

Western Mediterranean Vegetable Stews and the Integration of Culinary Exotica

Anthony F. Buccini

Introduction¹

In her book on Mediterranean food, Elizabeth David says of *ratatouille* that it has 'the authentic aromatic flavour of Provençal food' (1965: 131). That this dish is indeed an authentically Provençal dish, few would dispute; one might say that *ratatouille* is even the quintessential representative of Provence's cuisine. Yet, to anyone familiar with the regional cuisines of the western Mediterranean, it is striking that almost all feature a similar vegetable stew, one that has as its base onions cooked in olive oil and includes peppers, tomatoes, often also eggplant and/or zucchini and in several cases potatoes and green beans as well; common but not universal regional additions to these dishes are garlic, chillies and herbs. And just as *ratatouille* is regarded as an authentic, emblematic dish for Provence, so too *xamfaina* for Catalonia, the various *pistos* for Castile, and *cianfotta* or *ciambotta* for southern Italy.

132

It is perhaps ironic that these emblematic vegetable stews are composed principally of ingredients originally from elsewhere: eggplant from Persia; from the New World tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, potatoes and green beans. The stews in question are thus in the first instance remarkable examples of how exotica may be thoroughly integrated into an established cuisine. Furthermore, since these exotic vegetables were introduced to the western Mediterranean in the course of the latter Middle Ages in the case of the eggplant and during the early modern period in the case of the American items, there is a good chance that all these regional stews that feature the same exotic vegetables did not evolve independently but rather are reflections of an original dish from one region which subsequently was spread from region to region.

Though many have noted the similarity and possible relatedness of some of these western Mediterranean vegetable stews, the relationships between the regional variants and possible paths of spread have not been investigated. In this paper, we examine the linguistic evidence of the names of these dishes together with evidence for the socio-historical settings in which the culinary and linguistic transfers occurred and offer a comprehensive picture of the developments. The linguistic evidence indicates in some cases diffusion from a primary point of innovation in southern Spain but also shows an intimate connexion between the *Països Catalans* and Campania, a connexion which allows no simple assignment of priority to either. The evidence points, moreover, to the first widespread consumption of the American exotica and thus too the development of the stews having occurred among the poorer strata of society, who

rapidly integrated the new foods into their diets. Indeed, the culinary and linguistic evidence related to these vegetable stews, when taken all together, reflects to a remarkable degree the political and socio-economic history of the western Mediterranean basin in the early modern period.

Variations on a theme

From the various western Mediterranean vegetable stews one can abstract a core, basic version: a base of onions fried in olive oil, to which are added the originally exotic vegetables, including the *de rigueur* tomatoes, then the very common peppers, eggplants and zucchini, and finally the more regionally restricted potatoes and green beans.² In virtually all the particular regional dishes, however, there is some variation with regard to the major ingredients used and sometimes variation with regard to aspects of the cooking process. With these qualifications in mind, we can give a brief survey of notable regional versions of the western Mediterranean vegetable stew.

Països Catalans (the Catalan-speaking lands): *xamfaina*, also *samfaina* with further minor dialect variants.

Known throughout the Catalan-language area is a dish conforming completely to our abstract basic version: a base of onions cooked in olive oil, usually also with garlic, to which are added peppers, eggplant, zucchini and tomatoes.³ Catalan *xamfaina* is a dish unto itself but it is also cooked down until the vegetables lose their independent character completely; in this state *xamfaina* is used as a sauce and it is considered one of the fundamental sauces of Catalan cuisine.⁴

Castile, neighbouring Castilian-speaking regions (e.g. Extremadura): *pisto*.

In Spain, *pisto manchego*, from La Mancha, is the best known version of the western Mediterranean vegetable stew from the Castilian language area. Recipes for *pisto manchego* resemble closely those for *xamfaina* and *ratatouille* but without eggplant – olive oil, onions, sometimes garlic, with tomatoes, peppers and zucchini – though there are versions which add eggplant to the mix, as well as versions which forego the zucchini and include instead ham. While the Catalans and Provençal also consume their stews on occasion alongside eggs, the addition of eggs and/or sliced ham is a popular way of finishing a dish of *pisto* in central and southern Spain.

Andalucía: *alboronía* (also *boronía*, *moronía*).

In Andalucía the local vegetable stew, *alboronía*, fits well into the family of dishes discussed here; it begins with the base of onions, often peppers as well, fried in olive oil, to which are then added tomatoes. The subsequent necessary additions are eggplant and squash; in this latter case, many recipes call for *calabaza amarilla* ('yellow squash'), clearly the traditional choice, though some recipes sporting the name *alboronía* call for *calabacín* ('zucchini').

North Africa (Tunisia, Algeria, also Morocco?): *shakshouka* (French spelling: *chak-chouka*, also *chouchouka*).

Shakshouka typically includes both onion and garlic and normally contains only

Western Mediterranean Vegetable Stews

tomatoes and peppers, though versions which add zucchini or eggplant exist. The dish is, however, commonly finished with the addition of eggs to the top of the vegetables, which are cooked until they set.

Southern Italy: *cianfotta* (Campania), *ciambotta* (Campania and elsewhere), *ciambrota* (Calabria and elsewhere), *ciammotta* (Calabria), *ciabotta* (the Abruzzi).

The southern Italian stews show a fair amount of variation with regard both to the name and the ingredients. In general, garlic is often absent from the base and the added vegetables most often are – beyond tomatoes – peppers, eggplants and potatoes. Other common ingredients are zucchini, green beans, and chiles. Occasionally other vegetables are present, such as celery or carrot, as well as olives and capers.

North-western Italy (Liguria, Piemonte, Lombardia): *ratatuia*.

North-west Italian *ratatuia* varies between versions rather close to the Provençal counterpart and others differing significantly. First, the base is often not simply onion (and garlic) fried in oil but sometimes a full *battuto* with celery and carrot as well. In some recipes, celery and carrot are added later, in large pieces, as major ingredients. Tomatoes, eggplant, peppers and zucchini are typically present but green beans and, especially in Piemonte, potatoes are also commonly included; thus these north-western Italian versions bear a noteworthy resemblance to their southern counterparts.

South-eastern France: *boumiano* (Camargue, Rhône Valley, generally western Provence?) and *ratatouia* (standard French *ratatouille*; Côte d'Azur, Nice, generally eastern Provence?).

Most recipes for these dishes conform to the base version described above, though occasionally omissions of an ingredient or additions (potatoes, green beans) are found.⁵

The angels' kitchen

That the vegetable stews under discussion all include as primary ingredients two or more food products introduced to Europe from the Americas and that this introduction occurred in the context of Spanish colonialism is good reason to look to Spain as the place where these stews first developed. That the other exotic ingredient, the eggplant, had been especially popular among the Moors in Al Andalus further strengthens the connexion. This evidence finds graphic support in the painting of 1646 by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo known as 'The Angels' Kitchen', as noted by Grewe (1988: 110). This work depicts a group of angels preparing food, including eggplant, squash and tomatoes, three of the four essential ingredients of our vegetable stews and more specifically, the most prominent ingredients of the Andalusian *alboronía*. Murillo's painting was executed for a Franciscan convent in his hometown of Seville, then the largest city of the Spanish empire and the central point for the regulation of trade with the New World (Elliott 1963, 2002: 182–3). Clearly to Murillo these vegetables were sufficiently delicious to be fit for Heaven, implying that by the mid 17th century, either singly or together as Seville's *alboronía*, these were well-known foods.

The arrival in southern Spain of each of the American foodstuffs of interest here surely belongs to roughly the first half of the 16th century. It is, however, generally assumed that, while peppers and the New World squashes and beans were quickly and widely accepted as comestibles, the tomato was generally regarded with suspicion and only gradually accepted in Spain and Italy as a foodstuff. This point is important here, since the tomato is a constant in all the related western Mediterranean vegetable stews, alongside the base of onions fried in olive oil. Grewe (1988), in his brief article on the tomato, concludes from references in the contemporary literature that through the 16th century, even in southern Spain, there was only limited cultivation of the tomato; Davidson, following Grewe, adds that from this initial century after the introduction of the fruit to Europe, 'there is little evidence to suggest that people had begun cooking or eating tomatoes except rarely and by way of experiment' (2002: 962).

For 17th-century Spain, there is no extant cookbook indicating how tomatoes and other American exotica were incorporated in the diets of Spaniards but there is evidence which indicates that use of the tomato had progressed well beyond the purely experimental stage. Murillo's depiction of tomatoes in the angelic kitchen shows clearly that by mid-century the tomato, certainly in Seville but surely more broadly in Spain as well, was an appreciated foodstuff. And if we consider further the two recipes with tomatoes in Antonio Latini's *Lo scalco alla moderna* which appeared in Naples in the 1690s, recipes both characterised as '*alla Spagnola*', that is, 'Spanish style', it seems the strong suggestion of Murillo's depiction is confirmed (Grewe 1988: 109, cf. Davidson 2002: 962). But while most food historians have insisted on the very gradual and late acceptance and popularisation of the tomato, there are indications that it was already consumed in the 16th century, including the remark by Pietro Mattioli who, in a work that appeared in Venice in 1568, states that tomatoes were eaten in the same manner as eggplants.⁶ Another Italian, Costanzo Felici, in a manuscript from ca. 1570, also refers to the consumption of tomatoes, though he dismisses them as something desired by 'gluttons and those eager for new things' (*'ghiotti et avidi de cose nove'*) and as a food that looks better than it tastes. Also dismissive, though on different grounds, is Castor Durante, who in a publication from Rome in 1585 observes that tomatoes are eaten in the same manner as eggplants 'but give little and bad nourishment' (*'danno poco e cattivo nutrimento'*). To whatever degree Felici and Durante thought ill of tomatoes themselves or of those who enjoyed them, already in the third quarter of the 16th century we find three Italians, all apparently writing outside the parts of Italy that during this period belonged to the Spanish empire, who were quite aware not only that tomatoes were eaten (*'si mangiano, mangiansi'*) but also how they were prepared.

An instructive parallel can be drawn to another American import, namely, peppers. Textual evidence for consumption of peppers, at least in Italy, is also quite sparse – according to Milioni (1992: 93), they are barely mentioned in Italian sources from the 16th to 18th century and are not even listed in the dictionary of the Accademia

della Crusca – but virtually all food writers agree that peppers were diffused through Europe, including Italy, soon after their importation from America and that from early on different varieties of pepper were developed and consumed. But when the silence on peppers in Italy is broken, Corrado, in the 1781 edition of *Il cuoco galante* says the following:⁷

[A]lthough peppers are a rustic food of the masses, there are many who like them... they are eaten when they are green, being fried and sprinkled with salt or cooked over the coals and flavored with salt and oil.

The implication here is that, despite peppers being a popular food among the lower classes, some members of the higher classes also enjoy them and that Corrado's readers should look past the stigma attached to this common food.

The claim here is not that tomatoes were consumed very widely in the 16th century but rather that they were eaten already within decades of their arrival in Europe but then primarily by the poor. Note too that indications for similarly early acceptance of the potato exist.⁸ The lack of textual evidence indicating any appreciable consumption of the imported vegetables must therefore be relativised. On the one hand, the habits of the poor, illiterate masses were largely ignored by the privileged and literate until fairly recent times and at best only incidental and indirect mention of the spread of the new foods among the lower classes could be expected. On the other hand, quasi-learned and cultural prejudices against these foods, which clearly operated to varying degrees among the upper classes, were surely of little consequence to people living regularly under the threat of starvation. All the exotic vegetables common to these Mediterranean stews, including perhaps the potato, insofar as they grew well under local conditions, were surely adopted by the peasantry throughout the region well before they were embraced by the literate classes.

Returning to the vegetable stews, we find indirect historical support for the assertion that the new ingredients were used to create the stews by the poor, well before any particular note of the developments made its way onto paper.

First, there are good reasons to conjecture that Gypsies played a part in the introduction of a version of the vegetable stew to western Provence, where the dish is known as *boumiano*, that is, 'Bohemian', Provençal for 'Gypsy'. Starting in the 15th century, many Gypsies settled in Andalucía and especially in the area around Seville. These Spanish Gypsies also established communities throughout the Catalan-speaking lands and in the Camargue region of Provence; all these Spanish Gypsy communities have maintained close contacts and form a natural social bridge between Seville, where the exotica were first introduced, and the Camargue, where we later find *boumiano*. Given the social standing and economic condition of the Gypsies over the centuries, it seems certain that a dish associated with them was a dish of the poor, whoever may have first invented it.⁹

Second, support for a relatively early acceptance and agricultural exploitation of some of the exotica from the Americas, if not actually for an early development of a version of the vegetable stew, can perhaps be seen in relation to the history of the 'Moriscos,' the Muslims who remained in Spain after the fall of Grenada in 1492 and were forced to convert to Christianity. After roughly a century of uncomfortable coexistence, the Moriscos were expelled from Spain, with some 300,000 emigrating from 1609 to 1614.¹⁰ Of these, many thousands relocated to the coasts of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, with especially large numbers settling around Tunis and on the Cape Bon peninsula.¹¹ Among the contributions these refugees made to Tunisia was the introduction of New World foodstuffs, including corn, tomatoes, green beans and peppers (Latham 1986: V.56). This further supports the notion that these items, including tomatoes, were already well accepted as foodstuffs in Spain before the end of the 16th century. In addition, one notes the strong similarity between north Africa's *shakshouka* and the *pistos* of Castilian Spain: they both often are a minimalist – perhaps especially old – version of our western Mediterranean vegetable stew with only onions, tomatoes and peppers, a dish commonly fortified with eggs in both central Spain and along the north African coast.

Mixed, trampled, crushed?

The evidence discussed above suggests that the exotic ingredients and perhaps the stews themselves were first consumed by the late 16th or early 17th century by the peoples inhabiting southern Spain, namely the Castilian-speakers of Andalucía and immediately neighbouring areas, the Gypsies, the Arabic-speaking Moriscos, including many in Valencia, and surely also the Catalan-speaking Valencians. For further clues concerning the development of the vegetable stews, we now examine the linguistic evidence of their names.

Setting aside for now Catalan, it is striking that the names for the stews linked more or less directly with southern Spain show no overlap. Castilian *pisto* is transparently derived from a verb *pistar(e)* meaning 'to pound' and is a direct cognate of the name of Genoa's famous pounded sauce, *pesto*.¹² There is clearly no direct relationship between *pisto* and Arabic *shakshouka*, which appears to be derived from a mimetic verb, presumably referring to the sound of the dish cooking.¹³ Of a name of any vegetable stew in the Gypsies' Caló language I have found no evidence but around Seville and more broadly in Andalucía one encounters in Spanish the aforementioned *alboronía*. This name is obviously Arabic in origin and related in no way to *pisto*. The development of both the dish and the name in the Arabic-speaking world is described by Perry (2001) but for current purposes it suffices to say that in late medieval Arabic recipes, including some from Moorish Spain, the dish is not a vegetable stew but rather a combination of fried eggplant (or squash) and meat. Whether the Moors also had a vegetarian version of *būrāniyya* from which the stew including American vegetables directly grew is possible, as Perry (p. 247) suggests, but it is also possible

that the name came simply to be strongly linked to fried eggplant in areas where there was a large Arabic-speaking presence and when the vegetarian stew was developed, the name was applied to it, a misapplication but one to which no Arabic speakers were present to object after 1614.

Perhaps the most interesting and complex matter in the development of these vegetable stews is the relationship between dishes and names within the Romance languages beyond southern Spain. There are five Romance names for the stews and of these, we can set aside the term *boumiano*, which is of historical interest, as discussed above, but sheds no light on the development of the other names; we can also set aside the already discussed term *pisto*. Remaining then are the Catalan *xamfaina* or *samfaina*, the eastern Provençal and north-west Italian *ratatouia* or *ratatuia*, and finally the group of closely related forms in southern Italian dialects, namely, *cianfotta*, *ciambotta* etc.

Provençal *ratatouia* has as its French cognate *ratatouille* and it is this latter form that is first attested in 1778 in the sense of ‘*ragoût*’; it is subsequently attested more generally in that sense or pejoratively to denote a coarse or bad stew.¹⁴ In specific application to the famous vegetable stew, the first attestation dates only from 1930 (Davidson 2002: 784), which has led some to believe that the vegetable dish itself is a relatively recent creation. *Ratatouille* is also attested in the sense of a ‘volley of blows’ and this meaning in turn points to the family of verbs to which the noun is related. The base form for the verbs is *touiller*, attested since Old French times, meaning ‘to stir, agitate, mix’ and this verb has by-forms with intensifying and affective prefixes, including *ratouiller*, *tatouiller* etc., with a range of meanings from ‘to stir (intensely)’ to ‘to wallow, soak’ and especially ‘to soil’. The further etymology of the base verb is, however, well worth noting: it is the reflex of Lat. *tudiculare* ‘to grind, crush’ and this in turn is derived from the noun *tudicula* ‘mechanism for crushing olives’. Semantically, *ratatouille* has developed along two lines, one denoting the act (e.g. ‘volley of blows’), the other the result (‘*ragoût*, bad food, mess’) of intensified forms of a verb originally meaning ‘to pound’ or ‘to crush’, associated with the crushing of olives.

The standard etymology of Catalan *xamfaina* (<x> pronounced as English <sh>) or *samfaina* is that of Corominas (1954: vol. II, p. 16–7). According to him, the Catalan form is a ‘semi-learnèd word’ derived from Lat. *symphonia* ‘concert’. In support he offers a number of music-related words from Catalan and other Romance varieties (e.g. ‘bagpipe’) which can be derived from *symphonia* but which also show irregular, presumably mimetic or phonæsthetic (and thus not according with general sound laws of the dialects in question) alterations; e.g. Cat. *sanfoina*, Occitan *sanfonia*, Cast. *zampoña*. The key to making such an etymology convincing lies in the semantic link and Corominas’ suggestion that the stew could have been metaphorically likened to a harmonising of voices in concert is conceivable but seems rather more learned and poetic than one might expect.

For the southern Italian dialect names for the vegetable stew, the few, unconvinc-

ing etymologies proposed assume the word was originally borrowed.¹⁵ We suggest, however, that they represent a genuinely native southern Italian formation. To begin, we recognise that a word initial sequence of *cia-* (pronounced like Eng. <cha->) is in general not a normal, '*lautgesetzlich*' outcome of an inherited sound sequence in the dialects in question; thus, if not borrowed, then the initial sequence must be attributed to mimesis or a phonæsthetic process. And indeed, not only in southern Italian but also in other Italian dialects and the standard language, there are many words with this ('non-*lautgesetzlich*') initial sequence *cia-* or *cio-*, words with mimetic and/or affective force and semantically associated with speaking (excessively or badly), eating, shoes or feet (and related sounds) and persons or things that are bad or useless.¹⁶

Particularly interesting here are the terms for feet and shoes and their close association with things and persons that are useless, bad or slovenly. In standard Italian and most dialects, there occurs a word *zampa* meaning 'paw, animal's foot' and, presumably on phonæsthetic grounds (directly connected to the semantic values), this form *zampa* and its derivatives occur with specialised or affective meanings in the standard but especially widely in the dialects (n.16). Throughout the southern Italian dialects, sets of forms exist both with *za-* and *cia-*, as in Camp./Np., Cal. *zampa/ciampa* 'paw, big foot', *zampare/ciampare* 'to stamp, crush (e.g. grapes)', *zampata/ciampata* 'slap, stamping'. In turn, these words sometimes have derivative forms indicating a bad person or thing, as in Cal. *zampitta* 'sandal, peasant's shoe' and *zampattu* 'coarse peasant', and *zamparu* 'rogue, boor', or Np. *zampitto* 'peasant's shoe; rogue, boor', *zampruosco* 'rogue, boor' but also *ciampruosco* 'shoe; rogue, boor' (Salzano 1986). Finally, and of paramount importance here, the Neapolitan and Campanian dialects – but for the most part not the other southern Italian dialects – have a further and common variant of the *zampa/ciampa* word, namely *cianfa*, and its derivative *cianfata*. In light of this, we posit that at some point, a derivative of this form was created, *cianfotta*, presumably with a pejorative sense. The question is, how can we link *cianfotta* to food and the vegetable stew in particular?

Clues to a possible connexion can be found in dialects neighbouring Campania, specifically, those of Lazio and Calabria. In Lazio we find as the reflex of Latin *sampsā* (standard Italian *sansa*) the form *ciancia* (e.g. Chiappini 1945: 88), meaning 'olive pomace', the mushy residue left from crushing olives in the process of making oil, which is then variously used, including as animal feed.¹⁷ This form in turn calls to mind apparent relict forms in the dialects of Calabria, *cianciana*, *ciancianu*, which refer to stews made from sheep's or goat's pluck or the pluck itself (Rohlf 1977). The evidence of these relict forms, on the periphery of Campania, suggests that forms similar to *cianciana* meaning 'offal stew' may once have existed more widely, including in Naples and elsewhere in southern and central Italy. The major steps in the linguistic development posited here are:

Western Mediterranean Vegetable Stews

1) Lat. *sampsā* > It. *sansa* 'olive pomace'.

This development involves straightforward sound changes.

2) It. *sansa* → Central, southern It. dialects *ciancia*.

There are two related developments: a) a mimetic change of consonants; b) a semantic development by which *ciancia*, through the use of olive pomace as animal feed, takes on a secondary meaning of 'messy food', 'food noisily eaten', 'slop' or 'mush'. At this stage, *ciancia* comes in various dialects to be associated increasingly with humble stews made with poor ingredients and in particular with offal stews.

3) Dialectal It. *ciancia* 'offal stew' is reformed further for mimetic/affective reasons, yielding such forms as:

– Tuscan *cioncia*, known today as a stew of calf's snout, cheek, ears, lips.

– Calabrian *cianciana*, *ciancianu*, *ciacialiddra* (diminutive), (a stew made with) sheep's or goat's pluck (heart, lungs, spleen, trachea).

4) In Campania, there is a crossing of the jocular/pejorative form for the offal stew, *ciancia*, with an affective derivative of *cianfa*, i.e. *cianfotta*, perhaps originally bearing the meaning of 'something of little value, something boorish'. The semantically crossed form envisioned here, *cianfotta* meaning 'offal stew', would have brought together several complementary phonæsthetic associations and ultimately, except in peripheral areas, have fully supplanted the older forms of the *ciancia*, *cianciana* variety.

140

5) The name *cianfotta* as 'offal stew', perhaps also with a more general sense of 'coarse peasant stew, slop' was expansive within continental southern Italy but as it spread beyond its area of origin, where the base form *cianfa* was native, it was adapted in form to the local cognates of the *ciampal/ciamba* variety, giving rise to *ciambotta* and further minor variants.¹⁸

6) The final step in the development to the attested modern situation is the transfer of the name *cianfotta* and the majority of its variants across southern Italy from a meaning of 'offal stew' or a more general meaning of 'messy, peasant food' to indicating the vegetable stew with tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, potatoes and zucchini. While such a transfer may at first seem unlikely, one should note that there is a general resemblance between the southern Italian pluck stews and *cianfotta*: starting with the fact that they both begin with a *soffritto* of onion, both (ultimately) include tomato and feature several further ingredients of differing textures cut up in roughly similarly sized pieces. If our arguments in the third section above are true about the status of the exotic vegetables following their introduction to Europe, then both stews were quintessentially humble dishes of the poor. They both seem even to have necessarily included one bitter ingredient, spleen in the case of the pluck stew and eggplant in the case of the vegetable stew. From this perspective, the two can be seen as variants of one another, with the vegetable stew, which in Italy is traditionally strictly vegetarian, being the dish appropriate for the many fast days which Catholics observe.¹⁹

Given that Corominas' etymology for *xamfaina* is semantically unpersuasive, we suggest the Catalan name is linked to *cianfotta*. From a linguistic standpoint, there is no problem: the initial *cia-* (Eng. <ch->) in Italian, not present in that position in Catalan, would naturally be adapted to native phonology as *x-* (Eng. <sh->), and with regard to substitution of the suffix, *-aina*, a specifically north-east Iberian feature which itself has a strongly affective semantic value, it is not surprising that adaptation and integration would involve a change of this sort.²⁰ But if Catalan *xamfaina* is an adapted borrowing from Campanian *cianfotta*, the borrowing must have taken place at a time before *cianfotta* had switched in its reference from an offal stew or more generally a messy, peasant stew to specifically a vegetable stew. The basis of this assertion is that there exists throughout the Castilian-speaking world the term *chanfaina* which a) consistently is used in Castilian to refer to a stew of offal and b) for linguistic reasons is almost without doubt a borrowing from Catalan into Castilian. Assuming this path of expansion of *cianfotta* to Catalonia and thence, after adaptation, subsequent borrowing into Spanish is correct, the attestation of Spanish *chanfaina* in the first decade of the 17th century in secondary, non-culinary meanings ('mixture, criminal world') apparently affirms our contention that the expansion of *cianfotta* to Iberia occurred early enough to pre-date or coincide with the period when the vegetable stews first developed.²¹ Thus, we might surmise that the American vegetables and possibly the stews themselves were first consumed in Spain, but evidence of the spread of the name of a humble dish from Campania to Spain calls attention to the two-way nature of cultural and culinary exchange between these two parts of the Spanish empire.

141

One last point concerning the spread of the term *cianfotta* brings north-western Italy and its versions of *ratatuia* back into the discussion. I know of no early attestations of *ratatuia* in Liguria, Piemonte or Lombardia and given the name perhaps the dish is – as natives of those regions think – an import from neighbouring France. Two interesting facts, however, prompt us to question that view. First, note that in Liguria and especially in Piemonte and Lombardia, there is a tendency to include several vegetables in the stew not typically added in nearby Provence and Nice, including potatoes and green beans and notably carrots and celery; these additions are all found in some versions of the stews consumed in southern Italy, implying some connection – if only of shared aesthetics – between the two parts of the country. Second, in the dialects of at least two of these three north-western regions, there exists a term *cifute*, *cifotu*, *cifutti* in Ligurian, meaning 'awkward, boorish, or worthless person; scoundrel' and in Piemontese *cifota* meaning 'bad wine'.²² The standing etymology for these words, offered by Meyer-Lübke and repeated elsewhere, links them via Arabic to a word meaning 'Jew' in Turkish. Whatever merit this proposal has, we might well wonder – given the previous discussion – whether Campanian *cianfotta* also reached Genoa and Liguria and spread to Lombardia, both integrally tied to the Spanish empire during the 16–17th centuries, and thence on to Piemonte. Perhaps then the word *ratatuia* is a late arrival in north-western Italy, but one which entered the region

as a more respectable moniker for a vegetable stew of southern Italian origin. In any event, one is struck by the coincidence of the presence of both vegetable stews and traces of the *cianfottal/ciambotta* family of names in those regions of continental Italy that were linked to the Spanish empire during the early modern period and their general absence in those regions, such as Tuscany and Lazio, that were not.

Fritta è buona persino una scarpa'

While the etymology for *cianfottal/xamfaina* proposed here includes some steps not directly attested, support for each of the steps can be adduced, and while this derivation of such a humble and jocular term as *cianfotta* may seem unduly baroque, the fact is that the hitherto proposed etymologies both for the Italian and the Catalan names for the vegetable stews simply do not address the material broadly or convincingly. On the other hand, our proposed solution to the problem brings together two previously poorly explained names and additionally offers a view of the semantic developments in the southern Italian dialects which is remarkably parallel to what we know of the more transparent history of the name *ratatouille*.

This last point calls to mind a general observation regarding the development of the entire family of western Mediterranean vegetable stews, namely, that the family falls into two closely related but distinct branches. On the one hand, in the west and south, we have an area including the Castilian *pisto*, Andalucian *alboronía* and north African *shakshouka*, all dishes which typically either include more limited sets of exotic ingredients or else emphasise one above the others, and which bear names that are strikingly unrelated to one another. To the east and north, from Catalonia to France, north-western Italy and on to southern Italy, we have, however, dishes which all typically include at least three, if not more, of the exotic ingredients and do not feature one above the others; in addition, in this second area, as discussed above, there is noteworthy unity in the names, with a direct connexion between Catalonia and southern Italy and a remarkably parallel semantic development lying behind *cianfottal/xamfaina* on the one hand and *ratatouia* on the other. The overall picture is then of a probable zone of original innovation embracing several ethnic and linguistic groups in the southern half of Spain, but then also a second area of innovation, spanning from Catalonia to Campania but with no obvious priority being reasonably assigned to the one or the other.

The claim that this family of stews necessarily derives directly from Moorish cuisine in Al Andalus, as often asserted by Andalucians and writers who approach the topic from an Arab perspective, is not supported by the facts in any meaningful way and the denial of the complex origins of this family of dishes would be, in light of the evidence presented here, no less misguided than would be any attempt to deny the strong possibility of direct participation in the development by the Moriscos and the certainty of a significant historical, background rôle of Moorish culinary traditions in southern Spain. In the end, the origins of *cianfotta*, *xamfaina*, and *ratatouia* are no

Western Mediterranean Vegetable Stews

less a jumble and ultimate harmonisation of the culinary efforts of humble people of several distinct ethnic backgrounds than these stews are themselves a jumble and ultimate harmonisation of inexpensive ingredients from far-flung places. In a very real way, this family of western Mediterranean stews reflects through its diversity and unity a particularly important period for the region as a whole, when Spain, as centre of a great empire, served as both actor and audience on a world stage.

References

- Andrews, Colman, *Catalan Cuisine* (New York: Atheneum, 1988).
- Aprosio, Sergio, *Vocabolario ligure storico-bibliografico sec. X-XX* (Savona: Marco Sabatelli Editore, 2003).
- Bloch, Oscar, & Walther von Warburg, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002 [1932]).
- Boris, Gilbert, *Lexique du parler arabe des Marazig* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1958).
- Chantot-Bullier, C., *Vieilles recettes de cuisine provençale/vieii receto de cousino prouvençalo* (Marseille: P. Tacussel, 1988).
- Chiappini, Filippo, *Vocabolario romanesco* (Roma: Casa Editrice 'Leonardo Da Vinci', 1945).
- Corominas, Joan, *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana* (Bern: Editorial Francke, 1954).
- , *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1961).
- Cortelazzo, Manlio, & Carla Marcato, *Dizionario etimologico dei dialetti italiani* (Milano: Garzanti, 2000).
- David, Elizabeth, *A Book of Mediterranean Food* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).
- Davidson, Alan, *The Penguin Companion to Food* (London: Penguin, 2002).
- De Sales Mayo, F., *Los Gitanos, su historia, sus costumbres, su dialecto* (Madrid, 1869).
- De Vaux de Foletier, François, *Mille ans d'histoire des Tsiganes* (Librairie Fayard, 1970).
- Diccionari Català-Valencià-Balear* (Palma de Mallorca, 1959).
- Elliott, J. H., *Imperial Spain 1469–1716* (London: Penguin, 1963, 2002).
- Frisoni, Gaetano, *Dizionario moderno Genovese-Italiano e Italiano-Genovese* (Bologna: Forni Editore, 1910).
- Grewe, Rudolf, 'The Arrival of the Tomato in Spain and Italy: Early Recipes', *Proceedings of the First International Food Congress in Turkey* (1988), pp. 106–113.
- Harvey, L. P., *Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- Lapesa, Rafael, '«Chanzón», «chanzoneta», «chancha», «chanza», «chanzaina», «chanfaina» y sus derivados', *Homenaje a Félix Monge* (Gredos, 1995), pp. 233–47.
- Latham, J. D., 'Contribution à l'étude des immigrations andalouses et leur place dans l'histoire de la Tunisie' (1973); in J. D. Latham, *From Muslim Spain to Barbary* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986), pp. 21–63.
- Meyer-Lübke, W., *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1935).
- Migliorini, Bruno, *Vocabolario della lingua italiana* (Torino: Paravia, 1965).
- Milioni, Stefano, *Columbus Menu: Italian Cuisine after the First Voyage of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Istituto Italiano per il Commercio Estero, 1992).
- Perry, Charles, 'Bûrân: Eleven Hundred Years in the History of a Dish', *Medieval Arab Cookery: essays and translations* by Maxime Rodinson, A. J. Arberry & Charles Perry (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2001) pp. 239–50.
- Pharies, David A., 'The Ibero-romance Suffix -aina', *Romance Philology*, 43 (1990), 367–99.

Western Mediterranean Vegetable Stews

- Rey, Alain, Marianne Tomi, Tristan Hordé, & Chantal Tanet, *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1998).
- Rohlf, Gerhard, *Nuovo dizionario dialettale della Calabria* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1977).
- Salzano, Antonio, *Vocabolario Napoletano-Italiano Italiano-Napoletano* (Napoli: Edizione del Giglio, 1986).

Notes

1. In researching and writing this paper, I benefited greatly from the aid and input of Amy Dahlstrom, to whom I extend my gratitude. I should also like to thank Ernest Buccini Jr. and Joseph Grano for their input in discussions on certain aspects of this project.
2. The slow-fried base of onions in olive oil, optionally with further ingredients, is a fundamental element in Castilian (*sofrito*), Catalan (*sofregit*) and Italian (*soffritto*) cooking.
3. Surely the dish is also well known on the Balearic Islands but then perhaps as part of the Catalan national cuisine, for there occurs there also a different local version, tumbet, which includes potatoes and is baked. The term (and dish) *xamfaina* is also known in the Catalan-speaking enclave of Alguer (Alghero) in Sardinia. For details of the dialect distribution of phonetic variants of the name, see the entry for *samfaina* in the *Diccionari Català-Valencià-Balear*.
4. For detailed recipes and further discussion, see Andrews 1988, esp. p. 42 ff.
5. See, for example, Chanot-Bullier's 1988 bilingual (French-Provençal) cookbook, with *ratatouia/ratatouille* in the section of recipes from Nice (p. 212–3) and *boumiano/bohémienne* in the section of recipes from the Camargue, Arles and the Comtat-Venaissin. The recipe for *ratatouia* omits tomato but I believe this omission to be an editorial mistake rather than a genuinely tomato-less recipe.

Apparently around Nîmes, this style of vegetable stew is known as *bourbouillade* (Davidson 2002: 784), though that name (Occitan *borbolhada*) is known to this writer primarily as a dish composed of wild greens from Languedoc. Further investigation is required.
6. I have not yet had the chance to consult this work directly; Mattioli's comments are widely referred to in the literature but an actual citation of the original Italian of the 1568 text I have only found on the internet, at the following Italian site:

<<http://www.racine.ra.it/russi/webscuola/alimamer/pomodoro.htm>> [accessed 13 July 2005]

These passages have been copied over and translated at the following English-language site:
<<http://home.comcast.net/~iasmin/mkcc/MKCCfiles/16thCITomatoReferences.html>> [accessed 13 July 2005]

Also quoted in these same web-pages are the passages by Felici and Durante referred to directly below.
7. The translated passage from Corrado is from Milioni 1992: 93.
8. The potato, like the tomato, is generally thought to have been only very slowly accepted in Europe but Milioni (1992: 34) cites two rather early indications of the potato's acceptance and exploitation as food of the poor in Spain. According to Milioni, potatoes were 'listed in 1573 among the provisions of the Sangre Hospital in Seville' where they were 'used to supplement the diets of the ailing poor.' Milioni also calls attention to another of the works of Seville's Murillo, who in a painting of Saint James dating to 1645 'shows the saint distributing potatoes to the famished.'
9. For general discussions of the history of the Gypsies in Spain, see De Sales Mayo 1869 and De Vaux de Foletier 1970. The questions of what rôle the Gypsies may have played in bringing the new foods or the stew to Provence and when they may have done so need to be investigated further.
10. For a recent and detailed account of the Muslims in Spain from 1500 to the mass expulsions, see Harvey 2005.
11. A detailed discussion of the settlement of Muslim emigrants from Spain in Tunisia is Latham 1973 [reprint 1986].
12. There are reasons to believe that the specific form *pisto* is not a 'lautgesetzlich' development of Castilian and thus that the form must have been borrowed from some other Romance dialect; see,

Western Mediterranean Vegetable Stews

- for example, Corominas 1961: 450. Unfortunately, due to time and space restrictions, I cannot address this problem here.
13. For the Arabic of the Marazig in Tunisia, for example, Boris (1958: 317) gives the verb in question as follows (phonetic spelling here adapted): '*shakshak*, inacc. *ishakshek* «produire du bruit; bouillonner» (boisson versée); «gargouiller, chanter» (liquide sur le feu)...
 14. This discussion draws especially from the entries for *ratatouille* and *touiller* in vol. III of Rey et al. 1998, as well as from those in Bloch & Wartburg 2002.
 15. Of more recent suggestions, there is that of Rohlfs (1977: 170), who suggests that one of the Calabrian variants, *ciambrotta*, which he defines as a 'liquid or brothy mixture of things', is to be derived from *ciambra*, meaning 'a kind of shelter from the sun' and ultimately from the French *chambre*. The semantic basis of this etymology is, at best, opaque. As an alternative, Cortelazzo & Marcato (2000: 140) have suggested instead that the same Calabrian form be derived from the French dialect term *chabrot*, which they define as a 'mixture of wine and broth'. While this originally western Occitan word seems to fit *ciambrotta* as defined by Rohlfs tolerably well, the link to the broader family of vegetable stew names is tenuous at best and the historical path for the transfer from western Languedoc to southern Italy clearly needs elaboration. Given the more proximate relationship of *ciambrotta* to Neapolitan *cianfotta* and thence to Catalan *xanfaina*, this etymology seems not especially compelling.
 16. Some examples of such forms from standard Italian, Genoese and Roman: 1) speaking, e.g. It. *ciarlare* 'to chatter'; 2) speaking nonsense or stuttering, Gen. *ciambrottà* 'to babble', Rom. *ciancicagnocchi* 'stutterer'; 3) lying, It. *cianciare* 'to lie, chatter, gossip'; 4) eating, Rom. *ciancico* 'eating'; 5) shoes or feet and the sounds made by them, It. *ciabattare* 'to shuffle along', *ciampicare* 'to stumble along', Rom. *cianfarone* 'large, badly made shoe', Rom. *ciocia* 'poor peasant's shoe'; 6) persons or things that are bad or useless, It. *ciarpame* 'rubbish', *cianciafruscola* 'bagatelle', It. *cialtrone* 'scoundrel, rogue, slob'.
 17. Migliorini (1965: 1243): '*Sansa* s.f. Quel che resta delle olive spremuto l'olio, e che, sottoposto a nuova macinazione e sprematura, fornisce l'olio d'infima qualità e lascia un ulteriore residuo che serve all' alimentazione dei bovini...'
 18. Note that the existence of Pugliese *ciambotto*, *ciambotta* in the sense of a sauce for pasta made with a soffritto, tomatoes and mixed small fish provides evidence for the word having been expansive with a general meaning, allowing for such relatively local and exceptional re-lexicalisation.
 19. Cf. Perry's (1988: 246–7) comments in connexion with the rise of a meatless version of *alboronía* in Spain.
 20. On the history, distribution and value of *-aina*, see Pharies 1990.
 21. On the earlier attestations of *chanfaina* in Castilian, see Corominas 1954: 16–7 and Lapesa 1995: 242–4.
 22. For the Ligurian forms, see Apro시오 (2003: Part II, vol. 1, p. 307) and Frisoni (1910: 79); the Piedmontese form is cited in Meyer-Lübke (1935: 309).