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who was by way of an antique dealer, a caner and restorer of chairs, with a stall on Portobello, and a fervent collector of breadboards. At the end of the visit, a generous cream tea is provided. True obsessives may wish to take the Airbnb room that is also available. This book, which celebrates the mother, the museum and the artefacts themselves with loads of colour photographs, facts, anecdotes and recipes, is pretty unique too. Breadboards can be an avenue to a greater understanding of the industrial revolution, of the way that mechanized arts and crafts have a dignity too easily denied them (by the likes of Wm Morris), of the impact of the repeal of the Corn Laws, and of the ingenuity and connoiseurship of dealers and collectors in later years. There are things, and artists and companies, in this book that you will never have imagined existed. The whole thing is quite surprising. It is one of those books that you pick up and say, 'What can there possibly be to tell about breadboards?' At the end, you say, 'I want to know more, please.' The only problem is that you can never cut bread on them again because you'll score them to perdition.

María José Sevilla: *Delicioso. A History of Food in Spain*: Reaktion Books, 2019: 344 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Choosing the order in which review-books get read is a bit like choosing which food on one's plate to eat first. Most people seem to prefer to eat the stuff they like least first, saving the best for last. Faced with a pile books to review, my response is not dissimilar – I select those which have the least appeal to review first. These tend to be the more scholarly offerings that focus on contemporary social processes, research on the effects of nationalism or globalization, analysis of different food cultures and the like. I'm entirely conscious of my lack of academic credentials when faced with a well-researched and erudite study, that seeks to fill some gap in our food knowledge, written to serve as a future text for students in the field. Yet it is sent for review in hopes, perhaps, of tapping into a wider lay audience. I tell myself that I am therefore reviewing it with that potential non-expert reader in mind and get stuck in. Often, as it happens, those books viewed with most trepidation will turn out to be rivetingly interesting. So much so that I happily bombard my nearest with pithy items, newly come-by, relating to the eating habits of middle America or the symbolic nature of Bulgarian yogurt – at least until the next review comes along.

Which brings me nicely to María José Sevilla's *Delicioso*. This was to be my treat after the hard slog. After the heavier items in my pile I was ready to relax and enjoy a spot of unalloyed hedonism. I kept eyeing it. I loved the look of it: the cover of vegetable wallpaper; its weight; the density of the print. I took in the title noting that it did not call itself, *A History of the Food of Spain* but rather, *A History of Food in Spain*. A signal surely that this was not to be a plodding excursion, century by century, of collected texts but something a

bit more lively and apposite – and so it proved to be. This is a book written by a food writer rather than an historian and that fact alone creates a narrative with a difference. The historian might well write a book called 'A History of *the* Food *of* Spain' in which he/she judges the wealth and power of the king and his court by the weight of his table. They will also note, in passing, the centuries of subsistence farming that marks the lot of peasantry. But will an academic make those subtle links between the demands of the royal stomach and developments in the kitchen or how the peasant's attachment to his terroir shapes what is on his plate? Perhaps, but the food writer worth their salt most definitely will. María José Sevilla is such a one. Her *Mediterranean Flavours,* published in 1995, is still a treasured item on my bookshelf. She has a deep understanding of Spanish food and it feels as though all her years immersed in the subject has been, in part, an apprenticeship served in preparation for the delivery of this most significant addition to the lexicon of food culture.

A complex subject – food history began early in Spain. The Iberian Peninsula has forever been the booty sought by the invader, be they conquering armies, colonizers, immigrants or those fleeing from persecution. They came like waves rolling onto the seashore or as an insidious trickling stream finding its way through mountain ranges and inhospitable and barren lands. Greeks, Romans, Moors, Jews and Christians, all outsiders, who morphed, over time, into settled peoples, all bringing their own rich food traditions to their new homeland; most profoundly, that heritage of medieval Islam issuing from both Africa and the Middle East that resulted, over time, in a glorious fusion of Islamic and Andalusian cuisines, embedded to this day in the food of Spain.

Lucky for us then that María José Sevilla, an established writer of Spanish food culture, who, having lived for many years outside of her native country, is thus able to cast an objective eye over her subject matter. She understands the reasons why portraying this land in terms of a 'food' map – dividing it up into its regions – has been so politically explosive but perhaps also explains why Spaniards, more than most, remain so emotionally attached to the place of their birth and the food of their region. She discusses how the country can be divided into *cocinas* as a way of identifying the unique character of each area. Although, inevitably, they share many ingredients, in each *cocina* the language, the people and the way they cook is distinctive and original. I am only really familiar with the *cocina Balear*, as Mallorca is home to my son and his family, but immediately recognized her description of olives, *subrasada, tomatiga de ramellet* and *pata negra* – the very essence of Mallorcian cuisine. Some traditions still survive locally, and no doubt in the other *cocinas*; she details the roasting, at the village baker's, after the main baking is done and the oven is cooling, of suckling pigs cooked in their wide metal trays. Now it is a once-a-year tradition in my son's village of Alaró and it's fun to vicariously participate in an historic event as the locals arrive to collect their Christmas

dinner, rapidly whisking the crisply roasted piglets away in the boot of their cars.

History is full of conundrums. Unravelling mysteries is meat and drink to the food historian. Why, for instance, should bream, a sea fish, be traditionally served in Madrid – a land-locked city in the centre of a country of difficult terrain, surrounded by mountains, and a long way from the coast – on Christmas Eve? Or, the connection the English have to salt cod? Or, the link between maize and pellagra – a nasty disease which eventually kills you? The answers are to be found in *Delicioso*, but don't be fooled, this is no 'rag bag' book full of random anecdotal tales. Sevilla cleverly overcomes that problem of too much unrelated but fascinating information, garnered during those long hours of research, that doesn't easily slot into the historical timeline. Instead, she turns them into short discrete essays, each throwing light into those odd culinary corners of Spanish food history.

Sevilla shows precisely how the history of Spain is reflected in its food. Geographically it would always have been a country of consequence but it was the search for black pepper that resulted in the discovery of America in 1492, followed by the succession of the Habsburgs to the throne in 1516, that brought Spain to the very forefront of international affairs. From then on until the nineteeth century the steady flow of foodstuffs from the New World rendered seismic change to the diets of both rich and poor – and not just in Spain but, ultimately, to the whole of Europe. The slow absorption from the Americas of such products as potatoes, tomatoes, maize, chilli peppers and beans brought about a recognizable national cuisine with which we identify the Spain of today. All is detailed here.

I hope you will have detected my enthusiasm for *Delicioso* – the first book written in English that traces the history of the food of Spain from antiquity to the present day. Brought together within its pages is the story of this cuisine, interwoven with the causes affecting its development, the characteristics of the food and the country's ongoing and changing relationship towards its food culture. Skilfully written with passion and originality plus a deep understanding of the subject matter, *Delicioso* is an outstanding book with an immediate claim to space on any serious cook's bookshelf.

Di Murrell

David Smith: *The Cooking Colonel of Madras*: published by the author, 2018: 262 pp., paperback, £9.99 (available through lulu.com and amazon.co.uk).
Arthur Kenney-Herbert (1840–1916), better known as 'Wyvern', is a favourite cookery writer. His *Culinary Jottings for Madras* should be on everybody's bookshelf, especially that edition published by Prospect Books and introduced by the late Lesley Forbes. David Smith may be familiar to readers from his websites <curryhouse.com> and <goforanenglish.com> as well as for his books,