PPC 118 (2020) 119-120
https://doi.org/10.1558/ppc.27851
Petits Propos Culinaires (print) ISSN 0142-7857
Petits Propos Culinaires (online) ISSN 3029-0651

the impact of Italian food on our generation, Professor Zancani tells of the impressions it made on travellers in Italy in the past, adding new material and lively anecdotes, then going on to describe the arrival of Italians in London and beyond, from Guglielmo Alexis Jarrin and his ice-cream parlour in Bond Street, to the Contini family of Valvona and Crolla in Edinburgh to Ann and Franco Taruschio of the Walnut Tree in Abergavenny. This is a book to read cover to cover, or dip into, as one of the most worthwhile contributions to our enjoyment of Italian food and its history in recent years. The glossary is a strangely perfunctory listing of terms already explained in enjoyable detail in the text and notes, while the picture captions might have been helpfully expanded or put into a sadly missing list of illustrations, while the sixteen recipes which are embedded in the narrative could have been listed somewhere, as a guide to those of us wanting to locate and try out Apicius' melon salad with mint, or Jamie's version of *peposo.* But these are small quibbles, it remains an entertaining read, backed up by serious scholarship.

Gillian Riley

Eugène Briffault: *Paris à table 1846*, translated and edited by J. Weintraub: Oxford University Press, New York, 2018: 212 pp., hardback, £16.99.
Another late review, I fear. Lots of people know this book, a guide to private and public eating in Paris in 1846 written by a high-living journalist, an even better *viveur* than England's own Bon Viveur (Fanny and Johnny Cradock). The original was also illustrated with some wit and panache by the artist Bertall. This is an English translation with an informative introduction and copious notes by the Chicago scholar Joseph Weintraub. It is for these two latter features the book should be purchased as they are excellent. The original text, while sometimes enlightening, is also the worst form of gastronomic literature, full of tiresome, hyperbolic gasbaggery. It reads much better in French – no criticism of the translation – because when this is rendered into English it sounds like a drunken, pompous uncle who should know better. If you can practise reading as a peasant used to winnow his corn, throwing it up in the air to rid it of chaff and letting the grains of fact fall into a retentive brain, then you will derive much profit. Not half so much, however, as from the wide reading and citation of the editor/translator who has profitably gone through myriad volumes of contemporary description, the *littérature panoramique* and the *physiologies* of mid-century France, the bulk of which is too great for most of us to navigate.

Di Murrell: *A Foodie Afloat*: Matador, 2020: 256 pp., paperback, £12.99.
The sub-title is too long for the header, but it reads, 'A cook's journey through France on a barge. A secret world of canals and rivers. An enticing story of slow boats, slow food, small events and chance encounters.' That puts it in

a nutshell or three. The redoubtable Tam, her husband, and Di have driven their equally redoubtable barge the *Friesland* round the canals of northern France for years and years and this book distills the culinary essence of their journeys, expressed as a single season's *trajet* from Cambrai to Auxonne, north of Chalon on the Saône. As readers will know from outings in these pages, Di Murrell writes in a relaxed and pleasing manner and her cookery is in much the same style. Her encounters with producers and shops are always instructive, as too her exchanges with lock-keepers, and they translate into recipes that often retain the tang of locality while rarely straining towards the far horizons of crazed elaboration – her kitchen is on a barge, not in a château. This is a companionable book, which is high recommendation. The illustrations by Kathleen Caddick add a nice froth to the coffee. I must say that reading this makes one think that there are worse ways to spend one's time than chugging along to the next portion of *foie gras*. And for impecunious bargees, the Murrells seem to drink an astonishing amount of very high-class Champagne. Maybe their cargo is of a higher value than one first assumes.

Letitia Clark: *Bitter Honey. Recipes and stories from the island of Sardinia*: Hardie Grant Books, 2020: 255 pp., hardback, £26.00.

Despite the mountain of books on Italian food and cuisine published in recent decades, one region of the country has been largely neglected. If lucky it's the last in a series of chapters in books on Italian regional cuisines (*The Food of Italy*, by the late, great Waverley Root and Claudia Roden's book of the same title are among the few to do it justice). *Bitter Honey* helps redress this imbalance. *Bitter Honey* is not, as its author cheerfully admits, a history of Sardinian food and cuisine but rather the story of a personal encounter, a love affair – indeed, two love affairs, that with Sardinia and its food enduring. Nor is it a conventional cookbook. Recipes are interspersed with anecdotes, quotations, explanations and descriptions, and almost every page is enhanced with Matt Russell's sun-drenched and evocative images. The bitter honey of the title is a speciality of the island, derived from the blossoms of the strawberry tree (*Arbutus*) and used to drizzle over Sardinia's signature dessert, *Seadas*, small deep-fried pastries filled with fresh pecorino. Disillusioned by cooking in a professional kitchen, Letitia Clark was introduced to Sardinia and its food during a brief visit for one of its colourful festivals, and soon returned to make the island her home. Again and again, she stresses the essential simplicity of Sardinian food with its reliance on relatively few basic ingredients – meat and game, wheat, cheese and vegetables – and its maxim of minimum stress, maximum pleasure. Her recipes, either typical of Sardinia or associated with her experiences there, are proof: bread, butter and anchovies; roasted pecorino, walnuts and honey; pasta and potatoes in broth; baked chicken with citrus, fennel, white wine and olives; suffocated cauliflower. *Ciambellone* (Yoghurt Cake) is not only simple but also