

Conclusions

From the techniques of oven building, we progressed to the main purpose for which they are built—baking bread. We concluded by exploring the significance of these two activities as revealed in the oral tradition.

We included a few historical references in order to provide a time frame for the phenomena encountered during our research and fieldwork. The bread oven is shown to be fundamentally connected to economic self-sufficiency, being very useful in pre-industrial regions and even in the rural areas of an industrialized country. Unfavourable socio-economic conditions can precipitate a return to the methods of self-sufficiency.

We did not limit this study to mere technical description because we believed that, in order to fully comprehend any object forming part of the material culture, it is important to consider how it was viewed in the oral tradition.

This approach enabled us to make two general observations: firstly, the *habitant* has an intimate knowledge of the properties of the materials he uses, and he expresses his knowledge with a particularly vivid vocabulary; secondly, the function of the bread oven is one of transformation, and its power to do this is reflected in the oral tradition surrounding it.

Let us take a brief look at the basis for these statements. In the language he uses, the farmer constantly refers to familiar phenomena for purposes of comparison and analogy. Let us look, for example, at the rich vocabulary used to describe clay ovens. The farmer readily compares the various stages in the construction of the clay oven to the preparation of

bread dough for baking, or to the work of swallows building a nest. In like manner he gives the parts of the oven the same names as the parts of the human body: legs, mouth, back, rump, and so on. This characteristic way of speaking carries over to his description of the bread itself, relating its importance to that of children.

We must point out that, because ovens have fallen into disuse, the source of a rich imagery has dried up, with the result that it was very difficult to gather the few fragments we did manage to collect. On the other hand, it was easier to compile expressions concerning bread itself simply because the baking of bread in the home has survived, and the vocabulary has thus been maintained.

As for the transformation that takes place in the oven, it results from the ability of the oven walls to retain the necessary heat. The oven converts into delicious bread a raw dough that itself is considered inedible. It also changes vegetable matter that must first be dried to be usable. It kills the germs that infest the clothing of the sick. This capacity for material transformation is reflected in the oral tradition. In tales and legends, all that is undesirable in life, everything unpleasant, undergoes a metamorphosis in the oven.

In conclusion, it is clear that the role of the bread oven in daily life, language, and legend reveals its dynamic relationship with those who make it and those who use it.