



Defining Culinary Authority: The Transformation of Cooking in France, 1650-1830

Jennifer J. Davis

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In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, French cooks began to claim central roles in defining and enforcing taste, as well as in educating their diners to changing standards. Tracing the transformation of culinary trades in France during the Revolutionary era, Jennifer J. Davis argues that the work of cultivating sensibility in food was not simply an elite matter; it was essential to the livelihood of thousands of men and women.

Combining rigorous archival research with social history and cultural studies, Davis analyzes the development of cooking aesthetics and practices by examining the propagation of taste, the training of cooks, and the policing of the culinary marketplace in the name of safety and good taste. French cooks formed their profession through a series of debates intimately connected to broader Enlightenment controversies over education, cuisine, law, science, and service. Though cooks assumed prominence within the culinary public sphere, the unique literary genre of gastronomy replaced the Old Regime guild police in the wake of the French Revolution as individual diners began to rethink cooks' authority. The question of who wielded culinary influence -- and thus shaped standards of taste -- continued to reverberate throughout society into the early nineteenth century.

This remarkable study illustrates how culinary discourse affected French national identity within the country and around the globe, where elite cuisine bears the imprint of the country's techniques and labor organization.

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