

# Plato's political cuisine. Commensality, food and politics in the Platonic thought

## A cozinha política de Platão. Comensalidade, comida e política no pensamento platónico

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the question of the sociological and political background of food, cuisine and commensality in Plato's philosophy. It argues that the importance of these elements in Plato's political thought is related to the increasingly complex gastronomic developments in fourth century Greek world. In the first place, it will analyse the general trends concerning Platonic perceptions on fourth century's food habits and cookery. In the second place, it will study the role food and eating habits have in the Platonic utopias of the *Republic*, *Critias* and *Laws*. These two compared analyses will demonstrate how the utopian diets and eating habits are key elements in the construction and stabilisation of these imaginary communities.

**Keywords:** Plato; Utopias; Food; Commensality; Politics; Banqueting.

### 1. Introduction

In later years, there have been an increasing number of interesting works concerning ancient Greek gastronomy and food habits<sup>2</sup>. One of the most interesting trends is the exceptional development of cookery and gastronomy in the late classical period, roughly corresponding with the fourth century BC<sup>3</sup>. The emergence of the firsts Greek cookbooks, the professionalization of the cooking activity and the integration of gastronomic connoisseurship in the general trends of social recognition are some of the elements that help to this cultural development<sup>4</sup>. This process is coincident with the consolidation of dietetics as one of the most relevant

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<sup>2</sup> Detailed bibliography can be found in MURRAY (2003); NOTARIO (2011); SCHMITT PANTEL (2012).

<sup>3</sup> DALBY (1996): 113-129. In a more general way: OLSON; SENS (2000).

<sup>4</sup> BERTHIAUME (1982) 71-78. Greek cookbooks: WILKINS; HILL (1996). Concerning the concept of social recognition in ancient Greece: DUPLOUY (2006).

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branches in ancient Greek medicine, which, besides some earlier works, is also roughly situated in the fourth century BC<sup>5</sup>.

The new socio-cultural interest in food and cookery, both, from the gastronomic and the dietetic point of view, introduced interesting questions regarding food preparation and consumption that would influence contemporary and later philosophical inquiry<sup>6</sup>. Beyond the views of some philosophical and religious sects, since the later fifth century, cookery and eating became critical matters regarding ethical and moral issues, such as physical desire, guilt or indulgence<sup>7</sup>. Fourth century philosophers used food as a way of thinking about the nature of social relationships, the virtues and imperfections of contemporary political ideologies, and the acceptance or rejection of the shared habits concerning cooking and eating.

Besides an arguably shared background rooted in the personal relationships with Socrates, the existence or, at least, the terms in which the “Socratic circle” can be defined, remains a problematic topic. As several scholars have pointed out, in the case of admitting its existence, the fragmentation of this circle must have been an early phenomenon. This is proved in the emergence of rival philosophical schools, each one interested in the appropriation of conflicting memories concerning Socrates, his personality and legacy<sup>8</sup>. The literary genre of the *logoi sokratikoi*, the Socratic dialogue, conveys the articulation of the diverging images of Socrates. At the same time, however, gives them a particular shape in accordance with, or contrasting with, the writer’s philosophical, ethical and ideological principles<sup>9</sup>. In spite of these fragmentation and colliding interests, there is little doubt that at least there was an underlying Socratic experience that the

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<sup>5</sup> CRAIK (1995); NUTTON (2004) 115-127.

<sup>6</sup> In general: WILKINS; HILL (2006) 185-210; AUBERGER (2010) 211-216. Concerning food and philosophy: TELFER (1996); ONFRAY (1990a; 1999b); KORSMEYERS (2002); KAPLAN (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the discourses about food of some of these sects, such as Orphic or Pythagoreans: DETIENNE (1970; 1977); SEAFORD (1981); BEER (2010) 28-53.

<sup>8</sup> MONTUORI (1988) 7-24; MORRISON (2011) xiii-xv. DORION (2011).

<sup>9</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 3, 1417a 17-20; *Po.* 1447b 1-13; F 72 Rose. VEGETTI (2006); DANZIG (2010) 69-113; DORION (2011) 7-9.

scholars usually have ascribed to the moral, dialectic and ethical horizons<sup>10</sup>. It is regarding these overlapping areas that the philosophical attitudes towards food and eating in the Socratic philosophical schools achieve its full signification.

As in other areas of intellectual inquiry, nevertheless, the differences between the Socratic students are also evident in the way they conform their philosophy of food. Xenophon presents a coherent frame for food consumption in moral, ethical and political terms, and other Socratics such as Antisthenes or Aristippus developed a significant part of their moral, ethical and even ontological propositions using food as a conceptual tool<sup>11</sup>. This paper aims to analyse, in the first place, the way Plato dealt with contemporary gastronomic developments and its impact in the socio-cultural recognition patterns of the Greek social elites. The contrast and even real opposition between cookery and dietetics is one of the major trends in Platonic thinking concerning food. However, the analysis of food and eating in the Platonic utopian texts clearly shows us that health can be regarded as secondary or, rather, just a complementary aspect of them. The political and sociological background of food is more decisive than the medical one in Platonic thought.

## 2. The background of food and cookery in Plato

It can be hardly argued that eating and drinking are among the most prominent topics in Platonic studies. Although the relationship between Plato and wine drinking has received some scholarly attention, the contexts of cooking and eating have remained in a relative academic obscurity<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, classical scholars have little to blame on this apparent neglect. The disdain with which Plato regards contemporary gastronomy is mate-

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<sup>10</sup> WOLFF (1997); GOURINAT (2001); DÖRING (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Concerning the political, moral and ethical uses of food as the background for the evergetic action in Xenophon's works: AZOULAY (2004); NOTARIO (2013). Concerning Aristippus, food and pleasure: TRAINA (1991); O'KEEFE (2002); HOURCADE (2008). Concerning Antisthenes, cynical attitudes towards food and other cynical habits: NAVIA (1996) 37-80; (2001).

<sup>12</sup> Wine and Plato: BOYANCÉ (1951); BELFIORE (1986) ROLAND (1990); NOËL (2002); HOLOWCHACK (2003).

realised in a profound silence concerning food in banqueting contexts, something that is mostly apparent in his *Symposium*<sup>13</sup>. The detailed focus Plato has towards the realm of sociability and drinking habits in this text contrasts with his oblivious attitude towards food<sup>14</sup>. The brief description at the beginning of the dining soon gives way to a portrait of Socrates' eccentric behaviour<sup>15</sup>. After the libation and hymn singing, the guests started to drink<sup>16</sup>. There isn't any further mention to the foods that were cooked and eaten by the guests, a feature that, as Luciana Romeri argues, will be shared with other philosophical banquets<sup>17</sup>. Only those banquets that are consciously constructed as anti-philosophical, such as Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* or Lucian's *Symposium*, indulge in the description of the food consumed in them<sup>18</sup>.

As far as the Platonic Socrates is concerned, banqueting is just a context for philosophical debate, without any interest in the food served, and while he is certainly someone that enjoys human company, he is a solitary eater. When he makes his entrance in Agathon's dining room, he eats alone, in a somewhat differentiated way regarding the other guests<sup>19</sup>. Later on, when Alcibiades remembers the campaign to Potidaea, he says that Socrates already had the habit of standing alone thinking while the other members of the military contingent dined together<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, Socrates' loneliness

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<sup>13</sup> Concerning food in Plato's *Symposium*, the analysis of Luciana ROMERI (2000); (2002) 61-103 remains of great interest. As John WILKINS (2000) 4-12 argues, if the material world is the milieu for popular empowerment, Plato's silence concerning food could be seen as another mark of his elitist background, philosophical concepts aside.

<sup>14</sup> For example, concerning the host reception: Pl. *Smp.* 174d-e. Instructions for the slaves serving the banquet: Pl. *Smp.* 175b. The reception of Alcibiades as an unexpected guest: Pl. *Smp.* 213a-b. Concerning social manners: NADEAU (2010).

<sup>15</sup> Pl. *Smp.* 175c-e.

<sup>16</sup> Pl. *Smp.* 176a.

<sup>17</sup> ROMERI (2002) 70-79; X. *Smp.* 1, 8-11. The parallel silence concerning food is but one of the signs of the early constitution of the general trends of the literary genre of the philosophical banquets: DUPONT (1977); NIGHTINGALE (1995). Cf. D.L. 2, 57; 3, 34.

<sup>18</sup> ROMERI (2000) 256-271; (2002) 191 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Pl. *Smp.* 176a.

<sup>20</sup> Pl. *Smp.* 220c-d.

does not correspond to the cultural patterns of the solitary eaters in other cultural depictions of this phenomenon in Greek culture. He is neither an incorrigible glutton nor an antisocial thug: for him, food is only a biological necessity. When it is pleasurable, it is only because of its contraposition to the pains created by famine and starvation, not because of its inherent nature<sup>21</sup>.

In accordance with the ideal image of Socrates, the wise man should be able to raise some form of philosophical and behavioural firewall that isolates him from the entire conceptual network that connects eating with pleasure, and gluttony with the pleasurable life<sup>22</sup>. Unlike other intellectual proposals, such as the Cynic school, Plato argues that the ideal philosopher should not distance himself from the dominant culturally accepted gastronomic background, although he should regard refined cookery as a hollow knowledge<sup>23</sup>. Thus, in *Theaetetus* Plato excludes gastronomic connoisseurship from the set of skills that conforms the philosopher's mechanisms for social and intellectual recognition<sup>24</sup>.

Plato further explores the complex relationship between pleasure, the new gastronomic trends and pleasure in his *Gorgias*<sup>25</sup>. The first glance of the importance that cookery will have in this dialogue can be found in the debate over the nature of the distinction between art or science (τέχνη) and habitudes (πρᾶγμα-ἐμπειρία)<sup>26</sup>. Socrates defines rhetoric as a habitude of producing a kind of satisfaction and pleasure (χάριτος καὶ ἡδονῆς), making explicit his refusal to accept it as an art<sup>27</sup>. Socrates considers then that rhetoric is similar to cookery (ὀψοποιία), as they are both habitudes related to the

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<sup>21</sup> Pl. *Phlb.* 31e. On Socratic eating (or lack of) in Plato's *Symposium*: TURANO (1989); ROMERI (2002) 66-69. Solitary eating: WILKINS (2000) 67-69;

<sup>22</sup> This image is shared with other Socratic philosophers: X. *Mem.* 1, 3, 7 and 4, 5, 1.

<sup>23</sup> DESMOND (2008) 78-82. It is significant that apparently Plato thought that Diogenes was like a "maddened Socrates", among other things, because of his rejection of normalised foods and eating habits: Ael. *VH* 14, 33; D.L. 6, 54.

<sup>24</sup> Pl. *Tht.* 175e. Concerning the idea of intellectual recognition as a form of social distinction: AZOULAY (2010).

<sup>25</sup> Concerning *Gorgias*: WARDY (1996). An interesting commentary: PIERI (1991).

<sup>26</sup> DODDS (1959) 228-229. Another interpretation on the traditional distinction between these areas of knowledge: BALANSARD (2001) 139-159.

<sup>27</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 462c.

production of gratification and pleasure<sup>28</sup>. Flattery (*κολακεία*) is the name of this general practice, and it involves four main branches that are mainly related to the pleasurable life: cookery and personal adornment for the body, and rhetoric and sophistry for the soul<sup>29</sup>. Unlike medicine, which is based in conscious research and experimentation, cookery has not investigated the real causes of pleasure, and it can thus be disregarded as an irrational knowledge that relays on repetition and habitude for providing pleasure<sup>30</sup>.

A couple of ideas can be extracted from this last passage. First of all, Plato seems to reproduce the argumentation of the Hippocratic text “*On the ancient medicine*” regarding the importance of research and experimentation in ancient dietetics, which are regarded as the basic elements in the construction of Greek medicine<sup>31</sup>. This proximity reminds of the alleged relationship between Plato and professional doctors such as Philistion of Locris, which could have shaped some aspects of Plato’s anthropological theories<sup>32</sup>. On the other hand, Plato argues directly against the consideration of cookery as a distinguished art, a topic of debate especially important in the gastronomic context of late classical Athens. The introduction of food and cookery in the Athenian intellectual milieu seems to be an early phenomenon, as it is suggested by references to gastronomic literature in Middle Comedy and other texts<sup>33</sup>. The parallel comic trope of “the boastful chef”, as John Wilkins names it, demonstrates how in contemporary Athens, cooks developed some degree of professional pride, and tried to assimilate their alleged art to other respectable occupations, such as medicine or physics<sup>34</sup>. In this dignifying process, professional cooks aim to leave behind the very same terminology with whom Plato tried to discredit their way of living

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<sup>28</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 462d-e.

<sup>29</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 463a-b. PIERI (1991) 370-372.

<sup>30</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 501a. Notwithstanding, medicine, in its more practical and less theoretical form, as in the first aid techniques practiced by slaves for other slaves, can be seen as another form of ἐμπειρία: Pl. *Lg.* 4, 720b-c; cf. 857c-d.

<sup>31</sup> Hp. *VM* 4.

<sup>32</sup> Pl. *Ep.* 2, 314e-315a; cf. Epicr. F 10 K-A, 27-37. NUTTON (2004) 115-118.

<sup>33</sup> Alex. F 140 K-A; Antiph. F 205 K-A; F 207 K-A; Arist. F 83 Ross; Pl.Com. F 189 K-A.

<sup>34</sup> WILKINS (2000) 387-408.

and the place of gastronomic connoisseurship in the aristocratic mechanisms of social recognition<sup>35</sup>. As one cook said in one comedy of Dionysus, anyone could be a scullion (*ὀψοποιὸς*), but being a cook (*μάγειρος*) was an entirely different matter because of his careful analysis on the seasons and convenient seasonings<sup>36</sup>.

A significant part of this professional pride relies on the study of cookbooks and the subsequent experimentation with the recipes provided in them<sup>37</sup>. Mithaikos' cookbook, the first one widely distributed in the Greek world, seems to have created some model that would be later followed by many other authors. Glaucus of Locris or Heracleides of Syracuse, are two examples of cook writers that were engaged in the symbolic empowerment of the cook underlining his free status<sup>38</sup>. This kind of literature, nevertheless, was apparently nothing but a nuisance for Plato, as it helps to disguise the real face of cookery under a facade of respectability. When Socrates censure Callicles' approach towards the question of public usefulness and pleasure, he argues that he has a position similar to those who, asked for the identity of good gymnastic trainers, were to tell of Thearion the baker, Sarambus the vintner and "*Mithaikos, the author of the book on Sicilian cookery*<sup>39</sup>". Plato's disdain towards contemporary gastronomic trends is not limited, thus, to Sicilian cookery. It is also projected towards other areas concerning food and drinking specialisation, such as elitist wine connoisseurship and the professional, oven-based bakery that surpasses the limitations of the domestic operations<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> As GARCÍA SOLER (2008) argues, the "boastful chef" seems to present a sharp contrast with the real position of cooks in Athenian society.

<sup>36</sup> Dionys.Com. F 2 K-A.

<sup>37</sup> Anaxipp. F 1 K-A; Antiph. F 221 K-A; Bato F 4 K-A; Sotad.Com. F 1 K-A.

<sup>38</sup> Mithaikos: Ath. 7; 326a; Max.Tyr. 17, 1 (cf. Plut. *Moralia* 644b; Phylarch. *FGrH* 81, F 44); DALBY (1996) 110. Glaucus of Locris: Ath. 7, 324a; 9, 369b. Heracleides: Ath. 2, 58b; 3, 114a; 7, 328d; 12, 516c. Their defense of the status of the professional cook: Ath. 14, 661e.

<sup>39</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 518b.

<sup>40</sup> Other (somewhat unclear) testimonies on Sarambus: Achae. *TrGF* 20 F 13; Possidip. F 31 K-A. More testimonies on Thearion: Antiph. F 174 K-A; Ar. F 1 K-A; F 177 K-A. Previous wine connoisseurship as a mark of status among archaic aristocrats: DALBY (1996) 93-102. Concerning previous uses of bread ovens: SPARKES (1962) 123; 133.

The increasing process of cookery specialisation is a phenomenon that Plato could hardly miss in his writings or in those texts so closely related to his philosophical bases that were perceived as belonging to the Platonic corpus. It usually works as an analogy for the kind of obscure, often even cryptic knowledge that is somewhat alien to the real philosopher and to the Platonic Socrates' chatting partners. In the *First Alcibiades*, Socrates takes for granted that Alcibiades would not know how to prepare a tasty dish, and that, given the necessity of preparing one, he would entrust some professional cook<sup>41</sup>. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates argues that, concerning pleasure while banqueting, the opinion of regular, misinformed guests has less value than that of a professional cook. He is, after all, someone that receives a high fee because of his training in discerning pleasurable patterns not only for the present, but for the future as well<sup>42</sup>. Similar metaphors and analogies regarding cookery as a specialised, even if unsubstantial, set of skills can be found in other Platonic texts. In the *Minos*, cookery books conform some sub-science, as they study general patterns concerning taste and seasonings, but they are far away from the universal truths of the scientific knowledge<sup>43</sup>. In the *Lysis*, the Persian king would not allow to his heir meddling in his cooking pot while there is a professional chef present, as his familiarity with the cooking process should be necessarily inferior to that one of the cook<sup>44</sup>.

Despite this apparent process of over-specialization, cooking will never achieve full recognition in the Platonic scheme of arts and sciences, as its ultimate material dimension imposes a limit to the degree of philosophical and scientific abstraction that can be achieved through it. The contrast between cookery and other forms of abstract thinking is clearly seen in the *Protagoras*. There, it is said that any individual could go to the market and buy all sort of foods and condiments in separate vessels, and prepare everything in the most excellent way with a minimum technical super-

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<sup>41</sup> Pl. *Alc.* 1, 117c.

<sup>42</sup> Pl. *Tht.* 178d-e.

<sup>43</sup> Pl. *Min.* 316e-317a. Concerning *Minos'* authorship: COBB WILLIAM (1988).

<sup>44</sup> Pl. *Ly.* 209d-e.



vision. This is not the case with the apprehension of intellectual lessons, when the studied subjects become one with the student's soul<sup>45</sup>.

Returning to *Gorgias*, the depreciation of cookery and elitist gastronomy depends not only on their status as fake sciences, but also, in their choice of pleasure over health<sup>46</sup>. The contraposition between refined cuisine and medicine, which disdains hollow pleasures and aims for those foods and preparations that are the bests for the body, is a recurrent feature in the Platonic literature<sup>47</sup>. Notwithstanding the benevolence of the medical art, the pleasures achieved through the new cooking fashions obfuscate the eaters' will and make them believe that gastronomy is equivalent to the dietetic principles embraced by medicine<sup>48</sup>. In the Platonic differentiation between soul and body, it is the soul that helps the eater to distinguish between the usefulness of the dietetic medicine and the foolishness of fancy cookery. If the body is left to follow his impulses, it could wallow in a chaotic labyrinth of immediate, tasty pleasures and healthy concoctions<sup>49</sup>. Thus, children and other individuals who do not have a strengthened soul will always prefer the delicacies offered by professional cooks rather than the austere, but healthy diet designed by the doctors<sup>50</sup>. Plato, against the broader sociocultural tendencies, dismisses in the potential of food and delicate gastronomy for the construction of distinguished identities in fourth century Athens. Instead, he argues for the adoption of more abstract forms of social and, overall, intellectual differentiation, based in the adoption of an ethical background that has a profound interplay with Platonic perceptions on the role of food, body, health and pleasure<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Pl. *Prt.* 314a-b.

<sup>46</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 464c-e. Concerning Plato's concept of healthy diet: SKIADAS; LASCARATOS (2001).

<sup>47</sup> Pl. *Alc.* 1, 108e-109a; *Amat.* 134c-e; *Io*, 531e; *Lg.* 2, 659e-66a; *Prt.* 334c; *R.* 1, 332c-d. There are other Socratic texts that reproduce similar ideas: Crates Theb. *SSR* 2, 78.

<sup>48</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 464d-e.

<sup>49</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 465c-d.

<sup>50</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 464d; 521e-522a.

<sup>51</sup> Concerning the construction of strategies of intellectual distinction in fourth century Athens: AZOULAY (2007).

These interactions are deeply studied in Plato's *Timaeus*, where the philosopher seeks to construct a coherent cosmological system mixing astronomical, theological and medical language<sup>52</sup>. In the first place, it should be underlined that in this cosmological system, the omniscient Deity designs human bodies in order to fulfil all its needs in the best possible way. Aiming for its nutrition and the use of articulated language, he designed their mouth, tongue and teeth, thus achieving something necessary (*ἀναγκαῖον*), regarding food, and of the fairest and most good (*κάλλιστον καὶ ἄριστον*), regarding discursive capacity<sup>53</sup>. It is interesting also to analyse the foods that were created for the nourishment of the human beings, mainly the fruits of the trees and the cereal seeds with whom the earth would be sowed<sup>54</sup>. The Platonic argument concerning the natural wildness of these vegetables and the role of husbandry in making them apt for human consumption coincides with the general ideas concerning civilization and agriculture in the Greek world<sup>55</sup>. The description of the elements that compound the original human diet underlines its austerity and the distance they keep from the modern gastronomic attitude. These are materialised in the use of concepts related to *opson* (condiments, in a broad sense) rather than to *sitos* (the cereal base of the diet) or even *poton* (drinks)<sup>56</sup>. When Plato depreciates delicate cooking in his *Gorgias*, he consistently uses concepts related to *opson*, such as *ὀψοποιία*<sup>57</sup>, while the neutral process of human nourishment is conceptually constructed through more unbiased terms, such as expressions related to *sitos* or *trophé*. The digestive process decomposes the food (*σιτία*) and drink (*ποτὰ*) in the belly, although the foodstuffs are specifically identified with the fruits (*καρπῶν*) and tender

<sup>52</sup> GREGORY (2000) 241-264. Other passages where Plato discusses these issues: Pl. *Phd.* 64d; 96c-d; *Prt.* 353c; R. 8, 559a-c; *Smp.* 187e.

<sup>53</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 75d-e.

<sup>54</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 77a; 80e.

<sup>55</sup> Concerning primitiveness and diet in the Greek world: Athenio F 1 K-A; D.S. 1, 14, 1; 1, 90, 1; Moschio *TrGF* 97 F 6; Porph. *Abst.* 2, 27. The pseudo-Platonic *Epinomeis* made further reference to this point: Pl. *Epin.* 975a-b. WILKINS (2000) 410-412.

<sup>56</sup> DAVIDSON (1995); (1998) 144-147.

<sup>57</sup> Related terms, only in *Gorgias*: Pl. *Grg.* 462d, 463b, 464d-e, 465b, 465d, 465e, 500e, 517e, 518b, 521e.

cereals (χλόης) that the Divinity planted for human beings for the express purpose of serving as food (ἅ θεός ἐπ' αὐτὸ τοῦθ' ἡμῖν ἐφύτευδεν, εἶναι τροφήν)<sup>58</sup>. Eating food fit for humans, thus, is essential for the very same human identity in the Platonic anthropological theory. The potential incapability of old bodies for synthesize food nutrients is the ultimate cause for aging and many diseases<sup>59</sup>.

Nevertheless, biological principles do not explain the recent human obsession with gastronomy and delicate cookery. The theory of the tripartite soul provides Plato with a somewhat physical background for the analysis of this apparent deviation from the natural laws and appetites. The "appetitive" part of the soul, which is subject to appetites for foods and drinks, resides in the viscera, between the midriff and the navel, as far away as it could be possible from the "deliberative" part, so that it cannot disturb it with his turmoil and din<sup>60</sup>. Despite all these precautions, the appetitive part of the soul, affected by the liver, may conjure up strange dreams and visions, full of wicked desires regarding food, drinks and lustful impulses<sup>61</sup>. This part of the soul is usually subdued to the counselling or "deliberative" part, but if it escapes to its control, it may impose some kind of bewilderment between pleasurable and convenient or healthy attitudes towards food and cookery, reproducing the confusion between gastronomy and dietetics already noted in the *Gorgias*<sup>62</sup>. This disorder concerning the seductions of fancy foods implies bodily, psychological and even political disturbances. Beyond the existence of inherently dangerous foods, such as some drugs or just rotten foods, a great part of the convenient diet relies on the particular circumstances of the eater<sup>63</sup>. Thus, gymnasts, interested in muscle gaining, distort the natural Greek menu, making beef the *sitos* (basis) of their diet, something that could be very dangerous for the health of any other

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<sup>58</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 78a-b; 80d-e. Concerning the primitive, vegetal diet in this dialogue: TAYLOR (1928) 541-542.

<sup>59</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 81b-d. TAYLOR (1928) 584-587.

<sup>60</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 70e-71a. LORENZ (2006) 74-110.

<sup>61</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 71a-72b; *R.* 9, 571c.

<sup>62</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 465b-d; *Ti.* 77b-c.

<sup>63</sup> On dangerous foods: Pl. *Hipparch.* 230a-b; *Lg.* 10, 609a; *Prt.* 334a; *R.* 10, 609e-610a.

individual<sup>64</sup>. In ordinary situations, nevertheless, the consumption of unnatural or unaccustomed substances, such as those with whom modern cuisine is prepared, is detrimental for human health<sup>65</sup>.

A special education based in the acceptance of strict ethical and behavioural guidelines towards food can prevent the emergence of these insane and gluttonous attitudes. Gastronomic pleasure lies not in the gourmet tasting of extravagant dishes, but in the alleviation of the painful sensation known as “hunger<sup>66</sup>”. The desire of eating *opson* and *sitos* is something natural, but if it surpasses the physical limits of hunger, it can lead to the development of unnatural and unnecessary foods that can even damage mind and body. Food training since the early childhood may prevent the adoption of disturbing food habits, such as *opsophagia* (gluttony) or *kakositia* (fussy eating)<sup>67</sup>. In the same way as doctors aim to embody healthy patterns in their patients, the “political thinker” should implement some eating practices that could improve individual and collective attitudes towards food since childhood years<sup>68</sup>.

### 3. Food and commensal politics in Plato’s *Republic* and *Timaeus-Critias*

A particular philosophical ambiguity marks the social necessity of medicine and doctors. Being necessary elements in any city, they are also the most obvious manifestation of the lack of virtuous and healthy eating patterns in any complex society<sup>69</sup>. A strict code of alimentary education, displayed both in the privacy of the household and the wider horizons of the political community, would help to dismiss social patterns concerning gluttony and other deviant attitudes<sup>70</sup>. Socialized food discipline will contribute to the development of a healthy society, with the added appeal of

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<sup>64</sup> Pl. *R.* 1, 338d; 3, 410b. VILLARD (2001).

<sup>65</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 83e; *Grg.* 504e; *R.* 4, 445a; *Lg.* 9, 865b-c.

<sup>66</sup> Pl. *Phlb.* 31b-e; *Ti.* 64c-65b. HAMPTON (1990) 52-54.

<sup>67</sup> Pl. *R.* 5, 475c; 7, 559a-c.

<sup>68</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 2, 659-666a; 7, 797e-798a.

<sup>69</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 517d-518a; *R.* 3, 405c-d.

<sup>70</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 839a-b; 12, 942d; *Prt.* 353c; *Smp.* 187e. Concerning the distinction between public and private spheres in Plato’s thought: LISI (2010).

setting a training ground for wartime<sup>71</sup>. It is not surprising, then, the importance given to the patterns of food preparation and consumption in the articulation of the ideal state of the *Republic*<sup>72</sup>.

The first hint concerning the ambiguous role that food will have in the structuration of the ideal state is linked to the idea of “the city of pigs”. Socrates considers this as the most excellent of human communities, but precisely because of that, it is also unappealing for a political analysis based in the dichotomy “Justice-injustice<sup>73</sup>”. Since the study of Ferdinand Dümmler, there are some scholars that argue that this city is a parody of the ideal state developed by Antisthenes in his book concerning laws and politics<sup>74</sup>. Thus, Plato would dismiss this city as the result of intellectual myopia, unable to distinguish the real importance of luxurious desires and passions in complex societies. The real necessity was to establish some behavioural guidelines towards food, not to deny the very presence of the distinguished dishes that would ultimately lead to gastronomic –and socio-political– corruption.

As the Guardians are the main elements in the stabilization of the Platonic city, it is of little surprise the detail put by Plato in their diet and food habits as a part of their more general education. In the first place, they will have to be kept aside from alcoholic intoxication, but they will also have to maintain a healthy diet, differentiated from the one kept by gymnasts and athletes<sup>75</sup>. The serious illness problems faced by the athletes that fail to follow their daily routine are the materialisation of the inadequateness of their diet. Unlike them, the Guardians will have to suffer very different circumstances concerning the availability of food and water while they are in military campaigns<sup>76</sup>. Nevertheless, the solution proposed by Plato is somewhat surprising: the return to the Homeric cuisine, that is, the cooking practices

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<sup>71</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 7, 789d; *R.* 2, 380e.

<sup>72</sup> Concerning the utopian elements in Plato's works: ISNARDI PARENTE (1987) cf. VEGETTI (2013). General analyses on the utopian works of Plato: FERGUSON (1975) 61-79; QUARTA (1985); DAWSON (1992) 53-110.

<sup>73</sup> Pl. *R.* 2, 372a-373a.

<sup>74</sup> Antisth. *SSR* 2, 41. DÜMMLER (1882); FERGUSON (1975) 51-55; NAVIA (1996) 40-41.

<sup>75</sup> Pl. *R.* 3, 403e-404a.

<sup>76</sup> Pl. *R.* 3, 404a-b.

and techniques that were described in the Homeric poems as belonging to the elitist warrior groups<sup>77</sup>. Plato's proposal of returning to a Homeric eating style has a double reading, concerning both, culinary preparation and the eaten food. Against contemporary cooking methods, Plato argues for a return to simple roasting techniques with a spit over the fire, without any other cooking vessel or utensil, something that Antiphanes considered specially archaic and out of fashion<sup>78</sup>. The distinction between roasting and boiling cooking processes is one of the major features in any food system, although it is not always easy to ascribe them in an immediate way to a popular or an aristocratic background<sup>79</sup>. Here, Plato does not seem to be especially concerned by the alleged "popular" identity of the boiling cuisine. Rather, he is more worried by the apparent complexity it entails and the logistic problems it would create if it were necessary to transport all the cooking pots<sup>80</sup>. The selection of foods that would be eaten presents a significant divergence between Homeric cuisine and contemporary gastronomic trends. Socrates argues that, in spite of the closeness of the sea, the Homeric heroes are never seen eating fish, and it is only in a situation of great necessity (*ἀνάγκη*) when Odysseus must survive through them<sup>81</sup>. The diverging sociocultural value of fish eating in the Homeric poems and Plato's contemporary Athens seems to go unnoticed by Plato<sup>82</sup>. Instead of seeing it as an indication of the evolution of taste between these two periods, he opts for interpreting it as a proof of the virtuous eating ethics of the Homeric heroes. They do not eat fish, but neither they use savoury sauces nor enjoy the luxury of the Attic pastries or the culinary art of Syracuse<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Pl. R. 3, 404b-c; SHERRAT (2004).

<sup>78</sup> Antiph. F. 248 K-A.

<sup>79</sup> LÉVI-STRAUSS (1968) 401-402.

<sup>80</sup> The sacrificial system of the Athenian democracy would, nevertheless, prevented a full identification between roasted meat and elitist rule: Theopomp.Hist. FGrH 115 F. 213; X. Ath. 2, 9.

<sup>81</sup> Pl. R. 3, 404b-c; cf. Hom. *Od.* 12, 330-334. HEATH (1995).

<sup>82</sup> Compare with Eub. F. 118 K-A. Concerning fish eating in Classical Greece: MYLONA (2008).

<sup>83</sup> Pl. R. 3, 404c-d.

Plato's attitudes towards luxurious eating are conveyed through the background of the cultural narratives concerning luxurious life in Sicily and his experience there as a counsellor of the two Dionysius<sup>84</sup>. Maybe it was there where he developed the basic features of the analogy between individual and collective attitudes towards food, the impact they have on the human soul and the relationship they maintain with the whole political community. In the so-called *Seventh letter* Plato, or at least, "an exceptional forger", as Canfora points out, describes the disillusionment he felt towards the courtesan atmosphere he found there<sup>85</sup>. That what in Sicily was called "the blissful life" was just a depraved way of living that Plato found particularly loathsome<sup>86</sup>. In accordance with him, the adoption of pernicious social habits such as the "Italian and Syracusan banqueting" style, enjoying two complete meals every day, would have serious consequences for the whole political body: "no State would remain stable under laws of any kind, if its citizens, while supposing that they ought to spend everywhere to excess, yet believed that they ought to cease from all exertion except feasting and drinking (εὐωχίας καὶ πότους)"<sup>87</sup>. This sort of collective madness would lead to a constant change in the political constitution, and the men in power would not even tolerate the name of a just government with equal laws (δικαίου καὶ ἰσονόμου πολιτείας... ὄνομα)<sup>88</sup>.

The relationship between individual passions and the nature of the political community is analysed in deeper detail in the eighth and ninth books of Plato's *Republic*<sup>89</sup>. The tyrannical man is the one who receives the most unsympathetic regard, being a corrupted creature possessed by the

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<sup>84</sup> For these cultural narratives concerning food and the Greek west: COLLIN-BOUFFIER (2000). Concerning Plato's experience: EDELSTEIN (1966); VON FRITZ (1968); CANFORA (2002a)

<sup>85</sup> CANFORA (2002b) 22.

<sup>86</sup> Pl. *Ep.* 7, 326b; cf. X. *Mem.* 3, 14, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Pl. *Ep.* 326c (Bury's translation).

<sup>88</sup> Pl. *Ep.* 7, 326d.

<sup>89</sup> Pl. *R.* 8, 541a ff. For the problem of the relationship between soul and politics in Plato's political philosophy: WILLIAMS (1973); LEAR (1992). Cf. FERRARI (2003) 37-53. Concerning the role of the appetitive part of the soul in Plato's *Republic*: LORENZ (2006) 41-58.

most unreasonable desires and passions that could only be pursued in dreams<sup>90</sup>. As James Davidson argues, the satisfaction of bodily passions and pleasures is one of the recurrent features of the monarchic and tyrannical powers in the Greek historic-political collective imagination. In democratic Athens, it eases the construction of a conceptual background regarding the links that tie charismatic individuals, the exercise of personal power and the rest of the political community<sup>91</sup>. Since the tyrannical man has been educated in the democratic city, Plato argues that he aims to disguise his insane perversions under the principles of democratic freedom<sup>92</sup>. Nevertheless, his vital horizon is limited to banquets, feasts and those pleasures that enslave the soul to Eros' tyranny<sup>93</sup>. If the tyrannical man is only a private person, he will have a criminal life, searching to calm the prohibitive pleasures that consume his soul, but if he acquires some kind of influence over the political community, his way of life can transform it, twisting and corrupting the political norms and laws<sup>94</sup>. The commensal circle that surrounds these tyranny-inclined individuals, conceptualized as flatterers (*κόλακες*), has a high importance in this process of political degradation<sup>95</sup>. On the one hand, they are themselves crooked individuals that corrupt the political system. On the other hand, they increase the isolation of the tyrannical men, offering them a false friendship and strengthening the idea that the only personal relationships that can be built in a tyrannical environment are those who are understood from a vertical, never horizontal, point of view<sup>96</sup>.

These vertical commensality patterns, where the tyrant man assumes a position of symbolic and material power, contrast with the ideal commensality phenomenon in Plato's writings, both in the private and public level. In opposition to the disdain he has for distinguished food and modern

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<sup>90</sup> Pl. R. 9, 571c-d.

<sup>91</sup> DAVIDSON (1993); (1995) 204-213; (1997) 278-308.

<sup>92</sup> Pl. R. 9, 572b-573a; cf. Th. 2, 37. Concerning individual freedom and democracy: MUSTI (2000) 132-136; LIDDEL (2007) 16-28.

<sup>93</sup> Pl. R. 9, 573d.

<sup>94</sup> Pl. R. 9, 575b-d.

<sup>95</sup> Pl. R. 9, 757e-758a

<sup>96</sup> Tyrannical banquets: BOUYSSOU (2013).



cuisine, Plato gives a great importance to the social contexts of eating and drinking. Banqueting seems to have been an essential element in the social production and reproduction of philosophic knowledge in Plato's *Academy*, although, like in the later *Lyceum*, the exquisite table manners occupy the importance fancy dining would have in other elitist social contexts of eating<sup>97</sup>. Circumstantial evidences of this phenomenon can be seen in the distinction raised in the *Protagoras* between coarse and respectable banquets and the *Laws*' defence of the well-organized symposium<sup>98</sup>. The diverse biographic anecdotes concerning Plato's presence in feasting contexts also demonstrate the importance of the association between him and banqueting in the popular imagination<sup>99</sup>. Finally, it should be underlined that the *Academy* was itself a *thiasos* for the Muses' worship, and that sacred banquets and sacrifices would have a big importance in this context. Being the *ἄρχων* that presided over the cultic activities, Plato would have an arbitrating authority over the collective behaviours in these banquets<sup>100</sup>.

The importance of commensality normative in Platonic utopias is a reflex of its role in the construction of socio-political identities that ease the control of certain socio-cultural groups over the whole political community. In *Kallipolis*, Plato does not only design the Guardian's diet following the Homeric patterns, but he also regulates the social contexts of food reception and consumption. They would receive their food as if it were their civic salary (*μισθόν*), although they will have neither surplus nor shortfall, they will eat regularly in a common meal (*φοιτῶντας δὲ εἰς σῦσσιτια*) and live together, like soldiers in a military campaign (*ἐστρατοπεδευμένους κοινῇ ζῆν*)<sup>101</sup>. The adoption of these measures can be analysed from different yet concomitant points of view. In the first place, it strengthens the egalitarian yet distinguished identity of the Guardians, as these common banquets are defined by their inner homogeneity from both, the culinary and the socio-

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<sup>97</sup> NADEAU (2010) 133-136; Antig. F 23 Dorandi, cf. Chrysipp. SVF 3, app. 2, 28, F 3.

<sup>98</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 1, 639 ff.; *Prt.* 347c-e.

<sup>99</sup> An general analysis of the cultural importance of these biographic anecdotes: GRAU I GUIJARRO (2009) 111-132. Concerning Plato's anecdotes: SWIFT RIGINOS (1976).

<sup>100</sup> D.L. 4, 1, 3; 3, 4. REVERDIN (1945) 104-105.

<sup>101</sup> Pl. *R.* 3, 416d-e.

logical points of view. In the second place, it eases the embodiment of the new habits of communal living that concerns not only common eating, but also other areas, such as child upbringing or sexual behaviour<sup>102</sup>. Finally, limiting the commensal circle to the very same class of the Guardians, he gets rid of the possibility of letting them to establish a shared identity through food and eating with the rest of the community<sup>103</sup>. The ideological structures that legitimize their socio-political situation in *Kallipolis*, materialized in the alimentary ethics, is thus continuously recreated and re-enacted in these commensal occasions. Nevertheless, Plato recognizes that commensality does not entails the immediate respect towards the original political principles of the state, as it can be clearly seen in contemporary Sparta or in the ideal timocratic state<sup>104</sup>.

The relationship between food, commensality and the structuration of socio-political power does not end with Plato's *Republic*. In later dialogues concerning utopian (and dystopian) communities, we can find further references to the way food has a distinct impact in the flow of socio-political authority and in the conservation of their most elemental features. As it is widely known, Plato's depiction of the utopian and dystopian communities presented in his *Timaeus* and *Critias* have a high relationship with the political analysis of his *Republic*. Thus, it is not strange that the ethical principles and guidelines concerning food and commensality in ancient Athens, Atlantis and Kallipolis share a common background<sup>105</sup>. Ancient Attic land's fertility made possible the structuration of a military class that, in the same way as Kallipolis' Guardians, dwelt apart from the other social groups and had all their properties in common<sup>106</sup>. The parallelism between Kallipolis and ancient Athens is further underlined through the institution of communal eating, which took place in public mess-rooms, characterized by

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<sup>102</sup> Pl. *R.* 5, 457b-458d.

<sup>103</sup> SOBAL; NELSON (2004).

<sup>104</sup> Pl. *R.* 8, 547d ff. cf. Arist. *Pol.* 2, 1265b-1270a; X. *Lac.* 14, 2-3.

<sup>105</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 17c ff. Concerning these dialogues as a political metaphor: PRADEAU (1997); VIDAL-NAQUET (1964). Concerning the later tradition on Atlantis: VIDAL-NAQUET (2005).

<sup>106</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 110c-111d.

their restrained decoration<sup>107</sup>. Nevertheless, Plato is not interested in the simple reproduction and implementation of the Guardian's way of life in the military class of his Athenian utopia. Rather, he finds in the contrast between the virtuous Athens and the dystopian Atlantis a framework for the discussion of the socio-political significance of eating and commensality between these two imaginary societies.

The first area of contrast concerning food is located in the production phase. In Atlantis it is the god Poseidon who imposes some sort of geographical order, brings two comfortable hot and cold-water springs from beneath the earth and produces all kinds of foods in plenty<sup>108</sup>. By contrast, the ancient Athenians based their subsistence not in divine favours, but in the exclusive dedication of the farmers' class to the production of food<sup>109</sup>. Despite of Atlantis' overwhelming carrying capacity, which even enables it for elephants' breeding, the Atlanteans need to import large quantities of products from abroad to maintain the high standards of daily living<sup>110</sup>. Plato is particularly colourful when describing the wide range of foodstuffs that were grown in the island, conceptually linking them to a luxurious life and the joy of banqueting and feasting<sup>111</sup>. Even the mountainous area that surrounded the island was so fertile that they could provide food for all kind of animals and maintain the great number of people that lived in their villages due to the practice of regular double cropping<sup>112</sup>.

Atlantean's depravation is the ultimate cause of their destruction. As long as they kept their moderation and soberness of mind, they were aware of the way these goods could affect on the virtuous life. However, when their divine share became faint and dominated by human temper, they became drunk with pride, lost control of themselves and went to

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<sup>107</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 112b-c.

<sup>108</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 113e. On the mythical background of this abundance: SERGENT (2006) 152-156.

<sup>109</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 111e.

<sup>110</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 114e.

<sup>111</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 115a-b.

<sup>112</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 118b-119a.

ruin<sup>113</sup>. Atlantis' destruction is, thus, a product of both, divine intervention and the ancient Athenians' military excellence, but it is ultimately motivated by the disintegration of her ethical guidelines due to her love for luxury (*tryphé*)<sup>114</sup>. The corrupting influence of *tryphé* in the public sphere and the decline and fall of virtuous and, politically and military speaking, stable states, is one of the guiding features of late classical and Hellenistic historiography. It could be argued that Plato moulded Atlantis' history following both, his philosophical perceptions concerning luxury and these attitudes towards *tryphé* in historical writing<sup>115</sup>. Atlantis' history presents many parallelisms with the way Athenaeus depicts the decline and fall of Sybaris: both are opulent states that find in their love for luxury their worst enemy, as it corrupts the citizens' nature or, more accurately, that of the ruling classes<sup>116</sup>. In contrast with this corrupting downward, ancient Athenians' military class found in their commensal practices, continuously recreated in their homogeneous and exclusive commensal unity, an element for the conservation of their political and ethical virtue. It is not by chance that, being aware of the importance of food sharing for the construction of socio-political identities, Plato excluded homogeneous commensality from Atlantis. All that is known is that there were different barracks, distributed in accordance with the alleged loyalty of the spearmen (*δορυφόροι*) that granted the security of the Atlantean kings<sup>117</sup>.

Commensality, thus, is one of the main elements in the conservation and reproduction of the ethics of eating, which have a direct influence in the acceptance of public virtue and the stabilization of the political constitution. The importance of commensality is, nevertheless, more explicitly stated in Plato's *Laws*, one of his later and more complex dialogues<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 120e-121c.

<sup>114</sup> Pl. *Ti.* 25c-d.

<sup>115</sup> PASSERINI (1934); COZZOLI (1980)

<sup>116</sup> GORMAN; GORMAN (2007).

<sup>117</sup> Pl. *Criti.* 117c-d. It is noteworthy to point out that the sacrifice of the sacred bulls did not finish with a sacred feast: Pl. *Criti.* 119d-120d. SERGENT (2006) 175-199.

<sup>118</sup> Concerning this dialogue and its historical significance: MORROW (1960); SAUNDERS (1971); PIÉRART (1973); SAUNDERS (2001); BOBONICH (2010).

#### 4. Food and commensality in Plato's *Laws*

In this dialogue, commensality acquires an early importance: since its very beginning the problem of common meals is raised by the nameless Athenian regarding these social practices in Sparta and the Cretan *poleis*<sup>119</sup>. The first layer of analysis relates commensality with war, as it is seen as a social habit developed after the custom of common eating during military campaigns<sup>120</sup>. From this point of view, if war were the only objective of the virtuous state, common meals would be undoubtedly beneficial. However, the nameless Athenian recognizes the incoherencies between the theoretical principles of common eating and the way this practice impacts on social relationships. In the case of civic upheaval, it may channel social discontent, and in any other case, eases the introduction of what he considers corrupted forms of sexual pleasure<sup>121</sup>. It is thus evident that as long as *The Laws* deal with contingent (even if imaginary) societies, commensality is not seen as being an immediately positive phenomenon. Nevertheless, Plato maintains a great attraction towards the idea of common eating in the Magnesian political constitution, and even when we cannot find the formal institution of common meals, their existence is presupposed. The scattered data concerning commensality in the Platonic city allow us to have a somewhat coherent view of their nature and the importance they will have in Magnesia<sup>122</sup>.

The first occasion in which the Magnesians are introduced in common meals is during their training as *agronómoi*, the two years period when they must patrol the countryside. During this time, each *agronómoi* group shall eat together in the common rooms (*ξυσσίτια*) that there will be in each one of the rural districts they must patrol over<sup>123</sup>. Their daily rations are not only

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<sup>119</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 1, 625c. Concerning commensality in Sparta: X. *Lac.* 5, 1-9; Plu. *Lyc.* 10-12. LOMBARDO (1989); SCHMITT PANTEL (1992) 62-76; RABINOWITZ (2009). Commensality in Cretan *poleis*: SCHMITT PANTEL (1992) 60-62.

<sup>120</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 1, 625e-626a. Cf. *Lys.* 13, 79.

<sup>121</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 1, 636b-e. The necessity of sober drinking in this dialogue is deeply linked with civic education: MOUZE (2005) 212-222; JOUËT-PASTRÉ (2006) 74-83

<sup>122</sup> MORROW (1960) 389-398; PIÉRART (1973) 77-80; DAVID (1978); SCHMITT PANTEL (1992) 234-237.

<sup>123</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 6, 762c.

characterized by their coarse nature (*ταπεινῆς*), but also because they will be uncooked foods (*ἀπύρου*)<sup>124</sup>. This way, this first period of commensality becomes one of the most important tools in the embodiment of civic identity and virtuous eating habits. The rough and even uncooked food that the country guardians must eat prevents them from developing an insane taste for exclusive dining, also impeding their familiarity with the mechanisms of social distinction through food. At the same time, this kind of itinerant commensality eases the construction of horizontal identities between the individuals who share food and vigilance. Once they are integrated in the citizenry structures, this nomadic commensality turns into a sedentary one that will take place in permanent dining halls where both, men and women, in separate rooms, will dine in company of their fellow citizens. An archon or “archontess” (*ἄρχουσα*) will be in charge of the banquets. He/she will make sure that all the guests keep their manners during it or else, being expelled from the commensal occasion, and will also regulate the banquet’s ending in time to make a libation in honour of the gods and retire home<sup>125</sup>. The nature of the foods consumed in these common meals remains unexplained in the Platonic text, although the farms should be able to yield enough food for the modest needs of the Magnesians<sup>126</sup>. In the eighth book, nevertheless, he designs the guidelines of their food supply, which are coincident with his ethical framework of food. The only foodstuffs acquired by the city would be those derived “from the earth” (*ἐκ γῆς*), while those derived “from the sea” (*ἐκ θαλάττης*) will not be included in the legislation concerning these issues<sup>127</sup>. The first group of foodstuffs has a clear agricultural background, including products such as wheat and barley, although the foods “from the sea” don’t have a clearly defined nature<sup>128</sup>. On the surface, they could be related to the big fishes that have a clear proximity with luxurious and exclusive cuisine. However, in addition to them, they

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<sup>124</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 6, 762e.

<sup>125</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 7, 806e-807a.

<sup>126</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 7, 806d-e.

<sup>127</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 842c.

<sup>128</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 847e-848c.

would include all kind of imported merchandises that introduce lavishness and extravagance in theoretically egalitarian societies<sup>129</sup>.

One of the most surprising aspects in Plato's *Laws* is the establishment of feminine commensal activities, although they will take place in different rooms from the men's. Although women's commensality is not an unheard feature of classical Greek culture, it is not an everyday activity, usually limited to some specific religious rituals<sup>130</sup>. As the nameless Athenian acknowledges, the implementation of this daily habit will arise many problems and social tensions that must be solved with the recognition of the artificial and historically conditioned nature of Greek behavioural and moral codes<sup>131</sup>. The politics of the gaze are specially significant when they are applied both, to female body and to activities socially considered as belonging to the intimate sphere, such as eating, and thus, the Athenian's remark that the attempt of making women join common meals could be received as a laughable matter is far from being a narrative trick<sup>132</sup>. Introducing them in the common meals, Plato makes the women a part of the *poliadic* community, subjected to the civic *theoreia* that transforms them in potential objects of the political discourse<sup>133</sup>. Women were commonly depicted as mistresses of shadows and private spaces, from where they construct their feminine identity, and Plato argues that they would resist attempts of bringing them into the public light<sup>134</sup>. Nevertheless banquets, feasts and common meals are, in *The Laws*, intimately connected with the collective education and with the embodiment of the civic ideology that assure the maintenance of collective virtue and stabilization<sup>135</sup>. Thus, their integration in these public institutions is imperative in spite of the general belief that marks this practice as unnatural<sup>136</sup>. As Thanassis Samaras claims,

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<sup>129</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 842d; cf. Hermipp. F 63 K-A.

<sup>130</sup> OSBORNE (1993); BURTON (1998).

<sup>131</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 6, 781a-c.

<sup>132</sup> Concerning the concept of "politics of the gaze": KRIPS (2010).

<sup>133</sup> For the political significance of *theoreia* in classical Athens: GOLDHILL (1999).

<sup>134</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 6, 781c; cf. Ar. *Ec.* 1-29; X. *Mem.* 3, 11, 1-18. GOLDHILL (1998).

<sup>135</sup> MOUZE (2005) 211-247.

<sup>136</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 839c-d.

even when Plato seems to be exceptionally traditionalist in many aspects of the Magnesians' legislation, women's commensality makes them to be necessary for the state not only because of their traditional role as guardians of the *oikos*, but also because of their integration in the *poliadic* normative<sup>137</sup>.

Common meals will not only help to the education of the citizens but will also be a fundamental tool in the socio-economic definition of the Magnesians. As in other aristocratic utopias, the slaves will take care of the productive activities in the 5040 *kleroi* that compound the community's land, while the citizens will have a life free from economic preoccupation<sup>138</sup>. The whole of the harvest will be divided in twelve parts, corresponding with the twelve productive districts, and each one of them will be also divided in three parts: one for the citizens, another for the foreigners and, finally, another one for the slaves<sup>139</sup>. As Glenn Morrow argued, it seems that Magnesia's commensality system will have a bigger resemblance with the Spartan than with the Cretan one<sup>140</sup>. Nevertheless, as Aristotle explicitly states in his *Politics*, this commensality system may end in the development of socio-economic hierarchies in the political community, a phenomenon that endangers the whole structure of the state. The Cretans, as the citizens of his ideal community, supply their banquets with the revenues of the common lands (*δημοσίων*) and the contributions of the dependent social classes (*ἐκ τῶν φόρων οὐς φέρουσιν οἱ περίοικοι*). However the Spartans must provide individual contributions for the common meals, and those who cannot afford them, lose their citizen status<sup>141</sup>.

In order to avoid the sociopolitical collapse contemporary Sparta was experimenting, Plato designed some measures to freeze Magnesia's socio-logical development, which vary from the polemical one-child policy to the archaic fantasy of land inalienability<sup>142</sup>. In addition to this, the Athenian has

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<sup>137</sup> SAMARAS (2010).

<sup>138</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 7, 806d; cf. Ar. *Ec.* 650-651; Pl. 517-521.

<sup>139</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 847e-848c.

<sup>140</sup> MORROW (1960) 395-396; DAVID (1978). Pl. *Lg.* 12. 955e; cf. Arist. *Pol.* 7, 1330a 10-14.

<sup>141</sup> Arist. *Pol.* 2, 1251a 30-38; 1272a 13-28. Aristotle's ideal commensality system: SCHMITT PANTEL (1992) 238-242.

<sup>142</sup> SAMARAS (2010) 176-183.



an extreme care in restricting the citizens' daily and leisure activities to an exercise of ideological self-reproduction. The minimization of free time activities is parallel to the sublimation of education as the only area of personal development, something that derives in the citizens' alienation from the socioeconomic dynamics that could have disruptive effects in the Magnesians constitution<sup>143</sup>. The educative background of the Magnesians *syssitia* introduces them among the other institutions that aim to paralyze its sociological evolution while, at the same time, they introduce flagrant contradictions in the whole political system<sup>144</sup>.

It seems that a significant part of Plato's incoherencies derive from his attempt to reconcile the diverging cultural values of Athens and Sparta in many different horizons, such as the familiar one. Commensality's main problem corresponds with the superposition of two different commensal principles, derived at the same time from the *symposion* as it is ideally practiced in Athens, and the Spartan *syssition*<sup>145</sup>. Common eating is not perceived by Plato as being naturally better than other forms of eating: without an ethical and educative background, it is nothing more than animal feeding in the better case scenario and a spiral of depravation in the worst one<sup>146</sup>. Instead, the aristocratic banquet, under the condition of being directed in a moderate way, is seen as the preferred sociability circumstance. Through it, the guests are induced to the practice of a virtuous life due to their familiarization with the equilibrate experience of pleasure and their integration in the conceptual universe of nobility and *kalokagathia*<sup>147</sup>. Thus, the importance of the Magnesians *syssitia* lies not in them being the occasion for healthy eating, but in them being, instead, the vehicle for the reproduction of the philosophical discourses that recreate the ideological system of the Magnesians community.

It is interesting, then, to analyse the scarce information we have concerning the banquets that are not directly related to these *syssitia*. Unlike

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<sup>143</sup> WHITAKER (2004) 109-125.

<sup>144</sup> MORROW (1960) 387-398; PIÉRART (1973) 77-80; DAVID (1978) 487 ff.

<sup>145</sup> SCHMITT PANTEL (1992) 236-237.

<sup>146</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 1, 635e-636d; 7, 806e-807a.

<sup>147</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 1, 639d ff.

*Kallipolis'* Guardians, the Magnesians don't have their eating patterns limited to the horizon of the common messes, and there are occasions where they can share food with alternative commensal unities. Thus, in the weddings, the citizens could invite their close family, friends and neighbours to a nuptial feast. However, the nameless Athenian points out some legal measures in order to undermine the excessive display of wealth that was a common feature of ancient Greek weddings<sup>148</sup>. The number of guests is fixed, and, even when it is dependent on the groom and bride's socioeconomic status, there is also a limit to the quantity of money that can be invested in these feasts<sup>149</sup>. Nevertheless, the wedding banquet blurs the lines between intimate and public behaviours, and the performance of straight or crooked social manners in these occasions will become a part of the *poliadic* discourses that define good and bad citizens. Thus, those who accept the norms and manners concerning private dinners will receive praise from the rest of the political community. On the contrary, those who do not adapt their behaviour to them will be despised because of his vulgarity and his lack of education regarding "the laws of the nuptial Muses" (*ἀπαίδευτον τῶν περὶ τὰς νυμφικᾶς Μούσας νόμων*)<sup>150</sup>. The celebration of these feasts offers some margins for the relaxation of the strict commensal normative of the *syssitia*, yet they are also a public demonstration of the way individual citizens have embodied the discourses and practices concerning ethical consumption in the city<sup>151</sup>.

In addition to these wedding feasts, the Magnesians have other commensal occasions, derived from the traditional background of *poliadic* religion<sup>152</sup>. Religion is embodied in the citizenry identity through various regular rituals, and through them, there is also a continuous recreation of the shared personal bonds that bind together the political community<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>148</sup> NOTARIO (2011b); GHERCHANOC (2012).

<sup>149</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 6, 775a-b.

<sup>150</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 6, 775b.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Pl. *Lg.* 7, 806e-807a. MOUZE (2005) 247-271.

<sup>152</sup> REVERDINN (1945); MORROW (1960) 352-389; PIÉRART (1973) 314-354; MOUZE (2005) 228-231.

<sup>153</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 10, 887c-e.

Religious commensality has a great importance in the construction of the shared Magnesian identity, and it is in public sacrifices and other religious meetings where the young boys and girls can meet together and the neighbours can strengthen their mutual friendship<sup>154</sup>. At the beginning of the eighth book, we can find the general dispositions for the celebration of these sacrifices: their funding system, their number, the gods that shall be honoured with them and the concordance they will have with each one of the political tribes (*φυλῆ*)<sup>155</sup>. In contrast with the alleged austerity of the common messes, in the public sacrifices there is a great variety of ritual and celebratory elements. Thus they mark a symbolic and material distance with the daily *syssition*, strengthening their festive nature and underlining the relevance of the social relationships that are recreated in them<sup>156</sup>.

Finally, commensality has a great importance in the consolidation of public harmony and the continuous reproduction of the Magnesian ideological system. Commensal manners present a warranty of the virtuous nature: as the nameless Athenian argues, wherever men conceal their personal habits one from another, no one will ever rightly gain a personal ascendancy over the rest of the community. On the contrary, in a *polis* where everything is made in an open manner, individual adaptation to the shared moral and behavioural values serves as an indicator of personal virtue<sup>157</sup>. It is unsurprising that eating patterns that are not conceptualized as belonging to the realm of commensal eating were left out of the Magnesian legislation or directly forbidden. The most appealing case could be that referred to the taverns, which in fourth century Greece seem to maintain some kind of conceptual link with the democratic way of life<sup>158</sup>. Among the activities that shall be left behind by the legislator, the nameless Athenian includes commerce, peddling and tavern keeping, all of them being supposedly banned to the Magnesian citizens<sup>159</sup>. Nevertheless, taverns will not be

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<sup>154</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 5, 738c-e; 6, 771d.

<sup>155</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 828a-d.

<sup>156</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 2, 666b-c; 5, 738d; 6, 775b.

<sup>157</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 5, 738e.

<sup>158</sup> DAVIDSON (1997) 53-60; cf. WILKINS (2000) 206-207.

<sup>159</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 842d.

forbidden as such: they will be allowed in the foreigners' district, although their use will be socially restricted. Neither the Magnesians nor their slaves will be able to buy there their basic foodstuffs such as barley or wheat, much less more complex foods. Those excluded from the Magnesian citizenry rights, including the metics, the craftsmen and their slaves, will be allowed to buy food and drinks in the taverns, as well as to buy meat from the professional butchers (another activity that seems to be illegal or, at least, not explicitly legal for the citizens)<sup>160</sup>.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that food, commensality and eating are recurrent issues in Platonic thinking. Plato's attention towards these topics are in accordance with the role gastronomy acquires in fourth century Greek culture as a mechanism for social distinction and the negotiation of both, individual and collective identities. Against the role of food and distinguished cuisine in these socio-cultural processes, Plato argues for the establishment of a mechanism of intellectual distinction. This distinction is based in the acceptance of some traditionally aristocratic features and the integration in a philosophical and ethical background based in the control of physical passions and desires, such as those derived from delicate foods. In the opposition between cookery and the dietetic medicine, the latter has a legitimate position against the first one. Nevertheless, when Plato designs his political utopias, he disregards the importance of a healthy diet. Instead, he underlines the importance of food and commensality for the political stabilization and the ideological reproduction of these imaginary constitutions. Whereas in *Kallipolis* and in Atlantis' political metaphor commensality is seen as an important element, it is in Plato's *Laws* where we can find a deeper engagement with the political significance of food consumption in the Platonic city.

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<sup>160</sup> Pl. *Lg.* 8, 849c-d.

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**Resumo:** Este artigo examina a relevância sociológica e política da comida, da cozinha e da comensalidade na filosofia de Platão. Argumenta-se que a importância destes elementos se encontra, no pensamento político de Platão, relacionada com o desenvolvimento e progressiva complexidade da gastronomia no mundo grego do século IV. Serão, num primeiro momento, analisadas as tendências gerais relativas à percepção platónica dos hábitos alimentares e culinários do século IV. De seguida, será discutido o papel que a comida e os hábitos alimentares desempenham nas utopias platónicas presentes em *A República*, *Crítias* e *As Leis*. Esta análise comparativa permitirá demonstrar como as dietas e hábitos alimentares mencionados nestas utopias constituem elementos cruciais para a construção e consolidação destas comunidades imaginárias.

**Palavras-chave:** Platão; utopias; comida; comensalidade; política; banquetes.

**Resumen:** En este trabajo se aborda la cuestión del trasfondo sociológico y político de la comida, la cocina y la comensalía en la filosofía de Platón. Se argumenta que la importancia de estos elementos en el pensamiento político de Platón se relaciona con los cada vez más complejos avances gastronómicos en el mundo griego del siglo IV. En primer lugar, se analizarán las tendencias generales relacionadas con las percepciones platónicas sobre los hábitos alimenticios y la cocina en el siglo IV. En segundo lugar, se estudiará el papel que desempeñan alimentos y hábitos alimentarios en las utopías platónicas de *La República*, *Crítias* y *Las Leyes*. Estos dos análisis comparados demostrarán que dietas y hábitos alimentarios utópicos son elementos clave en la construcción y estabilización de estas comunidades imaginarias.

**Palabras clave:** Platón; utopías; comida; comensalía; políticas; banquetes.

**Résumé:** Cet article étudie la pertinence sociologique et politique de la nourriture, de la cuisine et de la commensalité dans la philosophie de Platon. On fait valoir que l'importance de ces éléments se trouve, dans la pensée politique de Platon, liée au développement et à la progressive complexité de la gastronomie dans le monde grec du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. D'abord, nous analysons les tendances générales concernant la perception platonique des habitudes alimentaires et culinaires du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Par la suite, nous discutons le rôle joué par la nourriture et les habitudes alimentaires dans les utopies platoniques présentes dans *La République*, *Crítias* et *Les Lois*. Cette analyse comparative permettra de démontrer que les diètes et les habitudes alimentaires mentionnées dans ces utopies constituent des éléments cruciaux pour la construction et consolidation de ces communautés imaginaires.

**Mots-clés:** Platon; utopies; nourriture; commensalité; politique; banquets.