

French academics have also recognized the relevance of this field of research. In *Gastrono(r)mie. Naissance de la littérature gastronomique* Nelly Labère again draws attention to the paucity of studies on food and eating in literature in France, even when they occupy such a large place – think of Rabelais, Balzac, Zola. Focussing on the medieval era as marking the birth of both cookbooks and fiction, she examines the texts of this period and specifically the place of women, such as representations of the ‘eating woman’. The result is a patiently argued and finely analysed series of chapters, each centred on a particular dimension of interpretation. For conformity, for example, she examines two texts, both thirteenth-century, specifically addressed to women though each with a masculine counterpart, and concludes that advice to women on behaviour at table was essentially practical and didactic, with an emphasis on submission to protocol, while advice to males was more literary in style. Another chapter on the literature of recipes shows how the long list of foods fondly remembered by the daughter of the Comte d’Anjou, a model subsequently adopted in later medieval fiction, can be seen not simply as an interruption in the text but as having a literary function. In *Gastrono(r)mie* Labère presents a dense but rewarding book, though readers will find it helpful to have some familiarity with medieval literature.

BARBARA SANTICH

Corinna Sargood: *The Village in the Valley: Travels in Mexico and Italy*: Prospect Books, 2021: 288 pp., paperback, £20.00.

Readers are perhaps most familiar with Corinna Sargood’s glorious drawings, and cover painting, for her then-mother-in-law Patience Gray’s book *Honey from a Weed*. Her work has since figured on the covers of several other Prospect Books’ publications. How pleasing, therefore, that we can now savour both writing and drawing from her pen under the imprint of the same publisher.

‘Better Dead Than Late’ reads the company motto on the bus that drops Corinna Sargood at the gates of her new life in Mexico. Having been asked to create a set of illustrations for Angela Carter’s adapted *Fairy Stories*, Sargood and new husband Richard relocate to the *barrio* known as Las Brujas and embark on what can only be described as a feast of experience. Such is the intensity of the imagery that is painted for us here in *The Village in the Valley* one is left almost breathless at times by the kaleidoscope of intermingled reverence and revelry. Mexico, it seems, speaks to Sargood through its earthy detail and other-worldly flavours. Whilst the reader is treated to a wider story of new love developing in an alien culture, there are frequent moments of ethnographic interest. The description of preparing the ‘ubiquitous tortilla’ exemplifies Sargood’s unique ability to weave the historic, the practical and the artistic into an altogether palatable narrative that is neither dense nor lacking in substance. When Sargood’s travels finally lead to Italy we are presented

with the harvesting and the pressing of olives in a similarly unassuming and satisfying manner. Illustrated throughout by the author's highly recognizable and thoroughly enjoyable pen and ink drawings one is struck by the author's considerable ability to capture unlikely forms with both word and line.

MATT LORD



Carolyn Steel: *Hungry City*: originally published by Chatto and Windus, 2008; now Vintage, 2013: 383 pp., paperback £14.99;

*Sitopia: How Food Can Save the World*: Chatto and Windus, 2020: 373 pp., hardback, £16.99; or Vintage, 2021, paperback, £9.99.

Possibly a little late in the day to be reviewing a book written as long ago as 2008, but Carolyn Steel's *Hungry City* is something of a prequel to her second book *Sitopia*. Although both books are essentially standalone chronicles, *Hungry City* sets out to explore the notion of how a city feeds itself and the problems this incurs, while Steel's new book *Sitopia* builds upon those initial thoughts, extends her arguments and offers some solutions.

Although the two are weighty volumes – both running to nigh-on 400 pages – Steel's style is flowing, easy to read, non-academic. She writes with a light touch and a certain wry humour.

I met Carolyn Steel in 2019 at the Oxford Symposium for Food and Cookery. Hers was the keynote talk on the chosen subject for that year: Food and Power. Her title: 'A Tale of Two Cities: Paris, London and the Political Power of Food'. In a crowded auditorium she asked her audience, 'Who knows what is essential to a city in order for it to survive, grow and to, ultimately, become great?' Of all the responses mine was the only correct one – 'It has to be beside a navigable river.' Why? Because, historically, only water transport could provide an ergonomically viable system that allowed food, in sufficient quantity, to be delivered to a city on a regular basis. As Steel points out,