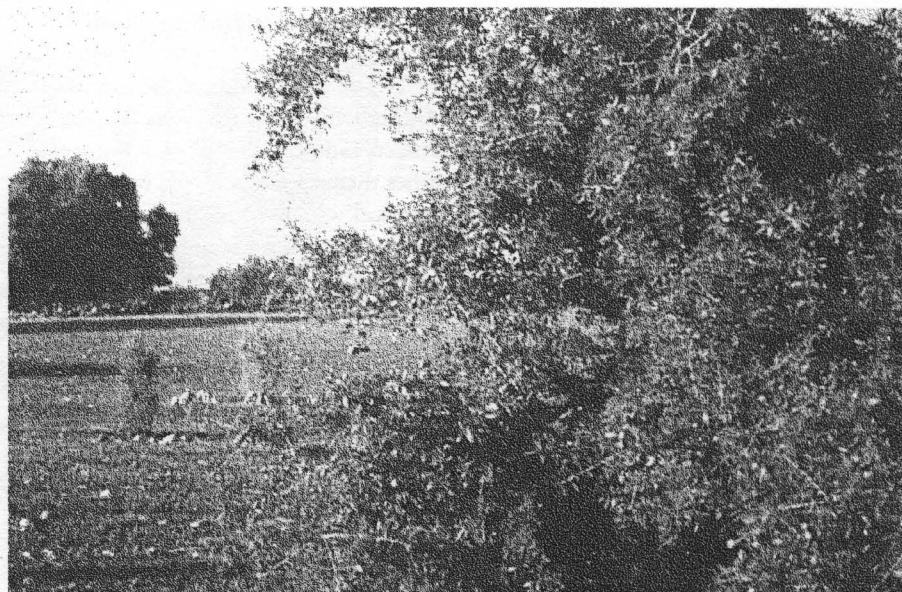


Photo: Terri Schwartz

*An argan tree bearing its olive-like fruits near Essaouira, Morocco. A traditional method of extracting the oil-rich nuts was to feed the fruits to goats, and later gather and clean the excreted nuts.*

sumption of exotic spices, citrus fruits, butter and other "luxuries."

What could have caused such a sharp turnabout? The Maghreb that was conquered by Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century was, like the Arabia of Muhammad, dominated by nomadic tribes. But the advance of irrigation, gardening, milling and other crafts, especially in Morocco and in nearby Andalusia (Moorish Spain), would steadily increase the importance of settled towns and cities. There, dietary choice was increasingly influenced by wealth, pleasure, even luxury. The unification of distant lands under Islam made available to the Arabs rich human, mineral, agricultural and other resources for the first time. These underlying forces were reshaping society on many different levels, including people's attitudes about the world.

#### From Meager Gruel to Rich *Tajine*

At first glance, the traditional and modern diets of Morocco appear to brook no

comparison whatsoever. Nevertheless, there are a number of surviving medieval accounts that allow us to make such comparisons.

The celebrated geographer Leo Africanus, accompanying his uncle on a journey from Fez to the western Moroccan province of Heha in 1511, observed the people there preparing their daily dinner of porridge. For the young man—born just after his family's expulsion from Granada following the Christian reconquest there in 1492—this was a trip back to his ancestral roots in medieval Morocco. He watched the villagers prepare a cauldron of boiling water, stir barley flour into it with a stick until this was cooked, pour the paste into a large bowl, and form a well in the center. Then some of the local oil—which was pressed from the nuts of the prickly *argan* tree and "which has a very foul odor," Leo added—would be drizzled in. Around this bowl a family would sit on circular mats, scooping the gruel with their fingers. During the spring and sum-

mer months, milk and butter could be added <sup>1</sup>. This staple was called *'asidah*, from a defunct Arabic root meaning “to stir, to turn” <sup>2</sup>.

Stale bread, up to a year old or more, was routinely turned into *tharidah*, a crumb soup and another mainstay of the regional diet. The bread would be cut into pieces and sprinkled in a boiling broth of herbs, often with vegetable or meat scraps and the addition of vinegar and *murri* (a fermenting agent made from barley sauce or other starters). The name of the soup came from a verb meaning “to crumble up and sop,” much in the way that our word *soup* is related to the verb *sop*. Eating the bread soaked in a hot broth made it more effective against hunger, while the fermentation made it easier to digest <sup>3</sup>. Such bread dishes made it possible for semi-nomads, for example, to continue living off of grain when they roamed upland for the

long months of the herding season between harvests.

These rustic foods of the medieval Maghreb and Andalusia were ancient artifacts indeed. Their names, if not the dishes themselves, had been brought westward with the Muslim Arab conquests. According to tradition, *tharidah*, for example, was invented by the Quraish (the tribe that controlled the Mecca area and later founded dynasties in Damascus and Córdoba) and was one of the favorite foods of its famous son, Muhammad himself. Maxime Rodinson comments that *'asidah* and *tharidah* are typical of Bedouin foods from the pre-Islamic period and were scarcely deemed worthy of mention in later Arabic discussions of high culinary art <sup>4</sup>.

Ironically, however, much of the region's *haute cuisine* actually arose from these humble concoctions, even as the latter remained fixtures in the diet of the

poorer classes. In an anonymous cookery manuscript written in Arabic under the Almohad dynasty (the Berber Muslim rulers of the Maghreb and Andalusia between 1130 and 1269, based in Marrakech), we can barely recognize from the recipe for *tharidah* that this dish had once been only a meager crumb soup. The stale, coarse bread has been replaced by a freshly baked white loaf, while the thin broth itself has become a rich stew. The recipe calls for us to use “the fattest cuts of fatty meat” and such vegetables as “tender turnips from Granada, eggplants and squashes... in the biggest pieces possible,” along with copious amounts of oil and vinegar, saffron, cumin, garlic and other spices. That we are instructed to use the resulting sauce to saturate a heap of couscous further solidifies the link between this *tharidah* and the *tajines* and other stews that would become so famous <sup>5</sup>.

### The Couscous Controversy

Couscous, a steamed pasta of tiny dried semolina pellets, has been called the “national dish” of the Maghreb. Yet its origins have been a matter of fierce dispute among culinary historians.

One school, which includes Moroccan economist Naima Lakhal and Geneva culinary historian Lucie Bolens, stakes out roots for couscous among the ancient Berbers of West Africa. Among other evidence, these scholars cite the Berber etymology of the word *couscous*, and the discovery of primitive *couscousières* (perforated steaming-vessels used to prepare the dish) in Berber tombs dating to c. 200 BCE <sup>25</sup>. Another school, including food writers Charles Perry and Clifford A. Wright, argues for a much later genesis during the Islamic period. They point out, for example, that durum wheat—the extra-hard wheat from which semolina is normally milled—was introduced to North Africa only with the Arab conquests in the 7th Century.

I believe that this matter can be resolved. Travelers to western Africa over hundreds of years observed couscous being prepared from any number of grains, such as barley, millet, sorghum, even the seeds of lotus or of water lilies. In 1352 for example, Ibn Battúta, a famous voyager and Muslim theolo-

gian of Berber origin, journeyed south by camel caravan from his native Tangier to the Niger basin in what is now Mali. Among the cereals there that he saw the black Africans use were millet, rice, and a grass called *fonio* (later referred to by Europeans as “hungry rice” because it tends to survive droughts). The tiny grains of *fonio* “resemble mustard seeds and are used to prepare *couscous* and *'asidah*,” he reported <sup>26</sup>.

It seems perfectly possible, then, that the Berber term *couscous* was associated from ancient times with a generalized West African practice of steaming fine-grained local cereals, and dried pellets of cereal paste. That would account for the vessels found in ancient tombs. When the Arabs arrived with their semolina—whose high gluten content helps pasta stand up to the rigors of rolling, steaming, dry storage, and restreaming—it would have been recognized as an ideal ingredient by practitioners of a couscous tradition that was already widespread. The tradition would more and more have become “fixated” on durum semolina, just as the old tradition of *polenta* became fixated on cornmeal when maize was introduced to Italy. This hypothesis is consistent with a phenomenon seen throughout culinary history: that new ingredients are often readily incorporated into established foodways, sometimes supplanting older ingredients without so much as a change in terminology.



Photo: Fran Lyman

*Outside Chefchaouen, Morocco, women sort olives into piles according to degree of ripeness.*

If we examine carefully this transition from rustic to refined dishes, we can discern a key factor explaining how foodways could have changed so drastically: archaic ways of thinking (notably medical, social and religious doctrines) that had once helped enforce archaic ways of eating, far from disappearing, became “workhorses” for the dissemination of new dietary customs. Thus, in Morocco, the older foods and foodways were not in fact *swept away*; rather, they were *radically transformed* by a set of social forces that pushed them to astoundingly higher levels of refinement and elaboration.

#### From Pharmacopoeia to Cornucopia

Several passages in the Almohad cookbook attest to the importance of medical doctrine as a key factor shaping the regional diet. Commenting on the nutritive value of steaming broths, for example, the author notes that “soups are hot so as to attach themselves to the phlegmatic humor and thereby impart some humidity to the dry body”<sup>6</sup>.

In the thinking of the time, the vital forces of the human body take the form

of four elements known as “humors”: blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm. The humors were manifestations of the four universal elements and their qualities: respectively air (hot and wet), earth (cold and dry), fire (hot and dry) and water (cold and wet). The health and nutrition of any given person were thought to reflect the balance or imbalance among these humors. The Greek physician Galen of Pergamum, in Asia Minor, had charted out this theory and its implications in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. His commentaries and those of his predecessor Hippocrates, amounting to over 150 manuscripts, formed an important corpus of medical thought. Greek writings fell into obscurity after the fall of the Roman empire, but in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century many were recovered from Christian sanctuaries in Persia and Byzantium, and translated into Arabic by scholars in Baghdad and elsewhere. These in turn were rendered into Latin by Arabs at medical schools in Andalusia and Sicily. Galenic medicine would hold sway across Europe and the Islamic world until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

The reach of these medical theories,

extending to the level of dietary habit, is reflected in an incident recorded by a Muslim cleric in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. The cleric complains about an uppity new slave of his to whom he had given money with instructions to buy some *hāzibā*, a type of fish. But the young boy had returned with something else, explaining to his master: “I find that Hippocrates disapproves of *hāzibā*.” At this, the cleric had struck him ten times with his whip, crying: “You worthless fool, I was not aware that I had bought a Galen.”<sup>7</sup>

When Ibn Rushd (1128-98), the great physician and philosopher of Córdoba better known by his Latinized name Averroës, praised crumb soups as “an extremely light food and easy to digest, very suitable for the acutely ill,”<sup>8</sup> he too was echoing his forebears Hippocrates and Galen, who had commended barley gruel as a near cure-all because of its balance of qualities. Balance, achieved through the judicious application of heat and moisture, was key; in this regard digesting one’s food was seen as analogous to the process of growing and cooking it<sup>9</sup>. The heat and moisture of the stomach, liver and blood vessels were thought to “cook” the food, turning it into the four humors and their various byproducts—flesh and bones, vapors and wastes. The ill were diagnosed with an excess of one or more of the humoral qualities, and they were counseled to eat foods considered rich in the opposite qualities so as to “repress” the imbalance. Good health can be maintained, it was thought, only by a conservative diet that balances dry, cold, hot and wet qualities. “Mis-diet” was considered the root of literally every illness.

It was permissible, then, to add bits of meat to one’s soup, as fat was judged a “hot” ingredient that would aid the broth in attaching to the phlegm. The addition of the fermenting agent *murri*, considered hot but dry, complemented the wetness of the broth. To counterbalance or “correct” all of these hot ingredients,

especially for people suffering from inflammations, it was advisable to add vinegar or verjuice (sour grape juice), both of which were labeled cold and dry. People with “weak nerves” could further add honey, whose sweetness was considered a “hot” sensation that would neutralize the cold. In this way, a “cascade of ingredients” (as it has been called) could be played out within a single dish, in hopes that those who ate it would benefit from each ingredient and from the intricately balanced combination <sup>10</sup>.

Where this would lead is not hard to predict. The spread of Islam and of agriculture were placing before the masters of the desert exotic new products such as rice, spinach, eggplant, citrus, pomegranate, watermelon, and sugar. As the availability of foods multiplied, the Galenic regimen justified adding more and more ingredients—nominally to maintain health, but essentially to enhance flavor, fragrance and pleasure. Especially notable was the expansion of spice repertoires. Pepper, cinnamon, ginger, galingale and other spices from the Far East were added to aid digestion because of their “hot” quality, while coriander became the most heavily used spice of all because it was the only one with a corrective “cold” quality. In time, a mixture of some 20 spices, herbs, and blossoms, combined in doctrinaire proportions, was developed for off-the-shelf use. It was known as *ra's al-hánút* or “head of the shop,” suggesting the apex of a cascade of ingredients. (In Morocco today it still receives widespread use and—in folk belief—esteem as an aid to health and longevity.) The Almohad cookbook, mentioned earlier, went so far as to assert that “an understanding of the use of spices is the main basis for preparing dishes, for it is the foundation upon which cookery is built.” <sup>11</sup>

One Arab who trained a harsh eye upon this multiplication of ingredients was 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldún, the 14<sup>th</sup>-Century Tunisian whom many con-

sider the leading historian of the Medieval world. He criticized the diet of his fellow townspeople of the Maghreb, writing: “They eat a great deal and rarely restrict themselves to one particular kind of food. They lack caution in taking food, and they prepare their food, when they cook it, with the admixture of a good many things, such as spices, herbs, and fruits, fresh and dry. They do not restrict themselves in this respect to one or even a few kinds. We have on occasion counted 40 different kinds of vegetables and meats in a single cooked dish. This gives the nourishment a strange temper and often does not agree with the body and its parts.” <sup>12</sup> Excessive eating, he argued, overwhelms the digestive capacity of the stomach, where the food sits and putrefies, resulting in fevers. “A great amount of food and the moisture it contains,” he explained, “generate pernicious superfluous matters in the body, which, in turn, produce a disproportionate widening of the body, as well as many corrupt, putrid humors.” <sup>13</sup> In fact, he claimed, stout and sedentary villagers are far more likely to die of famine than are the wandering nomads, because the latter have actually habituated their bodies to hunger.

How ironic that in reacting against the ample and variegated modern diet, Ibn Khaldún employs the same language of balance, derived from Galen, that his countrymen had relied on in rationalizing the emergence of that diet. In a mockery of his conservative impulses, the very notion of balance had been turned from a prescription for moderation into a recipe for an avalanche of ingredients.

### The Desert and the Sown

*If orange trees are much grown in a town, the town invites its own ruin.* This dictum was so widely repeated in the medieval Arab world that people shunned planting even a single citrus tree near their homes, fearing that it would rain misfortune

upon their heads. While dismissing its superstitious aspect, Ibn Khaldún endorsed the proverb in its original meaning: that citrus cultivation, a luxury heavily reliant on irrigated gardening, is the ultimate symptom of settled society and the various forms of decadence that were thought to invariably accompany it. Along with the Asian citrus fruits, he counted the heavy use of wheat products, seasonings, and sheep's butter among the markers of a corrupt, settled lifestyle, contrasting these to the meat and milk of camels and goats bred by the Bedouin, and to the barley, sorghum, dates and olive oil produced in the oases, hills, and semiarid regions to which these nomads had access.

“Among the things that corrupt sedentary culture,” Ibn Khaldún argued, “there is the disposition toward pleasures and indulgence in them, because of the great luxury. It leads to diversification of the desires of the belly for pleasurable food and drink.” <sup>14</sup> By contrast, he wrote, “The frugal inhabitants of the desert and those of settled areas who have accustomed themselves to hunger and to abstinence from pleasures are found to be more religious and more ready for divine worship than people who live in luxury and abundance. Indeed, it can be observed that there are few religious people in towns and cities, in as much as people there are for the most part obdurate and careless, which is connected with the use of much meat, seasonings, and fine wheat.” <sup>15</sup>

To assign moral values to particular foods in this way might strike us as a bit tendentious. But for Ibn Khaldún, such a formula was indispensable in explaining the twists and turns of Maghrebian history. Serving as a functionary for rulers in Fez, Tunis and Cairo, and traveling as far as Granada and Damascus, he was able to observe the different peoples and societies of this vast region. The *Muqaddimah* (Introduction) to his massive study interprets the rise and fall of dynasties as a



Photo: Terri Schwartz

*Grains and pastas for sale at a market stall in Marrakech.*

ceaseless clash between nomadic tribes and settled civilization. This tension between pastoral and sedentary forces—the twin cultures of “the desert and the sown”—shapes his entire discussion of the peoples of the Maghreb and every facet of their lives.

To Ibn Khaldún, history seemed to be locked in an endless cycle. Desert nomads would always need to trade with the people of towns and oases, and vice versa, since the former supplied milk, meat and other animal products, while the latter grew grains, dates, and olives. But as agriculture and other crafts advance, he argued, the sedentary lifestyle feeds a bloated and corrupt stratum increasingly unable to administer large-scale irrigation and the other enterprises that enabled settled life in the first place. Disintegration would lead to crisis, and the towns would fall pray to nomadic tribes. In Ibn Khaldún's Tunisia, for example, the Banu Hilal, a tribe of Arab Bedouins from Egypt, had sacked the

coastal capital in 1056 and destroyed much of the cultivation begun there after the Arab conquests. The land reverted to pastoral use, beginning a new cycle.

But this cycle was not in fact endless. It might continue so long as nomads accumulated wealth more easily than other classes, giving them the edge in health, mobility, and initiative. But developments in tillage and trade, spurred by technological progress, gradually reversed that state of affairs. Intensive irrigation techniques, introduced by the Arabs from Asia and perfected through water wheels (noria), wells and underground canals, increased the viability of agriculture. In Andalusia, market-gardening reached a particularly advanced level by means of improved plows, animal fertilizers and crop rotation. With the first Christian reconquests in the peninsula, the influx of Moors returning with knowledge of these techniques further accelerated farming in the Maghreb. The first enterprises in Fez powered by nonhuman energy were ani-

mal- and water-driven oil presses and other mills<sup>16</sup>. The population and the economic vitality of Arab and Moorish society shifted more and more to cities and towns.

To boast of their mounting wealth and refinement, urban caliphs, sultans and emirs turned to foods that symbolized this advanced cultivation. Poets extolled the palace of the sultan of Morocco, who was clever to plant a grove of orange trees among patios and fountains where an awed public was invited on designated days. The ostentatious practice (as well as the words “orange” and “tangerine,” “lemon” and “lime”) spread to Spain and from there throughout Europe, which became dotted with royal *orangeries*. It is in a medical treatise dedicated to the sultan of Egypt where we find the oldest surviving recipe for preserved lemons, today a fixture in elegant Moroccan cuisine. Compiled by Ibn al-Baytár, a botanist from the Andalusian town of Málaga, the recipe for salting away the ripe yellow fruits (which heightens their sweetness) is still followed today. One citrus historian concluded “that the culture of these trees, spreading from the gardens of the rich to commercial orchards where the fruit was grown for profit, expanded as rapidly as the progress of military conquest or of commercial enterprise would allow, and that soon in the huge Moslem empire there was hardly a corner left where citrus trees were not widely grown.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, exotic fruits once stigmatized as symbols of extravagance came to be craved—precisely as symbols of extravagance. The notion of sedentary luxury, which had once made Arabs ashamed to have full bellies, now made them eager to taste everything that the sultan tasted.

### **The Road to Paradise Was Paved with Submission**

Rivers of pure water, milk, honey and wine flow through the Garden where, the prophet Muhammad promised, those who



Photo: Omar Addi

*A group of friends eats couscous in a scene from El Kelaa des Sraghnas, Morocco in the late 1970s.*

keep their duty to Allah shall come to rest (*Qur'an*, Surah 47). Yet here on earth, wine was a temptation denied by the Prophet to his followers, for prayer and other duties of submission were threatened by its intoxicating effects.

The forbidden wine of the medieval Arab world was usually fermented from dates. But other sweet or sour substances made from fruit or honey, if they lacked alcohol, could be consumed by devout Muslims. *Dibs*, a sort of treacle made from raisins or from grapes, carobs and other fruits, was an ancient product of the Bedouins and is still prized among them today. Vinegar and verjuice made from grapes were, as noted earlier, used as sour counterpoints to such ingredients as meat or honey. In urban areas, sweet syrups variously called *sharab* or *shurbah* (the source of our words "syrup" and "sherbet") were made from fruit juices that were boiled in water and reduced to a sticky, viscous fluid, then further sweetened with honey. These sweet syrups were primarily used to hide the tastes of medical potions<sup>18</sup>.

It was with their conquests in Persia and India that the Muslims first encountered cane sugar. Taught how to grow the

cane and to cook its juice, they soon invented ways to refine this raw sugar into a practically pure crystalline powder. Their march westward spread sugar cultivation and manufacture across the Mediterranean, notably to Morocco around 709 and Andalusia by 760.

At first, sugar was consumed by Muhammad's followers mostly in medicines. But its allure as an exotic spice and ultimately as a basic cooking ingredient would prove irresistible. The consumption of sweets, historians have noted, tends to be highest among people who use no intoxicants. Sugar shares with alcohol some of its stimulating psychological effects, but it was not banned under Islam.

On the contrary, the purity of refined sugar—with its intensity of flavor and especially its whiteness—symbolized for Muslims the purity of submission to Allah's will. This symbolism also explains the adoption of white as "national color" by the Umayyads, the Arab caliphs who ruled Andalusia between 756 and 1031. Regional culture, from poetry to dress to architecture, adopted the white symbolism, with remnants still visible in the famous "whitewashed villages" of southern Spain. Culinary creations reflecting this influence included a *tharidah* made with milk and chopped chicken breast, and *harirah*, a soup in which flour paste and fat were boiled in milk. Even today in Morocco, *harirah* is eaten just before sunrise and just after sunset each day

during the fast-month of Ramadan, often accompanied by *halwá* (halvah), the sesame-paste confection<sup>19</sup>.

The triumph of white sugar in Iberia would be unstoppable under Arab rule. By 1150, there were 14 mills churning out sugar in the province of Granada alone. Some of this sugar went into the first true candies made in Europe. (Indeed, our word "candy," like "sugar" itself, was borrowed from Arabic.) Marzipan, for instance, made its appearance in Toledo in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. The magical white confection was fashioned from pure sugar and the paste of blanched almonds, and molded into wondrous shapes before baking. Bards and lute players of Andalusia sang of almond groves so vast that the blossoms made river valleys seem blanketed with snow each February<sup>20</sup>.

We can imagine the caliphs nodding in approval when troubadours praised their domain of almonds and sugar, for they echoed the Prophet's description of the Garden itself. The path of submission, they reckoned, can be bitter at times, but the rule of Islam had created a sweet paradise right here on earth.

### Crossing the Gibraltar

Since the Spanish Inquisition branded couscous a sign of hostility to Christianity, we need not wonder why its consumption in Spain steadily declined after the last Moorish stronghold fell there in 1492, with the accompanying mass exodus of Arab, Berber and Jewish families southward. But the impact of Maghrebian cuisine was so deep in Andalusia that it could not be wiped out.

While the Grand Inquisitors sought to expunge couscous from the tables of Spain, rice was considered a celebration of the Christian reconquest. Ironically, rice had been introduced to Iberia by the Arabs back in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. Indeed, the saffron-rich *paella* of Valencia, now considered one of the most characteristic

dishes of Spain, was almost certainly based on Moorish stews of fish and rice <sup>21</sup>. It was from Spain that rice was later first introduced to Italy, in Pisa in 1468.

The Spanish developed their own version of the milky-white chicken *tharidah*. Called *manjar blanco* ("white food"), it was made with chicken breast, rice flour, milk and sugar and was considered a cure for various illnesses <sup>22</sup>. By 1400, it had spread to France (*blanc mangier*), Italy (*bramangeri*) and England (*blomanger*), with the milk sometimes replaced by almond milk, the sugar by rosewater, and the rice flour by white wheat flour or bread. In modern times, *blancmange* became a sweet white gelatin with no chicken at all.

Consider, too, the Moorish soup that the Spanish call *ajo blanco* ("white garlic"). Prepared raw and served at room temperature, it was one of a roster of uncooked

breadcrumb soups eaten by Andalusian peasants and mule drivers as a nourishing, easily assembled midday meal. The stale white breadcrumbs would be sprinkled in water, vinegar and olive oil, thickened with pounded blanched almonds, and accented with garlic and halved white grapes. In *Don Quixote* (1615), Cervantes refers to these breadcrumb soups as *gazpachos*, a term that had entered the Castilian lexicon from Mozarabic, the vernacular of Arabized Iberian Christians <sup>23</sup>. Post-Columbian versions of gazpacho omitted the breadcrumbs and added tomatoes, bell peppers and other vegetables, but the *ajo blanco* version is still popular around Málaga <sup>24</sup>.

Viewing this matter purely from the angle of individual dishes, however, fails to fully capture the link represented by Gibraltar. In the Middle Ages, as we have seen, northern Africa served as a bridge for

the transmission of culture and cuisine from Asia to Europe, but it was a conduit in more than a geographical sense. The people of the medieval Maghreb took the revived dietary teachings of the Greek physicians—with their emphasis on humoral balance and on humble porridges and soups—and enriched them with a stunningly broad palette of ingredients, consonant with the global sweep of empire and the advance of settled life. In this sense, Morocco was a midwife to the birth of modern foodways from the womb of ancient and medieval society.

Most especially, it was the Moors who helped whet the appetite of Europe to import spices and to harvest sugar, undertakings that would change the entire world after 1492. In emerging from its pastoral history, Morocco helped usher a cuisine expressive of agrarian and mercantile enterprise onto the world scene.

## Notes

1. Leo Africanus, *Description de l'Afrique*, translated from the Italian original by A. Épaulard (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1956), pp. 71-2. It is likely that Leo's aversion to the pleasant peanut-like scent of *argan* oil was due mainly to his unfamiliarity with it.
2. Expiración García Sánchez, "La Alimentación en la Andalucía Islámica. Estudio Histórico y Bromotológico. I: Cereales y leguminosas," *Andalucía Islámica: Textos y Estudios*, vols. II-III (1981-2), p. 171.
3. On *tharidah* see Lucie Bolens, *L'Andalousie du Quotidien au Sacré: XI<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècles* (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1990), pp. X:63-66; and García Sánchez, pp. 169-70.
4. Maxime Rodinson, "Recherches sur les Documents Arabes Relatifs à la Cuisine," *Revue des Études Islamiques* (1949), p. 148. Further references to *astidah* and *tharidah* are cited on pp. 133, 141.
5. Bolens, *L'Andalousie*, p. X:65.
6. Bolens, *L'Andalousie*, p. X:64.
7. H. A. R. Gibb, "Introduction," in Ibn Battúta, *Travels in Asia and Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 30-1.
8. García Sánchez, p. 170.
9. Bolens, *L'Andalousie*, p. VIII:108; and Lucie Bolens, *Agronomes Andalous du Moyen-Age* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1981), p. 63.
10. Bolens, *L'Andalousie*, pp. IX:142-4.
11. Toby Peterson, "The Arab Influence on Western European Cooking," *Journal of Medieval History* vol. 6 (1980), p. 328.
12. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldún, *The Muqaddimah*, translated from the Arabic original by Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1958), vol. 2,

p. 376.

13. Ibn Khaldún, vol. 1, p. 178.
14. Ibn Khaldún, vol. 2, p. 295.
15. Ibn Khaldún, vol. 1, pp. 179-80.
16. Driss Ben Ali, *Le Maroc Précapitaliste: Formation Économique et Sociale* (Rabat: Société Marocaine des Éditeurs Réunis, 1983), pp. 75-8.
17. S. Tolkowsky, *Hesperides: A History of the Culture and Use of Citrus Fruits* (London: John Bale, Sons & Curnow, Ltd., 1938), pp. 112-48.
18. Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), pp. 60-1.
19. The modern *harirah* has been enriched and darkened by such later additions as tomato. On chicken *tharidah* and on *harirah*, see García Sánchez, pp. 169-71; and Abdelhai Diouri, "Of Leaven Foods: Ramadan in Morocco," in Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper, eds., *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), pp. 243-8.
20. Tor Eigeland, "Arabs, Almonds, Sugar and Toledo," *Aramco World* vol. 47, no. 3 (May-June 1996), pp. 35-6.
21. García Sánchez, p. 176.
22. Mintz, p. 89.
23. Ralph Penny, *A History of the Spanish Language* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 223-4.
24. On the history of gazpachos, see Raymond A. Sokolov, *Why We Eat What We Eat* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), pp. 116-20.
25. Bolens, *L'Andalousie*, p. X:61.
26. Ibn Battúta, *Voyages*, parallel Arabic/French texts edited by C. Defrémercy and B. R. Sanguinetti (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1879), vol. 4, p. 394.

Our CHAA speakers this Spring explored aspects of foods long relished in Midwestern towns such as ours. We thank member Ari Weinzwieg for generously making Zingerman's Deli available as our meeting place this past year.

### A Receipt Book from the Old Midwest

At our March 21 meeting, Prof. Russell E. Bidlack, Dean Emeritus of the Univ. of Michigan School of Library Science, spoke about the historic American cookbooks of Ann Arbor physician A. W. Chase. The 1885 edition of *Dr. Chase's Receipt Book and Household Physician*, over 800 pages long, sold more than a million copies. The earliest appearance of the work, dating before the Civil War, was a pamphlet of folk remedies that Chase had gathered from medical books, family members and "practical sources" (mechanics, farriers, farmers and other acquaintances) and which he published to raise money to attend medical school in Cincinnati. Later editions, including a locally printed translation for German immigrants, focused on culinary recipes *per se* and were so popular that they helped Chase to establish a publishing empire. "Mock oysters" and the other entries from Chase's books took a prominent place in the stock of recipes carried westward along the Oregon Trail and other routes.

### Salting Away Our Food

T. R. Durham, a St. Louis native and Ann Arbor proprietor of Durham's Trickle-ments and Custom Smoked Provisions, spoke about "Salt, Smoke and History" at our April 18 meeting.

As reflected in such phrases as "worth one's salt" and "earn a salary," salt has long been an extremely expensive product. Ancient Egypt produced a dried salted fish, and salt was mined in Ghana. Salt-cured hams were supplied to Rome from the provinces of Spain and Gaul. The salt-cod tradition of Portugal and Italy likely had roots among the Basques

or other seafaring peoples before the Middle Ages, while Baltic herring salted in barrels was an important product controlled by the Hanseatic League. Salt from the Ligurian coast and from Venetian lagoons, Brittany and the North Sea was an important part of the trade that spawned towns in late medieval and Renaissance Europe.

Other curing techniques arose as inexpensive, practical alternatives to salting. Stock fish, for instance, a type of freeze-dried product, spread from Norway. Mr. Durham theorizes that the Scottish tradition of smoked salmon and mutton might have arisen accidentally when residents of black-houses (chimney-less dwellings) hung the lightly salted meat indoors and noticed that the smoke slight aided preservation. The tradition seems to have spread to chimneyed cottages and from there, via Scottish immigration, to the Southern U.S.

A century ago, "New York lox" meant salmon from the Pacific Northwest or Alaska, salted in barrels for shipment east. At New York harbor, merchants soaked the salmon in several changes of water before sale, primarily to East European immigrants. By the 1930s, Nova Scotia fishermen were part-salting, part-smoking North Atlantic salmon and marketing it as "Nova." Salmon farming in the British Isles in the 1960s made a more reliable product available for world export. In the 1980s, the market became dominated by large-scale commercial factories in which brine-soaked salmon is coal-smoked, sometimes baked at the same time.

### Behind the Fish Counter

There have probably been more changes in the seafood industry in the last two decades than in all previous U.S. history. This was the message from fishmonger Mike Monahan of Ann Arbor in his talk, "Changes in Fish Consumption in the U.S. and Monahan's Market Over the Past 20 Years" at our May 16 meeting.

Seafood was once shipped frozen to the Midwest by rail, but the rise of truck-

ing and, in the late 1970s, air shipment opened our region up to fresh Gulf snapper and grouper, Pacific salmon and halibut, and other seafood. New techniques of ice-packing, developed in Scandinavia for air transport, have made even fish from overseas available fresh. Dwindling natural supplies, along with contamination scares, spurred the rise of aquaculture in catfish and shrimp from the South, and talapia from Central America and Africa. Farmed seafood has a quality and price that are easily regulated.

In the 1980s a health food boom, coupled with an openness to new foods and cooking techniques glimpsed in overseas travel, ethnic restaurants and cooking shows, prompted the largest per capita increase in U.S. fish consumption ever. Seafood retailers and restaurant chefs played a key role in shaping preferences. When a chic restaurant introduces Chilean sea bass to its menu, diners might like it enough to ask for it later at the fish counter. Bluefish, mackerel, exotic Hawaiian and other tasty fishes have become popular, as have techniques such as steaming, poaching, braising, grilling, sauces, stews, marinades, rubs, and kebabs.

The busy 1990s have decreased the time available to many people for cooking fresh meals, hence the boom in restaurant and carryout dining, as well as ready-to-eat retail products such as prepared fish sauces, butters, stocks, even microwaveable items. With online groceries on the horizon, quality concerns might spark a return to "old-fashioned" ways of shopping and eating. The role of the retailer in educating customers as to qualities and prices has been heightened.

Supply-side price effects and strict government controls have been crucial in preventing overfishing and extinction of fish species. But the complexity of regulations also makes startups by independent seafood retailers increasingly difficult. Today's intensive consolidation in the fishery industry has given the retailer a wide product array from each supplier, but has increased his remoteness from the fisherman himself where product quality can be monitored.

CHAA members **Bill and Yvonne Lockwood** continue their research, writing, and programming on traditional Michigan foodways. In June, they presented a paper, "Cudighi: Regionalism, Ethnicity, and Cultural Creolization in the Northwoods," at the joint meetings in Toronto of the Assn. for the Study of Food and Society and the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society. Their paper "Continuity and Adaptation in Arab American Foodways," an earlier version of which was presented at the March 1998 CHAA meeting, will appear in *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* edited by Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (forthcoming from Wayne State University Press). Bill has just published "Michigan Food and Foodways" in *Michigan Folklife Annual 1999* (Lansing: Michigan State University Museum). Together, they curated the program Taste of Traditions that included many traditional food vendors at the National Folk Festival, a three-year collaboration between the National Council for Traditional Arts (Washington, D. C.), the Michigan State University Museum, and the City of East Lansing, August 13-15, in East Lansing. In September, they presented a paper, "Finnish American Milk Products in the Northwoods," at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery.

This July, just as she was retiring her Trellis Café & Tearoom at Plymouth and Green in Ann Arbor, member **Carroll Thomson** published *In the Kitchen With Carroll* (Pleasant Ridge, MI: Elm Park Press; 50 pp., \$4.50 paper), a collection of her favorite recipes from the café and from her earlier store, Carroll's Corner. Included are a wide variety of scones, breads, cookies, cakes and pies; wonderful soups such as Split Pea, Navy Bean, Gazpacho, and Kansas City Steak Soup; Turkey Mandarin and other salads; and such hearty main dishes as Chicken Pot Pie, Irish Stew, Mayor Ingrid Sheldon's Spinach Quiche and husband John's Tea Room Chili. Copies of the book, already in its second



printing, may be ordered directly from Carroll.

Exploring the influence of France on the taste, menus and table settings of British nobility, the touring exhibit "**The Huguenot Legacy: English Silver 1680-1760**" remains at the Indianapolis Museum of Art until November before going on to a final stop at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston between January 2000 and December 2003. Drawing on 112 pieces from the collection of New York couple Alan and Simone Hartman, the show was organized by Christie's executive vice president **Christopher Hartop**, who also wrote the accompanying catalog.

The year 2000 marks 130 years since Sharpsburg, PA entrepreneur Henry John Heinz founded a company to bottle processed horseradish, one of a series of firms using food preservation technologies perfected in the Civil War. "**Heinz: Preserved in Pittsburgh**" is an exhibit ongoing at the Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center (through Spring 2001) tracing the history of the H.J. Heinz Company, from its founder's diary and recipe book to its rise as a multinational conglomerate.

In his "The Taste of Survival," written for the Memories column of *Saveur* (No. 34, April 1999, pp. 33-36), **Habeeb Salloum** of Toronto recalls how he and his Lebanese immigrant family found sustenance when he was growing up on a homestead in Depression-era Saskatchewan. Among other things, he describes the routines by which bulgur, yogurt, and qawarma were made. The importance of legumes is reflected in the two recipes that he includes, Chickpeas with Tomatoes and

Sweet Peppers, and Dandelion-Lentil Soup. Salloum was co-author, with James Peters, of the well-known Mideast cookbook *From the Lands of Figs and Olives* (New York: Interlink Books, 1995).

**Colette Rossant** is a Paris-born Jewish woman who, as a young girl during World War II, lived with her paternal grandparents in a villa in Cairo's Garden City district. Her *Memories of a Lost Egypt: A Memoir With Recipes* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1999; 159pp., \$20 cloth) recalls the wondrous hours that she spent in the kitchen with her Sephardic Egyptian grandmother (lots of pinenuts, leeks, and Jew's mallow) and the French-influenced Sudanese cook (aspic, garlic, cumin).

"A Place at the Table: More scholars focus on the historical, social, and cultural meanings of food, but some critics say it's scholarship-lite" by **Jennifer K. Ruark** was the provocative cover story in the July 9 issue of *Chronicle of Higher Education*. It discusses the explosion in food-related academic publishing, and the debate within academia over the scholarly credentials of the new generation of food writing. For example, the Spring 2000 issue of *PROTEUS: A Journal of Ideas*, published at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, will be devoted to food, with essays and scholarly articles from all disciplines (copies of this issue must be reserved by Feb. 28). **Darra Goldstein**, a cookbook author and Russian professor at Williams College, has been appointed editor of a new journal *Gastronomica* and book series "California Studies in Food and Culture," both from the Univ. of California beginning next year. **Andrew F. Smith**, a food writer and historian at New School University in Manhattan, will be editor of a similar book series launched by the Univ. of Illinois. Smith, who has spoken to the CHAA on the centennial of catsup (Sept. 1995) and the history of snack food (May 1997), has just published *Popped Culture: A Social History of Popcorn in America* (Columbia: Univ. South Carolina Press, 1999; 264 pp., \$24.95 cloth).

October 17 - Eighteenth Century Foodways in Colonial America

Speaker: Vivian Gniewek, Head Docent at Greenfield Village

November 14 - Mary Engle Pennington: Early Pioneer in Food Science and Refrigeration

Speaker: Lisa Robinson, MSU Librarian

December 5 - American Food in the Twentieth Century: Decade by Decade

Holiday Participatory Dinner

January 16 - Moroccan Foodways

Speaker: Fran Lyman, Peace Corps Volunteer

February 20 - Tour of Katherine's Catering

Speaker: Katherine ~~Curtis~~ Farrell, Owner



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