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## Medieval food and colour

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### Abstract

*For medieval people, colour provided important information about the nature of objects, and that was no less true of what they ate than of anything else. On one level colour might expose moral and spiritual connotations, on another it might offer indications of characteristics of a foodstuff according to medieval humoral theories. Moreover, it was to form an important element in the elite cuisine that developed across Europe from 1200 and perhaps earlier. Display was a crucial part of this cuisine, and this paper demonstrates how and why it was employed, and the ways in which these culinary practices were emulated elsewhere in society. Recipes instructed cooks in colouring dishes, and in ways of adding verisimilitude to made dishes. Heraldic colours and designs were employed for 'subtleties', the set pieces that came to table with wider messages. There were general cultural associations between colours and culinary preparations, and some types of dish show common patterns of colouring. However fleeting the colours of foodstuffs, they offer a further dimension to our understanding of meals, the material culture of dining and medieval mentalities.*

### Introduction

Even a cursory examination of medieval cookbooks and other records dealing with food at table leaves the impression that the colour of food mattered a great deal across Europe. That it did so is important for understanding medieval mentalities. Why it did so and the range of meanings that linked colour and food, that is, the purpose of colour, are questions at the centre of this paper. It is difficult to imagine today that we would not be interested in the colour of food. From the innocent 'that looks appetising', to instructions to watch for changes in colour as part of the cooking process, and the images of glossy cookbooks and on our screens, colour is intimately associated with our appreciation of food. Contemporary food marketing employs it as an essential component in provoking food purchase and consumption.<sup>1</sup> Beyond this immediate appeal, psychologists point to visual flavour, to the ways in which colour influences the perception of taste; they have also demonstrated the contribution made by the colour of the plate, or, indeed, the colour of cutlery.<sup>2</sup> Sensory perception, however, is in many ways culturally specific, and the understanding of colour in relation to food, a transitory phenomenon in a medium of short duration, presents an especial challenge to those who study the past.

Not all cultures have considered food colour to be of significance, but some have done

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used in this paper: BL: London, British Library; *CI*: C.B. Heatt and S. Butler, eds., *Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (Including the Forme of Cury)*. EETS, SS 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); EETS: Early English Text Society; ES: Extra Series; OS: Original Series; SS: Supplementary Series; *TFFCB*: T. Austin, *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books*.... EETS, OS 91 (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1888).

Hans J. Teuteberg, 'The Birth of the Modern Consumer Age: Food Innovations from 1800', in *Food: the History of Taste*, ed. Paul Freedman (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 233–62 (260).

<sup>2</sup> C. Spence and B. Piqueras-Fizman, *The Perfect Meal: the Multisensory Science of Food and Dining* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 115–19, 168–9, 196–200.

so – and medieval Europe did.<sup>3</sup> Equally historians have not necessarily considered food colour as a category for analysis.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it might seem counter-intuitive to think of the colour of a food as an important feature: surely it is taste that matters above all? This paper argues that colour did matter, and explores two broad themes associated with food and colour. Firstly it turns to colour as an indicator, as a form of explanation, founded on links between colour and essential characteristics of foods; and in the minds of medieval people those explanations ranged across both physical and moral territories. Secondly, there was a practical perspective: the creation of colour. Colour formed a significant element – much like spices or thin, acidic sauces – in the elite cuisine common across Europe certainly in the thirteenth century and probably for at least a century or more before that, and it was both a striking and a novel feature of that style of cookery. A link to spices is not unexpected, as in many cases there was a connection between colour and the special ingredients, often themselves spices, that were needed to produce the hues. This connection has not gone unregarded by historians,<sup>5</sup> but there is much to be gained from an overview of its use and significance, and an assessment of how and why colour was employed in cookery.

### Perceiving colour

The evidence for the perception of colour in late medieval Europe is not clear or straightforward to interpret,<sup>6</sup> but a number of different approaches can be distinguished. Firstly, there were theoretical descriptions, often in philosophical works, analysing colour and its gradations. Beyond this, implicit in many texts were associations between colour and value, for example, virtue or holiness. These theoretical descriptions point to important elements in the cultural perception of colour that were markedly different from our own: we live in a world dominated by hues, but other qualities of colour were as important, if not more so, in the medieval period, such as, the lustre of an object, its shine – and in examining colour we might also look at textures, saturation and so on.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary science teaches that objects that shine reflect light, but medieval people saw these objects as the source of light,

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Persian and Moghul cuisines, and some of those of contemporary south-east Asia.

<sup>4</sup> It does not feature, for example, in Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Corneè Ornelas, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Food*. 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), or in Christina Normore, *A Feast for the Eyes: Art, Performance and the Late Medieval Banquet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); on the other hand, others have looked carefully for the evidence of colour in foods, for instance, in manuscript illuminations, and have found little to report: Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, 'Pour un "art" culinaire au moyen âge: le témoignage des images', in *La cuisine et la table dans la France de la fin du moyen âge*, eds. F. Ravoire and A. Dietrich (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2009), 11–23 (20–1).

<sup>5</sup> e.g. C. Anne Wilson, 'Ritual, Form and Colour in the Medieval Food Tradition', in *'The Appetite and the Eye': Visual Aspects of Food and Its Presentation Within Their Historic Context*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 5–27; T. Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1995), 111–16; Mireille Vincent-Cassy, 'La vue et les mangeurs: couleurs et simulacres dans la cuisine médiévale', in *Banquets et manières de table au moyen âge* (Aix-en-Provence: Centre Universitaire d'Études et de Recherches Médiévales d'Aix, 1996), 161–75; B. Lauriou, *Les livres de cuisine médiévaux*. Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 77 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 45, 76, 79; Melitta Weiss Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 68–76, 84–8; 99–100; 110–11, 127, 139; P. Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Pastoureau, 'Voir les couleurs du moyen âge: une histoire des couleurs est-elle possible?', in idem, *Une histoire symbolique du moyen âge occidental* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 113–33, 364–7; C.M. Woolgar *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 155–76.

<sup>7</sup> J. Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 79–91; idem, *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 67–89; D. Jackson, 'Colour and Meaning', in *Colour: the Art and Science of Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Stella Panayotova (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 345–75.

and the divine qualities of light made them virtuous in their own right – or the close association that came from touch transferred those benefits from or to immediately adjacent objects or beings. Eating anything that shone, or was close to shining, such as foods with a strong yellow colour, or indeed, eating from shiny objects, such as gold or silver plate, would bring the beneficence of light.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the theoretical and philosophical, were descriptions of goods and foodstuffs that employed colour words, but it can be hard to be sure what these colours were in practice – especially in the case of foodstuffs, where so little evidence of their materiality survives directly. The range of hues that might be encompassed by a colour word varies by time and place: red, for example, embraced at some points colours that we might describe at one end of the range as yellow, and at the other, as purple. The breadth of the colour lexicon was not uniform across Europe: in the Mediterranean south in the years after 1200, people described some fabrics as the colour of oranges – but in northern Europe the use of ‘orange’ as a colour term was very rare until the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that there was nothing coloured orange in northern Europe, but that it was described differently, perhaps as ‘tawny’, and many people could not have in mind the strong, solid colour that came with the fruit because they had never seen it.

So why was colour important? Historians have been keen to see meaning in colour, in symbolic connotations and values, and it has been discussed in this way in connection with art, with heraldry and with clothing. Colour was a signifier, distinguishing and classifying, giving meaning: the importance of blue, or red, or of mixed colour schemes, such as stripes, or other defining features, was that they marked out the holy or other qualities; yellow might denote the false, from the thirteenth century; but gold, at the same time, was a ‘good yellow’.<sup>10</sup> Some scholars have enumerated the principal colours, setting out the virtues and qualities with which they were associated, as well as vices and sins.<sup>11</sup> Equally colours were associated with the four humours – and with the temperaments, with emotions and so on. It is this that leads to melancholy appearing as black – or yellow, or violet. While there is in practice a good deal of variation and inconsistency in these attributions,<sup>12</sup> there is an important general point: there was an expectation that colour could provide important information about the nature of an object. This was applicable to food as much as to anything else. This characteristic might be divided into two broad areas: on the one hand, colour and food systems, for example, in relation to humoral theory; and, on the other, the moral and spiritual connotations of colour.

### **Colour, humoral theories and food systems**

Colour was an important indicator of the characteristics of a foodstuff according to medieval humoral theories and other food systems. Humoral theories had their antecedents in Galenic medicine; by the later Middle Ages their application to foodstuffs was a very varied and

<sup>8</sup> Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 150, 157–8, 162–3.

<sup>9</sup> Valentina Brancone, *Il tesoro dei cardinali del Duecento. Inventari di libri et beni mobili*. Micrologus Library 31 (Florence: SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2009), 84 (goods pledged in 1262 by Ottaviano degli Ubaldini to a Florentine merchant); Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 158.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Pastoureau, ‘Les couleurs médiévales: systèmes de valeurs et modes de sensibilité’, in idem, *Figures et couleurs: études sur la symbolique et la sensibilité médiévales* (Paris: Léopard d’or, 1986), 35–49 (39–43); idem, *Blue: the History of a Colour* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); idem, *The Devil’s Cloth: a History of Stripes and Striped Fabric* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Pastoureau, *Figures et couleurs*, 40; LJ. Gavel, *Colour: a Study of Its Position in the Art Theory of the Quattro- & Cinquecento* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1979), 138–43.

<sup>12</sup> Gavel, *Colour*, 144–5.

complex process – indeed it is often difficult to find unanimity of practice and understanding. On one level, humoral theory might readily explain the ripening of fruit: cold was associated with whiteness and paleness, heat, with blackness and redness. Medieval encyclopaedists thus described the ripening of an apple through its absorption of the heat of summer, at the same time changing its flavour from the acidity associated with greenness to the sweetness of red or yellow.<sup>13</sup> These texts drew on Arabic medical works, for example the *De dietis universalibus et particularibus* of Isaac Israeli of Kairouan (c.832–932) and their influence endured through the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> An example might be found in the discussion of wine. Medieval writers were interested in its effects on the body. The colour of wine was noted in passing by Aldebrandin of Siena in his *Regimen sanitatis* of the mid-thirteenth century;<sup>15</sup> but more particular attention was given by other authors. Information derived from Galenic medicine and the work of Isaac Israeli appears in one of the para-texts of the *Secreta secretorum* by the Dominican Geoffrey of Waterford and Servais Copale, from around 1300. The colour of wine was derived from the grapes used in its making: Isaac had written at length on how wine changed with age, and what was best for each individual – and these traits were now reworked and abbreviated. So white wine – which started out being most similar to water for its colour – gradually gained qualities with age as its colour deepened, and after three or four years its natural heat had reached its greatest and was at its best, having a citrine to yellow colour.<sup>16</sup> In other analyses of foods in humoral terms, red foods often appeared as hot: red-fleshed meats were hot, light-fleshed meats, such as pork, or that of other young quadrupeds, was moist and cool. Domestic fowl had more tempered meats than wildfowl, and the dark flesh of some of the latter, such as swans, was associated with melancholy.<sup>17</sup>

Another approach to colour reflected a different type of food system, which one might describe loosely as the doctrine of signatures. This turned on the notion that if the visible characteristics of two items were similar, there was likely to be a relationship between them. Thus red meat was good for the blood – and Isaac Israeli had pointed to the ease with which red wine might be changed into blood, ‘on account of the similitude it had with it in liquor, colour and savour’.<sup>18</sup> Thus something that was red was similar to another thing that was also red, and they had mutual resonances. How beneficial these foodstuffs were depended equally on the make up of the individual in humoral terms – and one aimed for a balance.<sup>19</sup> Some colours were nonetheless seen as off-putting in terms of consumption. In one of the Becket miracles recorded in the late twelfth century by Benedict of Peterborough, Atheldrida, living at Canterbury, was cured of a fever after drinking some of the blood of the martyr, which was mixed by a monk at the shrine lest its taste or colour provoked disgust in the drinker.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 156; M.C. Seymour and others, eds., *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus Rerum*. 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–8), 2: 964–5.

<sup>14</sup> *Isaaci Ivdae, Salomonis Arabiae regis adoptivi filij, De diaetis uniuersalibus & particularibus, Libri II* (Basle: ex officina Sixti Henricpetri, 1570).

<sup>15</sup> L. Landouzy and R. Pépin, eds., *Le régime du corps de Maître Aldebrandin de Sienne, texte français du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: H. Champion, 1911), 19–20, 117–18.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Henry, ‘Un texte oenologique de Jofroi de Waterford et Servais Copale’, *Romania* 107 (1986): 1–37 (21); *Isaaci Ivdae, ... De diaetis uniuersalibus & particularibus*, 591–601.

<sup>17</sup> Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 80–1; . Scully, *Art of Cookery*, 44–9.

<sup>18</sup> *Isaaci Ivdae, ... De diaetis uniuersalibus & particularibus*, 597: ‘& mutatur in sanguinem facilius, propter similitudinem quam hebet cum eo in liquore, colore & sapore.’

<sup>19</sup> Albala. *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, 79–81.

<sup>20</sup> J.C. Robertson, ed., *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*. Rolls Series 67. 7 vols. (London: Longman, 1875–85), 2: 54: ‘Miscuit ei monachus, ut caeteris solebat, ne sapor aut color

### Morality and the colours of food

Medieval people linked colour to morality. There were well-known associations with good and evil. An opposition between black and white was widely understood; and it is far from surprising that there should be examples that relate colour to food, either as a metaphor, or as a caution. John Bromyard, looking for an illustration of hypocrisy for his great *Summa predicantium* in the years before the Black Death, turned to the swan, with its white plumage and black flesh.<sup>21</sup> In the fifteenth-century English N-town play cycle, in the play of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, the virtue of the fair maid that Joseph was about to marry was neatly encapsulated in the sentiment that ‘She is buxum [humble, obedient] and whyte as laue [loaf].’<sup>22</sup> The *Gesta Romanorum*, translated into English in the fifteenth century, included a tale about the Emperor Alexander and the law he promulgated that ‘no man should at this table eat the black side of a plaice, but only the white side, without turning it over; and if any man did the contrary, he should lose his life’. Inevitably he had a guest, an earl, who ate both sides. The earl was saved by his own son, who took his stead and was granted three wishes, the last of which was that eyes of those who saw his father turn over the plaice should have their eyes put out. No witnesses came forward. The explanation of this *exemplum* was that the earl was Adam, and turning the plaice was eating the apple in Eden.<sup>23</sup>

Food and morality made especial connections in events like the Fall of Man, or in the sin of gluttony. Some of the first references to the service of coloured foods appeared as examples of wanton extravagance, in the France of the 1330s.<sup>24</sup> Nicolas de La Chesnaye’s *La condamnation de banquet* of c.1503–5 brought to table a rich selection of coloured sauces: ‘Saulse robert et cameline, / Le saupiquet, la cretonee, / Le haricot, la salemine, / Le blanc manger, la galentine, / Le gravé sentant comme balsme, / Boussac montee avec dodine, / Chaulhumer et saulse madame’ – with the moral implications of extravagance and gluttony.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, the lack of colour in other circumstances might be a sign of virtue: the poor widow in Chaucer’s Nun’s Priest’s Tale, whose ‘board was provisioned mostly with white and black’ – dairy foods and dark bread, that is, marked out her virtue against those who might consume suspect coloured foods and wine.<sup>26</sup>

### Colouring food

Against this background of colour as a means to analysing the nature of food, and indicating to contemporaries ideas about morality and virtue, why should people seek to colour food? The opinion of some was clear: food should not be coloured. One of the great complaints against elite medieval cooks was that ‘with their new conceits, chopping, stamping and

sanguineus bibenti horrorem incuteret.’

<sup>21</sup> John Bromyard, *Summa predicantium* (Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1485) Ipocrisis I vii, Art. i iiiii: ‘Tercio sunt cigni inferni quia sicut cignus plumas habet albas sed carnes dicitur habere nigras etc.’

<sup>22</sup> S. Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D. 8*. EETS, SS 11–12. 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1: 104, line 271 (Play 10 The marriage of Mary and Joseph).

<sup>23</sup> S.J.H. Herrtage, ed., *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum ...* EETS, ES 33 (London: N. Trübner for the EETS, 1879), 153–5: ‘no man shulde at his borde ete the blake syde of the playse, but al the white syde, withe outen turnynge; and yf enye man dud the contrarie he shulde lese his lyfe.’

<sup>24</sup> G. Tilander, ed., *Les livres du Roy Modus et de la Reyne Ratio*. 2 vols. (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1932), 2: 33 (from ‘Le songe de pestilence’); Vincent-Cassy, ‘La vue et les mangeurs’, 161–75.

<sup>25</sup> Nicolas de La Chesnaye, *La condamnation de banquet*, eds. Jelle Koopmans and Paul Verhuyck (Geneva: Droz, 1991), 110–13 (ll. 722–8).

<sup>26</sup> L. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 253, ll. 2843–6: ‘Hir bord was served most with whit and blak’; C.M. Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England, 1200–1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 78, 263.

grinding’ they were changing nature.<sup>27</sup> This was both unfortunate and unlooked for from a moral standpoint. Yet changing the colour of food was an important feature of their work. This was a new phenomenon, part of the elite cuisine common across Europe probably by about 1200, based on sharp, acidic sauces, and spices. It was different from what had gone before. One looks in vain for colour in the few earlier Old English recipes, such as those that had appeared in tenth-century collections of medical materials, like *Bald’s Leechbook* (which considered some aspects of diet more generally).<sup>28</sup> From about 1300 a great deal more is known about what the cooks thought they were doing, as cookbooks appear across Europe – there are only a handful that date in origin from before this point.<sup>29</sup> These volumes, often slight, belong in genre to the tradition of the mechanical arts, the *artes mechanicae*, and they give important practical insights into cooking and the presentation of food and drink. The cookbooks demonstrate how the stamping and grinding was to be done and what it produced: dishes of food pulps, that is, pottages and broths – what one thirteenth-century cookbook called ‘white mush’ (‘hwit moos’),<sup>30</sup> and another, from the fifteenth century, ‘blue mush’ (‘blawe mose’),<sup>31</sup> sauces; roasts and grilled foods; fried foods; baked and boiled foods; egg recipes; and set dishes, like ‘leche meats’ (that is, made dishes, that were then sliced). These were the dishes of elite cooks. Cookbooks from across Europe described the creation of colour, and provide a good deal of evidence about the contexts in which it coloured food was consumed. But even here there is a disjuncture in the evidence: these books do not on the whole tell us the reasons why food was processed in this way. This was an essentially descriptive approach to colour, how people thought about working with colour from a practical standpoint. It is analogous to that found in the *Fachliteratur* of artists and illuminators, directing artists in the creation of colour.<sup>32</sup>

### The chronology and origins of recipes for coloured food

Across Europe medieval recipe books are exceptional items, and there are perhaps between 150 and 200 in total.<sup>33</sup> To understand their evidence for colour and its use, it is necessary to comprehend the origins and chronology of these works. Consideration must also be given to

<sup>27</sup> F.J. Furnivall, ed., *Manners and Meals in Olden Time: the Babees Book*, ... EETS, OS 32 (London: N. Trübner and Co., 1868), 149: ‘with þeire newe conceytes, choppyng, stampyng, & gryndyng’.

<sup>28</sup> O. Cockayne, ed., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft in Early England*, vol. 2. Rolls Series 35 (London: Longman and others, 1865).

<sup>29</sup> G. Gasper and others, *Ziniber: Sauces from Poitou. Twelfth-Century Recipes from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, MS 51* (London: Prospect Books, forthcoming); Rudolf Grewe, ‘An Early 13th Century Northern European Cookbook’, in *A Conference on Current Research in Culinary History: Sources, Topics, and Methods: Proceedings... Radcliffe College June 14–16, 1985* (Hingham, MA: Culinary Historians of Boston, 1986), 27–45; Laurioux, *Les livres de cuisine médiévaux*.

<sup>30</sup> Grewe, ‘Early 13th Century Northern European Cookbook’, 37, recipe 16.

<sup>31</sup> Scully, *Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*, 114–15, citing H. Wiswe, ‘Mittelniederdeutsches Kochbuch des 15. Jahrhunderts’, *Braunschweigisches Jahrbuch* 37 (1956): 19–55 (38, recipe 41; 46, recipe 93); for the latest edition, M. Caparrini, ed., *La letteratura culinaria in bassotedesco medio. Un’indagine linguistica e storico-culturale sulla base del ricettario di Wolfenbüttel (cod. Guelf. Helmst. 1213)* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> N.K. Turner and D. Oltrogge, ‘Pigment Recipes and Model Books: Mechanisms for Knowledge Transmission and the Training of Manuscript Illuminators’, in *Colour: the Art and Science of Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Panayotova, 89–107; Mark Clarke, ed., *The Crafts of Lymmyng and The Maner of Steynyng: Middle English Recipes for Painters, Stainers, Scribes, and Illuminators*. Early English Text Society, Original Series, 347 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> There are 138 listed in C.B. Heatt, C. Lambert B. Laurioux and A. Prentki, ‘Répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires’, in *Du manuscrit à la table: essais sur la cuisine au moyen âge et répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires*, ed. C. Lambert (Montreal: Champignon-Slatkine, 1992), 315–62; and others have come to light more recently.

whether there was a notion of a ‘colour system’ or schemes of chromaticism in operation, as that might help explain why particular foods were coloured. For medieval England, the earliest cookbooks contain fewest recipes, low 10s; and the most extensive, texts like the late fourteenth-century *Forme of Cury*, or ‘method of cooking’, only just over 200. When all are gathered together from all manuscripts, counting all that are repeated each time they appear, there are between 3,000 and 4,000 recipes. Most of these are short, running to no more than four or five lines in a printed text. Most date from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although one or two recipe collections go back to the late thirteenth century.<sup>34</sup> This corpus of material shows that colour was of particular importance in cookery in late medieval England – and other recipe collections discussed below demonstrate this as well for continental Europe,<sup>35</sup> and that recipes go out of their way to tell us about the colouring of food. A proportion discusses colour and the cooking process, but the largest number comes to questions of colour in relation to the finished dish, that it should have a particular colour, that it might be coloured almost as part of an artistic process, with the cook working on food almost like a blank canvas. Colouring is also implicit in many recipes: even if the recipe does not state that the colour will be white, or yellow, it is apparent that it will be. But while cookbooks of all dates have references to colour, some of these works have none or almost none.

Two Anglo-Norman culinary collections, one from late thirteenth century; the other from 1320–40, the latter translated into English in a work now known as the *Diversa cibaria*, illustrate the importance of colour in dishes.<sup>36</sup> The second work, contained in London, British Library, MS Royal 12 C XII, has 32 recipes: all but two contain references to colour. Some of those references are in the name of the dish: it famously starts with three, ‘Blanc desirre’, ‘Vert desirree’ and ‘Aneserre’, literally ‘white food of Syria’, ‘green food of Syria’ and ‘yellow food of Syria’. Most of the recipes, however, also conclude with a statement: ‘the colour shall be green’, yellow, red, blue, rose or, indeed, white. The other Anglo-Norman manuscript, BL, Additional MS 32085, folios 117v–119v, has 29 recipes. Colour appears in the names of some of the dishes, but 19 of them have no direct reference to colour. A survey of French cookbooks of the fourteenth century has demonstrated how, alongside increasing references to spices and sugar, mentions of colour become more frequent as the century progresses: the earliest manuscript of the *Viandier* attributed to Taillevent, from around 1300, has 29 recipes that involve colour,<sup>37</sup> while the *Ménagier de Paris* of around 1393 has 115.<sup>38</sup> The earliest Catalan cookbook, the *Libre de Sent Soví*, now survives in two fifteenth-century manuscripts, but in origin probably dates from the 1320s or 1330s. Of its 200 recipes, only 17 making direct reference to colour, either in the dish name or the cooking instructions.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> C.B. Heatt, T. Nutter and J.H. Holloway, *Concordance of English Recipes: Thirteenth Through Fifteenth Centuries*. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 312 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies; 2006); supplemented by C.B. Heatt, *A Gathering of Medieval English Recipes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 155–70, and C.B. Heatt, *Cocatrice and Lampray Hay: Late Fifteenth-Century Recipes from Corpus Christi College Oxford* (Blackawton: Prospect Books, 2012), 145–72.

<sup>35</sup> C.M. Woolgar, ‘Fast and Feast: Conspicuous Consumption and the Diet of the Nobility in the Fifteenth Century’ in *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. M. Hicks (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 7–25, especially 21–3.

<sup>36</sup> For editions of both texts: C.B. Heatt and R.F. Jones, ‘Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections, Edited from British Library Manuscripts Additional 32085 and Royal 12 C XII’, *Speculum* 61 (1986): 859–82. The English translation, the *Diversa cibaria*, is printed in *CI*, 43–58.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Aebischer, ‘Un manuscrit valaisan du “Viandier” attribué à Taillevent’, *Vallesia* 8 (1953): 73–100.

<sup>38</sup> Analysed in Vincent-Cassy, ‘La vue et les mangeurs’, 163–4.

<sup>39</sup> R. Grewe, ed., *Libre de Sent Soví (receptari de cuina)* (Barcelona: Barcino, 1979), 7, 73, 86–7, 91, 93–6, 100,

Surveys of German cookbooks show the importance of colour in their recipes from at least the 1340s.<sup>40</sup> A small German cookbook of the 1420s, with some 38 recipes, has a number that are explicit about the use of colour, even if their proportion in the whole is modest.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, some English cookbooks have very many more. A recipe book, BL, MS Harley 279, probably from the 1430s, is divided into three sections: of 153 recipes in a kalendar of divers pottages, 68 have reference to colour, either in the dish name or the cooking instructions; there are 64 recipes for ‘Leche vyaundez’, that is, the set dishes that are then sliced, of which 16 have colour references; and a final section of 41 recipes for bakemeats, of which only four have colour references.<sup>42</sup> In another group of recipes from the late fifteenth century, in BL, MS Harley MS 5401, 25 out of 96 refer to colour.<sup>43</sup> These recipe collections demonstrate an important degree of variation: some are prolific in their mention of colour, so much so that it is clear that colouring is a major part of the *raison d’être* of the cooking instructions. Others, produced in the same environment, have comparatively few references. There is a trend towards colour playing a larger role – in that it is mentioned in more recipes and at more points in them – later in the Middle Ages; but that said, there are striking examples of it in some of the earliest collections. It is hard to see the basis for these differences, and there is little evidence to suggest that there are here indications that recipes were used in a different milieu, or by a different group of people. The *Liber cure cocorum*, in its discussion of ‘petty curry’ or ‘little cookery’, explaining it for lesser men, includes recipes with directions ‘for colouring’.<sup>44</sup>

Where did this passion for colour come from? In discussing the visual impact of food, commentators have pointed to the common origin of some elements of elite cookery, especially the influence of the world of the Middle East and to similarities in Arab cookery.<sup>45</sup> The names of dishes – ‘from Syria’, ‘from Cyprus’, ‘Saracen’ – also suggest these connections. Dishes from ‘Cyprus’ typically had sugar, for which the island was well known; ‘Saracen’ dishes were often, at least in the earlier forms of dishes with this name, coloured red – one fifteenth-century recipe for ‘Pylets yn Sarcene’, for pork meatballs in an almond-milk pottage, instructs the maker to ‘add a portion of sanders to colour it Saracen colour’.<sup>46</sup> Some dishes required ingredients that were not found in northern Europe, such as large quantities of almonds, or dried fruits from the Mediterranean; some, like the less colourful Anglo-Norman collection, implied oranges or at least a knowledge of them.<sup>47</sup> That some Arab dishes were coloured seems in little doubt. Evidence like the thirteenth-century writings of

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119–20, 137, 155, 162, 179–80.

<sup>40</sup> Melitta Weiss Adamson, ‘Medieval Germany’, in eadem, ed. *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe: a Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 168–84.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth I. Wade-Sirabian, ‘“Als ich dich vor gelert haun”: Conrad Buitzruss’s recipe collection in manuscript Clm671 (Munich)’, *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 34 (2009): 172–84 (173–4); cf. B. Lauriou, *Le moyen âge à table* (Paris: Adam Biro, 1989), 36.

<sup>42</sup> *TFCCB*, 5–56.

<sup>43</sup> C.B. Heatt, ‘The Middle English Culinary Recipes in MS Harley 5401: an Edition and Commentary’, *Medium Aevum* 65 (1996): 54–71.

<sup>44</sup> R. Morris, ed., *Liber cure cocorum, Copied and Edited from the Sloane MS. 1986* (Berlin: A. Asher & Co. for the Philological Society, 1862), 42–6.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson, ‘Ritual, Form and Colour in the Medieval Food Tradition’, 5–27.

<sup>46</sup> C.B. Heatt, ed., *An Ordinance of Pottage: an Edition of the Fifteenth-Century Culinary Recipes in Yale University’s MS Beinecke 163* (London: Prospect Books, 1988), 41 (no. 17): ‘put thereto powdyr of pepyr & canel, and a percyon of sawndrys to colour hit Sarcene colour’; B. Lauriou notes that some ‘Saracen’ dishes would have been black: *Les livres de cuisine médiévaux*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> Although this may be a confusion with ‘pomegranate’ – the MS reads ‘poume dorages’: Heatt and Jones, ‘Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections’, 862 (recipe 1). Neither fruit is among the ingredients: this dish is a pork meatball, made to look like the ‘poume dorages’.



the doctor and scholar known as al-Baghdādī, provide ample support for this, documenting his visit to Egypt in the 1190s and early 1200s.<sup>48</sup> Examination of a wider range of cookbooks and other evidence relating to Cairo suggests that colour was an important element in local cookery, especially in the use of saffron – but that elites may have used a wider range of foods and colours. There are parallels over a longer timescale, too, in Abbasid Iraq,<sup>49</sup> but they may not have been coloured for the same reasons as Western dishes: a link to alchemy in Arabic cooking is one possibility. There are also in some Arabic manuscripts recipes for ‘sauce’, ‘sals’, which probably all originate in Western or ‘Frankish’ dishes – colour has a significant part in these.<sup>50</sup> The evidence for the original dates of these recipes is difficult to unpick.

### Colouring dishes

In some dishes, colour was essential to the dish, indeed it was the name of the dish. This is the case with ‘blanc mange’, ‘white food’, typically based on almond milk with a ground whiteish meat, poultry or pork – even if the recipes do not then talk about colour (and, indeed, with time they may have produced entirely different colours); likewise we find ‘white mortress’, that is a ground/pounded food, for example, of pork.<sup>51</sup> Dishes that were coloured red included eels in sore, or ‘sorrey’ – ‘sore’ etymologically meaning red.<sup>52</sup> Sauces for food were often known by their colour, or were expected to be a particular colour. Thus at St Augustine’s Abbey in Canterbury, the mid-thirteenth-century subcellarer’s customary sets out the loaves that were needed for the making of white ginger sauce, galentine and green sauce. ‘Verde sauce’, green sauce, was used extensively with fish throughout the Middle Ages. At St Augustine’s, the monks, and the abbot, ate a great deal of fish and shellfish; the abbot’s green sauce was made with wastel bread, that for the monks with one of the lesser loaves.<sup>53</sup> There was perhaps a conceit that green sauce was like water and the fish was in its natural element. The sauce was used for both freshwater and for marine fish.<sup>54</sup> The *Forme of Cury*, the great cookbook probably originating in the court of Richard II of England, gave the ingredients of green sauce as parley, mint, garlic, thyme and sage, along with spices and a little saffron (perhaps to brighten the green).<sup>55</sup> Other dishes of fish have sauces with them which may not be ‘green sauce’ by name, but in practice their colour was green. The *Forme of Cury* has a recipe for mackerel in sauce that uses mint and concludes with an instruction ‘colour it green or yellow and mess it forth’.<sup>56</sup> Another of its recipes, for ‘place in cyvee’, was to be coloured ‘gaudy green’, a bright green.<sup>57</sup> The *Forme of Cury* went on to give white sauce, for boiled capons; a black sauce for roasted capons; a black sauce for malards (coloured with the blood

<sup>48</sup> C. Perry, ed., *A Baghdad Cookery Book: the Book of Dishes (Kitāb al-Tabīkh) ...*, ed. C. Perry (Blackawton: Prospect Books, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> P.B. Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes: Aspects of Life in an Islamic Metropolis of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 26, 49, 144–5, 172, 204, 255 and n. 612, 264, 281, 330, 345.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Perry, ‘The Sals of the Infidels’, in *Medieval Arab cookery: Essays and Translations by Maxime Rodinson, A.J. Arberry & Charles Perry* (Blackawton: Prospect Books, 2001), 497–502.

<sup>51</sup> *TFCCB*, 28, recipe 70.

<sup>52</sup> Heatt, *Ordinance of Pottage*, 40, no. 14. Anglo-Norman Dictionary, *sub soré, adj.*, available through the Anglo-Norman On-line Hub, at <http://www.anglo-norman.net> (Accessed 28 July 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 156; Lambeth Palace Library, MS 1213, pp. 314–15.

<sup>54</sup> Fish dishes coloured green: e.g. *CI*, 119, no. 97; 122, no. 109; 124, no. 125; Heatt, ed., *Gathering of Medieval English Recipes*, 71, nos. 60, 68–73.

<sup>55</sup> *CI*, 130, no. 144.

<sup>56</sup> *CI*, 122, no. 109: ‘Colour it grene or yelow & messe it forth.’

<sup>57</sup> *CI*, 124, no. 115.

of the duck);<sup>58</sup> a yellow sauce, a ‘gaunceli’, here for geese, a garlic sauce, coloured with saffron;<sup>59</sup> and a ‘brown green sauce’.<sup>60</sup> Other sauces were well-known for their colour: cameline sauce, flavoured especially with cinnamon, has a slightly uncertain etymology, but one suggestion is that was ‘camel-coloured’, but it could equally be ‘cannelline’, that is, ‘cinnamony’.<sup>61</sup>

This interest in coloured sauces appeared across Europe, and cooks were instructed in a careful and thoughtful refinement of the medium. The *Libre de Sent Soví* has a recipe for a sweet and sour sauce, instructing that ‘you do not want this sauce to be too red, but that it is between cinnamon and saffron (i.e. between light brown and yellow)’.<sup>62</sup> A lemon-based sweet and sour sauce that was to be used for either roast or boiled chickens had to be greatly coloured.<sup>63</sup> Another sauce, ‘ginestrada’, was the yellow of broom flowers, but was principally coloured with saffron.<sup>64</sup> A pepper sauce that went with cranes was brown from the ground toast that was mixed with it.<sup>65</sup>

In other examples, colour was essential to recognising the dish: this is not just the name of the dish, it is colour telling us about the nature of the food; it must be this colour because it is this food. This was the case, for example, with dishes that were based on fruits and flowers. In the *Diversa servicia*, ‘murrey’, a dish made of crushed mulberries, with bread, fat and, sugar, noted that if it was not coloured enough, more mulberries should be added.<sup>66</sup> Fifteenth-century English cookery, at least, had a series of coloured dishes with fruit and flowers: mulberries, strawberries, cherries, violets, primroses, hawthorn and so on.<sup>67</sup> There was both a red and a white version of the rose dish.<sup>68</sup>

Some types of dish were very good at taking colour. Here one might point to those based either on almond milk, or, indeed, cow’s milk; and those that were based on set custards or fat-based mixtures, commonly designed for slicing. These show, without doubt, that one of things uppermost in the cook’s mind in preparing these dishes was colour. The recipe for ‘lete lardes’ in the *Forme of Cury* uses cow’s milk, parsley, with eggs and lard. There then follow instructions for making the dish with different colours: yellow using saffron and omitting the parsley; white, without saffron and parsley, but wheat starch; red, with sanders – powder from sandalwood; purple, with turnesole (the lichen orchil); black, with blood; while a further variant makes provision for blue.<sup>69</sup> Here also one might list such dishes as coloured creams.<sup>70</sup> Another category that might be easily coloured were jellies, often described as amber, well coloured with saffron.<sup>71</sup>

Colourings were also added to pottages and broths. In the fifteenth-century collection known as the *Ordinance of Pottage*, there was a sequence of recipes for broths: Lombard broth, with chicken and/or rabbit, which in a final flourish was coloured as red as blood; a

<sup>58</sup> *CI*, 130, no. 145.

<sup>59</sup> *CI*, 131, no. 146.

<sup>60</sup> *CI*, 131, no. 148 ‘Vertesaus broun’.

<sup>61</sup> **Needs a ref**

<sup>62</sup> Grewe, ed., *Libre de Sent Soví*, 87, cap. 44: ‘E aquesta salsa no vol ésser molt vermella, mes que sia entre canella e seffrà.’

<sup>63</sup> Grewe, ed., *Libre de Sent Soví*, 96, cap. 52: ‘E aquesta salsa deu ésser molt colorada.’

<sup>64</sup> Grewe, ed., *Libre de Sent Soví*, 100, cap. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Grewe, ed., *Libre de Sent Soví*, 119, cap. 83.

<sup>66</sup> *CI*, 69, no. 37.

<sup>67</sup> *TFCCB*, 28–9, nos. 122–8 ; 23–4, nos. 91, 100.

<sup>68</sup> Red: from the *Utilis coquinario*, *CI*, 90, no. 32; white, from the *Forme of Cury*, *CI*, 109, no. 53.

<sup>69</sup> *CI*, 113, no. 69; and 209, *sub* pownas.

<sup>70</sup> *TFCCB*, 20 recipe 77.

<sup>71</sup> *TFCCB*, 25, recipe 109; 86.

broth of Germany (bruet of Almayn), coloured red as blood with alkanet; a venison broth, made with roe deer, coloured yellow with saffron; a chicken broth, coloured with saffron; Lombard stew, made with pork, coloured with saffron, but mainly with sanders, i.e. to make it red; a Tuscan broth, coloured green; a Saracen broth, coloured red with alkanet; and, finally, a white broth, a blanch bruet, but with its final flourish acquiring a dusting of sugar that had been stained with alkanet.<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting in this list how dishes that ostensibly had a foreign origin had to have a particular colour. Colour was a way of indicating the exotic. It was also prominent in the made dishes and tarts of this collection.

The more detailed the recipe, the more likely it is that information about colour will go beyond simply the name of the dish, and that it will give evidence for cooking as part of the *artes mechanicae*, as a skill. Recipes describe the colours of ingredients, how colour might be an indicator in the cooking process – and also when in the preparation of the dish colouring was to take place, in some cases as a separate decorative element. Different qualities of some ingredients were distinguished by colour: for example, white, brown or black sugar; the whites of leeks, as well as egg yolks and whites; and there is detail about the colour of some powdered preparations of spices, like blanch powder.<sup>73</sup> Some cooking processes created colour, for example, blanching almonds, or frying them brown;<sup>74</sup> and steaks might be grilled brown.<sup>75</sup> In the *Boke of Kokery*, of c.1450, capons that were to be stewed were coloured with saffron before being set in the pot; birds baked in a pastry case were equally coloured with egg yolks and saffron before baking.<sup>76</sup> When making a capon pie, the mid-fifteenth-century English *Liber cure cocorum* instructed that the colouring with saffron was to be done with a ‘fayre federe’.<sup>77</sup> Basting with juices or batters and roasting was used to create colour. Meatballs might be basted using green and yellow batters in imitation of pomegranates.<sup>78</sup> Other meatballs became golden apples, using egg yolks coloured with green juice; yet others were simply called ‘apples’, with the green in the batter supplied by the juice from parsley, mallows or green wheat;<sup>79</sup> or the balls might be made to resemble hedgehogs, with spikes of blanched almonds, and green coloured almond milk and some blackened with blood.<sup>80</sup> It is in recipes like these that one sees the medieval passion for play and humour, for verisimilitude, for making one thing superficially like another.

Cookbooks were not only about what happened in the kitchen, but encompassed wider aspects of the preparation of food for service. If one looks closely at the structure of medieval recipes which mention colour, many of them mention it in a clause right at the end of the recipe, which says ‘and colour it with’, just before a final direction, ‘serve it forth’. These are the final touches in dressing the dish for the table. As well as the application of colour, it was at this point that powdered spices or comfits, or other decoration were applied to the dish. Just occasionally, the recipes make it explicit that this final direction was to happen at the dresser, in the final preparation of food for service.

The dresser is one of the most overlooked parts of the kitchen and cooking process. Its physical location varied from place to place, but the routines that went on there were commonly linked to display. The *Rules* of Bishop Robert Grosseteste, for the countess of

<sup>72</sup> Heatt, ed., *Ordinance of Pottage*, 50–3.

<sup>73</sup> Blanch powder: *TFCCB*, 15, recipe 50.

<sup>74</sup> *CI*, 127, no. 129.

<sup>75</sup> *TFCCB*, 40, no. 31.

<sup>76</sup> *TFCCB*, 71, 75.

<sup>77</sup> Morris, ed., *Liber cure cocorum*, 51.

<sup>78</sup> *TFCCB*, 38–9, recipe 23.

<sup>79</sup> *TFCCB*, 14, recipe 46; 38, recipe 19.

<sup>80</sup> *TFCCB*, 38, recipe 20.

Lincoln, 1245×53, setting out how she should manage her estates and her household, did not separately designate a dresser, but instructed the countess that the marshal of the household ought to name the servers at each meal who were to go to the kitchen – that is, to collect the food that had been dressed for service – and he was then to supervise from the end of the hall the distribution to the officers who have been assigned to set out the food.<sup>81</sup> By the fifteenth century, the role of the dresser is much clearer. Master Chiquart, the renowned cook of the duke of Savoy, in his *Du fait de cuisine* of 1420, in planning the arrangements for cooking the two days of feasting that formed the centrepiece of the work, described the area that would be needed for dressing foods. There should be great double dressers (by dresser he meant a tabletop), so that between the ‘dressers for the mouth’, the place where foods are prepared for the duke himself, and the others there should be room for the esquires of the kitchen to give out and receive the foods.<sup>82</sup> The long and detailed Harleian Household Regulations, from late fifteenth-century England, were interested in the ceremonial of service. They located the dresser at an intermediate point between the kitchen and those areas to which food was delivered, the great chamber and the hall. A yeoman of the ewery was to go down to the dresser, waited on with two or three yeomen of the chamber (the lord’s great chamber, where his meal was to be served). As the sewer – the principal servant serving the food – went down, the gentlemen were ordered to the dresser and the yeomen of the chamber were ordered there to serve the lord. The dresser was covered with a cloth by the yeoman of the scullery, and assays (tasting food, against poison) were taken; the clerk of the kitchen was there to see the food set out, as a control. The server gave an assay to the yeoman cook of every dish of meat served and to the yeoman of the scullery; and the yeoman of the scullery was given an assay of every sauce served. When the sewer was ready to come from the dresser, every gentleman and yeoman had his dish filled and covered in preparation for service – and the sewer put them in order at the entry to the hall.<sup>83</sup>

Activities at the dresser also emerge from inventories and recipes. In the inventory taken on the death of Thomas Morton, a canon residentiary of York, on 13 June 1449, listed among his plate was a silver box with the legend ‘Strew on powder’ – that is, ground spices. We do not know where Morton’s box was located, but powder boxes like this were typically to be found at the dresser.<sup>84</sup> Like many recipes, one for apple moyle, made from ground rice, almond milk and apples, was finished with a series of short instructions: ‘throw on sufficient sugar, and colour it with saffron, and cast on good powder and serve forth.’<sup>85</sup> A recipe for ‘fygeye’, a confection of figs, pinenuts, bread and ale, in an English cookbook probably from the 1430s (BL, MS Harley 279), has the instruction ‘and at the dresser, cast thereon

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<sup>81</sup> D. Oschinsky, ed., *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 404–5. For the date, L.J. Wilkinson, ‘The Rules of Robert Grosseteste Reconsidered: the Lady as Estate and Household Manager in Thirteenth-Century England’, in *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c.850–c.1550: Managing Power, Wealth, and the Body*, eds., C. Beattie, A. Maslakovic and S. Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 293–306.

<sup>82</sup> Terence Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine / On Cookery of Master Chiquart (1420)*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 354 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2010), 105.

<sup>83</sup> BL, MS Harley 6815, ff. 29v–30v. It has been suggested that these regulations are linked to the household of Richard, earl of Warwick (Warwick the Kingmaker): Kim M. Phillips, ‘The Invisible Man: Body and Ritual in a Fifteenth-Century Noble Household’, *Journal of Medieval History* 31 (2005): 143–62.

<sup>84</sup> [J. Raine], ed., *Testamenta Eboracensia: a Selection of Wills from the Registry at York*, vol. 3. Surtees Society, 45 (Durham: Andrews and Co. for the Surtees Society; 1865), 106, 113: ‘De i pixide arg’ cum scriptura *Strew on powder pond’* iii unc. iii quart xis. xd. ob.’

<sup>85</sup> *TFCCB*, 30, recipe 134: ‘prow on sugre y-now, & colore it with saffroun, & caste þer-to gode pouder, & serve forth.’

powdered sufficient cinnamon and serve forth.’<sup>86</sup> A recipe for ‘paynfoundew’ – fried bread, soaked in wine, with raisins, honey, eggs, with sugar and spices – was flourished with white coriander in comfits at the last stage.<sup>87</sup> It was at the dresser that the dishes that came from the kitchen were portioned into messes.<sup>88</sup> In a recipe for chickens in ‘dropeye’, boiled chicken was chopped small, tempered with almond milk and wine, and coloured red with alkanet as it was put in dishes. At the dresser it was to be salted, decorated with a feather or two, and if desirable, powdered ginger was to be added to the pottage.<sup>89</sup> The recipe for ‘caudle out of Lent’, in the same collection, described how the food was to be kept as white as possible, but at the dresser it was to be sprinkled with alkanet and then served; at this stage, a variant coloured the caudle with saffron, strewed on powder and sugar, and served it out.<sup>90</sup> Another recipe, for a syrup to go on a pestle (leg) of meat, described how it was to be applied to the dish at the dresser: ‘And at the dresser throw your syrup on your pestle, cream boiled egg yolks and add, and serve.’<sup>91</sup> Other references mention that this was where spices, or spiced preparations like blanch powder, cubebs, mace and cloves might be cast on the food – the final spicing and colouring of dishes took place here.<sup>92</sup> And from here the dishes were then set down in the hall.<sup>93</sup> This was a common pattern in great households across Europe. In the earliest text of the *Viandier* of Taillevent, from around 1300, ‘faux grenon’, an *entremets* of chopped veal, coloured yellow with saffron, was powdered at the dresser with cinnamon.<sup>94</sup> Master Chiquart’s *Du fait de cuisine* of 1420 describes how, at the dresser, fried fish was to be put on the platter, a green pottage was then to be cast over it and in a final flourish pomegranate seeds were sprinkled over it.<sup>95</sup>

All these instructions point to the importance of colour for spectacle in great establishments across Europe. Nowhere was this more important than with *entremets*, the dishes that came to table between the principal courses, in origin a special food – and which were to develop into the ‘subtleties’, the sometimes inedible tableaux, of the later Middle Ages. In the mid-thirteenth-century *Rules* of Robert Grosseteste, at the main meal the household was to have two full courses and the free household was also to have two *entremets* – that is, this food was restricted to a select part of the establishment.<sup>96</sup> By the late thirteenth century, these were on some occasions at least designed as set pieces, with a message, in which colour had a significant role. A recipe in the colourful Anglo-Norman culinary collection for ‘raunpaunt perree’, a dish with pears cooked with eggs and wheat starch, was put in dishes and decorated with pastry shapes, coloured yellow, of three lions rampant.<sup>97</sup> The *Forme of Cury* includes a recipe for ‘chastletes’, a pastry castle with five

<sup>86</sup> *TFCCB*, 24, recipe 103: ‘and atte þe dressoure, caste on poudere canel y-now, & serve forth’; also 30, recipe 130, ‘brewes in Lentyn’.

<sup>87</sup> *CI, Forme of cury*, 110–11, no. 60.

<sup>88</sup> *TFCCB*, 30; recipe 132.

<sup>89</sup> *TFCCB*, 30–1, recipe 137.

<sup>90</sup> *TFCCB*, 33, recipe 150.

<sup>91</sup> *TFCCB*, 40, recipe 22: ‘& atte þe dressoure þorw on þin sirip on þi pestelle, & kreme hard 3olkys of eyroun þer-to, & serve forth.’

<sup>92</sup> *TFCCB*, 48, recipe 9.

<sup>93</sup> Morris, ed., *Liber cure cocorum*, 15, 20.

<sup>94</sup> Aebischer, ‘Un manuscrit valaisan du “Viandier” attribué à Taillevent’, 91: ‘au drecier, poudrez poudre de canelle.’

<sup>95</sup> Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 177–8, no. 26: ‘Et quant il sera appoint de drecier si prenes vostre poysson friz et metes par voz platz et puis metes dudit potaige par dessus et semes des grains de mil granne par dessus [i.e. pomegranate seeds].’

<sup>96</sup> Oschinsky, ed., *Walter of Henley and other treatises*, 404–5.

<sup>97</sup> Heatt and Jones, ‘Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections’, 867, no. 24: ‘plaunté desus des feuilles secz de

different coloured stuffings – yellow, white, red, brown and green – which might well have been a subtlety of some sort,<sup>98</sup> and the stampings and grindings of cooks might produce coloured flowerpots with coloured flowers, or faux canvas sacks, each coloured, potential elements in this type of work.<sup>99</sup>

*Entremets* and subtleties were transient, yet impressive, examples of the medieval imagination, and colour was essential to their presentation. The thought and planning that went into the preparation of these dishes is evident, and that care extended to many other parts of the menu. Chiquart's *Du fait de cuisine* shows planning colour as an integral part of the preparations for a two-day celebration.<sup>100</sup> Some of his diners were to eat meat, others abstained and fish dishes were prepared for them. Chiquart ensured, however, that the dishes that came to the table were similarly coloured, of whichever type they were. So, on the first day, those abstaining from meat had a white pea-purée version of the white, chicken broth;<sup>101</sup> the brown, lamprey sauce for meat was matched by a similar brown sauce for fish;<sup>102</sup> and a green broth for fish was substituted for the green Savoy broth that had been prepared for the meat eaters.<sup>103</sup>

How do cookbooks describe the making of colour and what colours and substances were used? The predominant colour of much English medieval cookery described in cookbooks was yellow, and it was obtained from saffron, from egg yolks – and many continental cookbooks also turned frequently to these ingredients.<sup>104</sup> Green came from the liquid from crushed plants like parsley – the *julivert* of the *Libre de Sent Sovi*<sup>105</sup> – or from mallows, or green corn. Sanders – a powder from sandalwood – produced a red colour, as did a number of herbs or their roots, such as alkanet and sang dragon; browns came from ground toast, the shade depending on the degree to which it had been toasted, in some cases producing a black; cinnamon might produce a light brown; blood was also used for browns and blacks, although it might be added uncooked to produce a red colour. Fruits produced colourants: mulberries, grapes, lemons and oranges. And a lichen – orchil – referred to in the sources as 'turnesole', produced a red or a blue depending on the balance of acidity/alkali in the mixture. Glazing might come from egg yolks, and golds and silvers came from the use of thin sheets of foil of those metals.<sup>106</sup>

It was unusual for colours to be obtained from mixing primaries: colour was an indication of the essential nature of an object; mixing to achieve a new colour was a form of alchemy, changing the nature of the object.<sup>107</sup> If one wanted a green, for example, one used

paste, colour jaune, de treis lyouns rampauntz en les esquieles'. They might be 'lions rampant passant gardant or', i.e. the English royal arms, but in addition other individuals used three lions rampant or as part of their arms in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and the blazon is not sufficiently detailed to identify any particular individual with this dish: John de Bicknor (Dering Roll), Ralph le Savage (Dering Roll), Nicholas le Gras (Dering Roll), Adam de la Ford (Song of Caerlaverock) – Gerard J. Brault, ed., *Eight Thirteenth-Century Rolls of Arms in French and Anglo-Norman Blazon* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973); Gerard J. Brault, ed., *Rolls of Arms, Edward I (1272–1307)*. 2 vols. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997).

<sup>98</sup> *CI*, 142–3, no. 197.

<sup>99</sup> *CI*, 139–40, recipes 184–6.

<sup>100</sup> Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 56–7.

<sup>101</sup> Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 73, no. 23.

<sup>102</sup> Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 174–5, no. 24.

<sup>103</sup> Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 177–8, no. 26.

<sup>104</sup> A parallel to the saffron-coloured dishes of the Middle East.

<sup>105</sup> Grewe, ed., *Libre de Sent Sovi*, 179, cap. 166.

<sup>106</sup> These uses are surveyed in Scully, *Art of Cookery*, 113–16; and Weiss Adamson, *Food in medieval times*, 68–70. See also Wilson, 'Ritual, Form and Colour in the Medieval Food Tradition', 16–27.

<sup>107</sup> Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 159–61; the evidence of Clarke, ed., *Crafte of Lymmyng*,

green materials, not usually a mixture of yellow and blue. In the case of green, however, it was discovered that a brighter colour – known in English as ‘gawdy green’ and in French as ‘vert gay’ – might be achieved by adding a little saffron, a yellow, to the green. The Anglo-Norman recipe collection, in BL, MS Royal 12 C XII expected its dishes to be white, yellow, green, a range of reds – the reds of alkanet, sangdragon, the colour of rose and of mulberries, the reddy-brown of cinnamon in a dish of sorrey – as well as blue and black, along with at least one dish that was parti-coloured.<sup>108</sup> English recipes of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries exhibit a similar range, with some suggestions of shadings of colours – and gold and silver foils make their appearance.<sup>109</sup> There are also recipes for ‘motley’, a mixture of colours, with a streaking effect caused by partly stirring in one colour with another.<sup>110</sup> It has been suggested that there was not as much colour in the earliest copy of the *Viandier*, from around 1300, just the yellow of saffron and the green of parsley; but a closer reading demonstrates the conscious use of whites, blacks and browns too, as well as ‘vert gay’ and glazing, and the suggestion of shading, e.g. ‘yellowish’.<sup>111</sup>

### Consuming colour

If cookbooks attest a knowledge of working with colour, they are less certain evidence for the scale on which it was used. Oother sources, like household accounts, contain better information about the quantities of spices and related foods, such as almonds, that were used to produce colour, and they also are good evidence for when coloured foods were used – one cannot assume that, even in elite households, all and every meal is created in this way. The spices delivered by the apothecary of the count of Savoy in 1338–42 show 122 lbs. of saffron used in this timeframe, some for making fine powders along with ginger and pepper, cardamom, cubeb, cloves, long pepper and galingale; 222 lbs. of cinnamon by the weight of Chambéry and 83 lbs. by the weight of Rivoli; 52 lbs. of cumin (of which 12 lbs. was used for medical preparations); 89 lbs. of rice; and 175 lbs. of almonds.<sup>112</sup> This account makes a contrast to the colour that it is implicit in the quantities required for Chiquart’s specimen two days of feasts of around 1420. The colourants here included 25 lbs. of saffron, 18 lbs. of turnsole; 18 lbs. of alkanet; and 18 lbs. (perhaps books) of gold leaf, as well as 200 boxes of dragées of all manners and colours for sprinkling on pottages: the volume of colourants here is much greater than those used in 1338–42, and Chiquart must have expected to deliver a greater éclat.<sup>113</sup> For the household of Carlos III El Noble of Navarre in the early fifteenth century, there survive a series of detailed accounts for feasts. The kitchen expenses at the wedding in September 1406 of the Infanta Isabel and Jacques de Borbón, conde de La Marche, describe the *entremes*, the purchase of butter for ‘darioles’ (probably small custard tarts) and tarts, purchases of mustard for the saucery, the acquisition of 110 lbs. of ground rice; sacks for spices along with pepper, ginger, saffron, cinnamon and sanders. There was parsley for the saucery.<sup>114</sup> Nine hundred sheets of gold leaf were acquired for gilding swans,

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however, is that mixtures were commonly advocated in painting and manuscript illumination, e.g. 55–6, 72, 75–8; but note that the ‘tempering’ of colour with white, however, produced ‘false colours’ (78).

<sup>108</sup> Hieatt and Jones, ‘Two Anglo-Norman Culinary Collections’, 866–8.

<sup>109</sup> *CI*, *Forme of Cury*, 139, no. 183.

<sup>110</sup> *TFCCB*, 36–7, recipe 12.

<sup>111</sup> Wilson, ‘Ritual, Form and Colour in the Medieval Food Tradition’, 21; Aebischer, ‘Un manuscrit valaisan du “Viandier” attribué à Taillevent’, 88–90.

<sup>112</sup> F. Abbott, *Des comptes d’apothicaires: les épices dans la comptabilité de la Maison de Savoie (XIVe et XVe s.)*. Cahiers Lausannois d’histoire médiévale 51 (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 2012), 127–65, 176–7.

<sup>113</sup> Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 101–5.

<sup>114</sup> Fernando Serrano Larráyo, *La mesa del rey: cocina y régimen alimentario en la corte de Carlos III El Noble*

pigs and *entremes*; 450 sheets of silver leaf were purchased, along with 12 lbs of confections of anise of different colours – white, red and green for pottages.<sup>115</sup> The calculations of spices for the kitchen needed for the coronation feast of Richard III of England in 1483 included 8 lbs. of saffron, 8 lbs. of cinnamon, 14 lbs. of sanders, 24 lbs. of powdered anise, 16 lbs. of red and white comfits, and 12 lbs. of turnsole, and 100 sheets of pure gold leaf, and 100 of ‘partie’ gold; 3 lbs. of English saffron and 8 lbs of sanders were bought for the saucery, along with further powdered anise, red and white comfits, 6 lbs. of turnsole, 200 leaves of pure gold leaf and 60 of ‘partie gold’; there was further saffron and turnsole for the wafery. That 210 lbs of almonds were needed shows the scale of the cuisine using almond-based milks and pottages. It has been estimated that this was a feast for about 1000 people.<sup>116</sup>

Impressive though these occasions were, they should not give the impression that use of colour in this way was widespread: the occasions when it might appear, even in greater households, were carefully managed. Take the use of the red colourant sanders: it was used once by Dame Katherine de Norwich, the widow of Exchequer official, in 1336–7, at the great feast she gave to mark the anniversary of her second husband, 20 January 1337 – a day on which she disbursed a sixth of her annual household expenditure: she used four ounces for which she paid 12*d.* This day she also used two ounces of saffron – she had some 2 lbs. of saffron bought for 11*s.* 8*d.* as part of a bulk purchase of spices for a larger part of the year.<sup>117</sup> Five and a half pounds of sanders were bought by Richard Mitford, bishop of Salisbury, during 1406–7; but for his funeral feast in June 1407, some 12 lbs. were needed – at which point it was selling for 14*d.* a pound – along with 4 lbs. of saffron – which was then selling for 15*s.* a pound.<sup>118</sup> The price, however, suggests that this may not be the most important determinant in purchase: rather what was important was a style of cookery in general which had need for these colourants and which was reserved for the most special occasions, when expenditure on it might be concentrated for the impact it would make.<sup>119</sup> There was some use of colour at a lesser level for celebratory foods, because it was not unaffordable. Accounts survive for the celebration of the annual feast of the guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford upon Avon, Warws., for much of the fifteenth century. This was a feast attended by between 100 and 180 people, many of them the brethren and sisters of the guild who paid for themselves; but there was also a ‘top table’, as the guild was effectively the vehicle the town of Stratford used for entertaining on civic business. Coming to table typically were between 2 and 10 lbs. of almonds; colourants in the first quarter of the fifteenth century included saffron, usually not more than 3 oz.; sanders, sometimes as much as 1 lb.; there was about ½ lb. of cinnamon. Turnsole, however, appeared only late in the fifteenth century.<sup>120</sup>

These figures indicate that there was a long-standing interest in colour, that those who employed it on a large scale were the highest of the elite, that some usage of colour might happen at a lower level, particularly for *entremes*, but these dishes were exceptional even if

*de Navarra (1411–1425)* (Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, Departamento de Educación y Cultura, c.2001), 314–16, 338–9.

<sup>115</sup> Serrano Larráyoz, *La mesa del rey*, 342.

<sup>116</sup> A.F. Sutton and P.W. Hammond, eds., *The Coronation of Richard III: the Extant Documents* (Gloucester: A. Sutton, 1983), 283–90, 297–301.

<sup>117</sup> C.M. Woolgar, ed., *Household Accounts from Medieval England*. British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, new series, 18–19 (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1992–3), 1: 3, 204, 227.

<sup>118</sup> Woolgar, ed., *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, 1: 408.

<sup>119</sup> One might point to the use of venison as analogous, husbanding it for the great occasions where it might make most impact: J.R. Birrell, ‘Deer and deer farming in medieval England’, *Agricultural History Review* 40 (1992): 112–26 (126).

<sup>120</sup> Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 139–40.



they might appear at guild feasts. The cost of these colourants was certainly outside the reach of ordinary men, and even members of the elite might focus their use of foods prepared in this way; but for celebrations, especially those that were likely to have made use of the elite styles of cuisine, colour might give the meal an especial appearance of significance. Eating in this style was spectacle, and emulating at least in part elite styles of dining meant that colour appeared on lesser tables.

Elite cooks were trained to produce colour, and if the recipes are a sure guide, then in some environments colour was highly sought after and might be demanded of almost all dishes. There were recurring features. Certain dishes may usually exhibit particular colours – but there might equally be change over time, in quite a bewildering way: for example, the well-known case of ‘mawmenny’ (a minced meat, in a sauce of wine or almond milk, with spices). In the first part of the fourteenth century in England, this was coloured blue; by late fourteenth century, it was commonly yellow; and by the 1420s, it was an orange-red.<sup>121</sup> Changes like this mean that it is harder to comprehend the meaning and purpose of colour, or to establish whether there was a ‘colour system’ in operation. Some possibilities, however, suggest themselves. The prominence in the culinary repertoire – as evidenced by recipe books – of yellow dishes, typically coloured with saffron, or dishes that shone, is striking – and at an elite level one must also consider the gold and silver dishes on which these foods were served. Gold had important benefits, in terms of medicine, and alchemy, as a substance that could prolong life. Yellow or gold-coloured objects, or foodstuffs, might produce similar benefits. The benefit of light, especially the lustre or shine of a colour, was closely linked to this. Lustre might be added to food in many ways, from egg-based glazes, through to the direct application of metal foils. Although their importance goes far beyond their colour, light-emitting stones, jewels, might also be employed in some cooking processes at an elite level, for example, in the little bags of gems, along with gold coins, put into the dishes for the sick recommended by Master Chiquart.<sup>122</sup>

One other particular use of colour was that connected with heraldry. The cooks who followed these recipes would have been able to put together all aspects of heraldic blazon: most of the colours employed could be used to create the colours or tinctures associated with heraldry, and one can imagine that in the composition of some dishes at least, particularly in the creation of subtleties, the ability to colour food to specific heraldic ends was critical. Dishes sometimes came to table with heraldic mottoes or other writings connected to them, as in the swan and cygnets that formed the subtlety at the end of the first course of the coronation feast of Henry V of England at Westminster, or the gold eagles that appeared at the close of the third course.<sup>123</sup> Cooks were also trained to make patterns: checkered dishes, others that may have been dappled, or the parti-coloured dishes, such as the yellow and white of the ‘hony douse’ of the *Diversa servisia*, possibly from the 1380s;<sup>124</sup> as well as images in sugar paste.<sup>125</sup>

Colour in late medieval cookery was rarely a reflection of the sense of taste. It might mark fruit flavours, but beyond this it is hard to see a system with links to specific flavours. Colours were used occasionally to mark contrasts in flavour. The *Utilis coquinario*, an English manuscript of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, has a recipe for mortress

<sup>121</sup> *CI*, 200–1.

<sup>122</sup> Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 246–50.

<sup>123</sup> Society of Antiquaries of London, MS 287, ff. 22r–v, 24r; Scully, *Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*, 116; also Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 170, the decoration with banners on the Parmesan pies.

<sup>124</sup> Checker patterns: Scully, ed., *Du fait de cuisine*, 170; Scully, *Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*, 115–16; *CI*, 17–18, 77, no. 88.

<sup>125</sup> *CI*, 153, no. 15.

of fish – ground/pounded white fish, with almond milk, ginger and sugar. It came to table parti-coloured: one part was coloured with saffron and dressed into dishes, and strewn with powdered ginger and sugar; whereas the uncoloured dish, which must have been largely white, was strewn with sugar only.<sup>126</sup>

Some associations of colour were clearly intended to add verisimilitude to made dishes as part of a conceit, like the meatballs, decorated with parsley to produce a green to mimic apples; or Lenten foods, coloured and shaped to make them look like foods, such as meat and eggs, that could not be eaten at this time. On the other hand, there may have been general cultural associations of certain colours with some culinary preparations. Some types of dish show common patterns of colouring, such as the association of red with ‘Saracen’ dishes, and the use of green sauce, perhaps as a conceit for the sea or water generally, for fish dishes.

There were further contextual elements to understanding the presentation of coloured foods: the overall environment in which foods were served also contributed to colour, in terms of dishes – of gold, silver, or other materials; table linen and decoration added colour directly to the table; and even the liveries of the servers, the hangings in the room in which food was served, all might have an impact. Most food that was destined for elite tables was produced with a limited range of serving dishes in mind of silver or silver gilt. The use of solid gold vessels and utensils was rare, although they might be used by monarchs, such as the gold spoons we find associated with Richard II and various English queens.<sup>127</sup> The use of metals, with a shine, or themselves of virtuous composition, was something that added to the beneficial effects of what was about to be eaten. Shining food in shining dishes brought the maximum beneficence from light. Just as the evidence for cooking and colour relates almost exclusively to an elite level, so outside the level of the elite, or even in documents at this level, it is exceptional to have descriptions of dishes beyond those made of precious metals. Just occasionally, however, there is mention that pottery vessels were decorated. Along with the dishes bought for the scullery for Richard III’s coronation feast were 600 small clay pots of assorted colours.<sup>128</sup>

The moral connotations of food and colour come to the fore once more with the extravagance of the use of gold and silver vessels at table. Not everyone, even in a great house, had gold dishes; some were of wood or earthenware, yet were serviceable.<sup>129</sup> Yet there was also a notion that precious metals and jewels were appropriate to those of rank – and not to others. Lydgate’s reworking of fable of the cockerel that found a precious stone, a jacinth, in the dunghill, puts it well: ‘Precyous stones longen to iewellers / and to princes, when þey lyst wel be seyn: / To me more deynte in bernes or garners / A lytell rewarde of corn or good greyn. / To take þys stone to me hit were by veyn: / Set more store (I have hit of nature) / Among rude chaffe to shrape for my pasture.’<sup>130</sup> That sentiment also applied to coloured food. It belonged in late medieval Europe to elite cuisine: it could be afforded by others but rarely, and it was reserved, even among the elite, as a focus for days of great celebration or commemoration. Rarely was this daily fare. Others might aspire to it – and in a modest form it might even appear at gild feasts. It might be costly, but as a style of dining it might still be

<sup>126</sup> *CI*, 19, 88–9.

<sup>127</sup> Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 240; J. Stratford, ed., *Richard II and the English Royal Treasure* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 147–8, 267–8.

<sup>128</sup> Sutton and Hammond, eds., *Coronation of Richard III*, 301.

<sup>129</sup> B.J. Whiting and H.W. Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), 620 V24.

<sup>130</sup> H.N. MacCracken, ed., *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part II, *Secular Poems*. EETS, OS, 192 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 572, ll. 169–75.

sustained in lesser vessels than gold and silver dishes: ‘Where sylver fayleb, in a pewter dyssh / Ryall dentees byn off tymes seyne.’, as Lydgate says in the prologue to the fable of the cock and jacinth.<sup>131</sup> It was in this way that the coloured foods came to the top table at the annual feast of Stratford’s guild of the Holy Cross.

### Conclusion

In late medieval Europe there were a number of different ways of looking at colour in association with food. It was an important signifier of the nature of a substance, in humoral terms, or in terms of characteristics and affinities that might be transferable between foodstuffs and humans. An echo was found in made dishes, where colours emphasised the flavours of fruit, but beyond this it is hard to see a chromatic system linked to specific tastes, even if occasionally at table colour marked a contrast in flavour, as in some parti-coloured dishes. Secondly, colour was an indicator of moral qualities. Thirdly and most important for the culture of elite food, in the period from 1200 onwards and perhaps earlier, colour created spectacle and added to foods characteristics that were beneficial in their own right, from their lustre and hue. Here reference might be made to external colour systems, such as those of heraldry, or to general cultural associations, as in the colours of ‘Saracen’ dishes and green sauce, or in green meatballs mimicking apples or the ersatz meats and eggs of Lent. At the same time colour was an emblem of elite consumption. Just as coloured sauces might be an indication of gluttony, they defined a cuisine. It is significant that of the few Western recipes that found their way into Arab cookery books, it was the Franks’ coloured sauces that stood out. In most cases what has been demonstrated is that these links were far from systematic. Colour systems were not usually a driving force, and meanings inevitably changed over time – but delight in colour and fancy were, in the elite cuisine of later medieval Europe, a major feature. Colour in food is a fleeting concept, but it can nonetheless offer us perspectives on the aspirations of cooks and consumers in the late medieval world.

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<sup>131</sup> MacCracken, ed., *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part II, *Secular Poems*, 567, ll. 17–18.