PPC 117 (2020) 121-123
https://doi.org/10.1558/ppc.27872
Petits Propos Culinaires (print) ISSN 0142-7857
Petits Propos Culinaires (online) ISSN 3029-0651

of her chapters. Perhaps this is a 'trope' too far, (a word which occurs often, unsurprisingly, throughout the book), but, she says, as with the egg, to read the literature of food in general 'opens up for us a profound sense of its many and various purposes, its disturbing plenitude. It is hard to stop reading and writing about food'.

Di Murrell

David Castro Hussong and Jay Porter: *The Baja California Cookbook. Exploring the Good Life in Mexico*: Ten Speed Press, 2020: 272 pp., hardback, £22.50.
Upon opening *The Baja California Cookbook* we are immediately offered up a satisfying palette of reds, ochres and sharp greens that tells us a great deal about the tastes held in store. Chef David Castro Hussong proceeds to take us on a tour through his homeland from the vantage point of his award-winning restaurant Fauna where simplicity is key. In these sumptuous recipes that range all the way from the earthiness of the ranch (Grilled Rabbit with pasilla chile marinade) to the free and easy perfection of steaming over beach-fires (Mussels 'Playitas' with chorizo) we are introduced to the bare beauty of Baja cuisine. Despite the emphasis on creating dishes that are easy to execute in the kitchen Hussong points out early on that a mainstay of the Mexican diet, the flour tortilla can 'take some time and practice for the uninitiated to master.' Clearly there is much to learn here. This being said Hussong concedes that attempts to replicate Mexican food outside of the region might not produce results that are precisely authentic but 'it will taste good. And that's most important after all.' Presented in four unfussy sections each with fantastic photographs of the region *The Baja California Cookbook* brings an unpretentious warmth to any kitchen.

Matt Lord

Troy Bickham, *Eating the Empire. Food and Society in Eighteenth-century Britain*. Reaktion Books, 2020; 285 pp., hardback, 89 illustrations, £20.00.
[I wrote this review for the Asian Affairs Journal *but thought it useful not to let it languish there.]*
Professor Bickham presents here an account of the four major 'ingestibles' (only one of them a food) – tobacco, tea, coffee and sugar – that were the economic foundations of the trade underpinning the first British empire in the long eighteenth century. It is remarkable to see how they can be portrayed as underpinning the public social intercourse of their consumers in the same period. There were other new(ish) ingestibles at the time – chocolate, port wine, potatoes, tomatoes, opium – but perhaps none of these counted quite so much as imperial entities, nor had the social penetration of Professor Bickham's quartet which he uses 'to better understand Britons' relationships with the empire and its influence on their lives.'

Some of this influence is given greater emphasis than others. Tobacco, having spearheaded the colonial invasion, was so pervasive and so generalized in its consumption that its perceived embarrassments (production by slave labour) seem not to have impacted on its popularity; not does it get much discussion with regard to our view of empire. Coffee, which was only latterly an imperial product, receives much more attention because of its ingestion in coffee houses, hotbeds of social interaction, potential subversion and political debate. Parenthetically, the coffee house, in the Ottoman Near East and Georgian London, played much the same role in political discourse as does social media today: a touchstone, a spark, a trigger. Tea is perhaps Professor Bickham's favourite. It was not yet a properly imperial product, but only brought to these islands by a trading company which, admittedly, masqueraded as empire for decades before being brought within the state's embrace. And tea was produced by an alien culture that was yet to form part of even the most ambitious imperial world-view (and furthermore, was often traded in its 'illicit' form by Dutchmen, not solid John Bulls). But tea did indeed sweep through British eighteenth-century society, gathering up myriad women in its conventions of consumption as well as embracing the working classes towards the end of the period. This allows women into the narrative, where they have already been placed centre-stage by the author's discussion of middle-class cookery books, the majority of which were written by women and almost all of which were consumed by them (even if Dr Johnson denied that it was ever possible for a woman to write such a book, after he had seen a copy of Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* when it was first issued 'By a Lady'). Women are kept as a focus when we come to sugar, the fourth ingestible, inasmuch as it was added to tea, and in the way that it was the lightning-rod for agitation against the slave trade, a movement that had women at its heart.

The book looks at how these consumables became 'edible artefacts', in other words, symbols of world-view that comprised the empire and foreign lands. How far were these commodities freighted with messages about their origin? There are some grand trade cards and mercantile ephemera produced as evidence, with pictures of Chinese mandarins (but not coolies) and African slaves aplenty (complete with several lounging Europe slavemasters). Newspapers are combed for evidence in advertisements as well as reports; and cookery books are inspected for recipes from abroad. Here, in among the cookery books, the evidence is less compelling than that yielded by coffee houses and afternoon tea parties. Although curries figure after Hannah Glasse's first suggestion in 1747, and although pilau (spelled a thousand ways) was not an uncommon sight in most books from the mid-century, the number of such recipes is tiny in proportion to the whole. It might be suggested that the most significant way that the Orient, or indeed the empire, entered the British

dining-room was in the sauce bottle or condiment dish: in the store sauces that relied on soy sauce, or the chutneys and relishes that might have used cucumber rather than mango, but nonetheless had the sniff of an alien world.

But Professor Bickham is correct in underlining how foods, once accepted, can begin to take on meanings and be spurs to action that were never originally intended. His exemplar sugar is perhaps the best case in point although, were the reader American, tea would come close, for it was tea and the civil disobedience that it prompted that precipitated the American Revolution just as sugar and the boycotts that were provoked at the end of the century led eventually to the abolition of the slave trade.

Entertainingly written, with blessedly little historiographical jargon, amusingly illustrated with a wealth of contemporary caricatures, this book allows you to ponder the interpenetration of consumption and social action. Great stuff.

Christel Lane: *From Taverns to Gastropubs. Food, Drink, and Scoiality in England*: Oxford University Press, 2018: 230 pp., hardback, £31.99.

Christel Lane's previous book about chefs and high-end restaurants in England and Germany lent on the sociologist's tools of interview and questionnaire to deliver some interesting insights into restaurant ecosystems. Now, she has turned her attention to a lower level of gastronomy, the tavern or the public house. The book is divided into two: the first half is a history of tavern-eating (or, in the main, inn-eating); the second looks at the rise of the gastro-pub from 1990 to the present day. Restaurant history is plagued by problems of nomenclature and classification. Categories are often fluid. Was John Fothergill running a gastro-pub, an hotel, a restaurant with rooms, an inn or a tavern? Even when it is clear what he was doing, many of his friends and rivals might have been doing the same thing but in slightly different premises: did that mean they were pursuing different ends? Compare, for instance, the Spread Eagle at Thame to the Beetle and Wedge at Moulsford. But even when you can split hairs about the exact category of an enterprise, the broad lines remain valid. However, the creation of a strict compartment labelled 'gastropub' in some ways muddies the waters. There have been plenty of pubs in the English provinces offering excellent food all my lifetime. There were also myriad pubs or alehouses offering zero food, or no more than a packet of crisps and a sandwich. The secular tendency, since the '60s at least, has been for the first category to increase and the second to decline. While the food offered was often pedestrian, it allowed the publican a higher profit margin (when he was battling a diminishing margin from beer and the like) and was available in more and more places. The gastropub 'movement' simply raised the standards. It also offered the increasing number of chefs who wanted to open their own establishment a low-capital route of entry and permitted a very sensible re-use