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place in food scholarship over the past decade or more, away from disciplinary confines – history, anthropology, agricultural science, nutrition – towards a free-wheeling, more discursive approach. It's an evolution to be commended, so long as it retains respectful contact with the disciplinary bases and does not trivialize itself by focusing on peripheral issues.

Barbara Santich

Keith Thomas: *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England*: Yale University Press, 2018: 473 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Sir Keith Thomas is one of Britain's most distinguished historians – a Past President of the British Academy, former President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and author of such landmark books as *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) and *Man and the Natural World* (1983). Unlike so many historians, he is not afraid to acknowledge the influence of the social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology. In *In Pursuit of Civility*, he speaks of the 'looming intellectual presence' of Norbert Elias, the German-British sociologist famous for the theory of civilizing processes, first advanced in 1939 in *On the Process of Civilisation*. Thomas has always described himself as an enthusiast, if critical enthusiast, for Elias's ideas, and indeed served as 'patron' of the *Collected Works of Norbert Elias* in English (2006–14) of which I was General Editor. (That meant he read the proofs of all 18 volumes!) If the name of Elias is at all familiar to food historians, it will be because his discussion of 'behaviour at the table' is one of the longest and best-known sections of his celebrated study of how manners changed over generations between the late Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. Keith Thomas's home territory is seventeenth-century England, but here he strays backwards to the late Middle Ages and forwards – beyond his nominal end date of 1789 – to the theory of informalization, formulated by Elias and particularly by Cas Wouters to account for twentieth-century trends in socially acceptable behaviour. And his focus on England (as 'a Welshman and therefore something of an outsider'), he argues, is especially relevant 'at a time when Britain, like the United States, seems to be attempting to detach itself from the rest of the world'. Indeed, the whole of chapter 5 is devoted to examining 'the ways in which the belief of the English in their superior civility affected their relations with "uncivilized" peoples, particularly by legitimizing international trade, colonial conquest and slavery'. The first two chapters of the book trace early-modern notions of good manners, their place in the collective self-definition of ruling élites, and how they reinforced the prevailing social structure. Chapter 3 explores further what 'being civilized' meant for contemporaries, and chapter 4 what they thought about how England had come to be 'a civilized country'. Chapter 5 has already been mentioned. Chapters 6 and 7 show how, nevertheless, ideals of civility and civilization were very much contested, and finally Thomas considers 'how

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far those ideals remain relevant in modern times' and he asks 'whether social cohesion and human happiness are possible without them'.

In such an ambitious and large-scale work, table manners inevitably jostle for attention with many other topics. But it is not hard to find gems, which on the whole flesh out the general view painted by Elias. The English appear to have lagged behind other Western European countries in such matters as the adoption of the fork, or feeling disgust at belching, spitting and sharing dishes and drinking vessels. That did not, of course, prevent English people looking down upon habits in countries that lagged even further behind the Western *avant garde*, examples including Charles II's ambassador to Muscovy being shocked not to be offered a napkin at dinner. Yet that was not universal: Thomas also records English travellers to Africa or the East Indies recognizing that conventions, though different in form, could be equally 'civil'.

Some details were entirely new to me, like the nineteenth-century recommendation to eat peas with a spoon, or the injunction that bread served with soup should never be less than half an inch thick. Too little is known, remarks Thomas, about the eating arrangements of ordinary people, though his book is full of unfamiliar glimpses of that; it is clear that there has always been considerable 'cultural lag' in social standards governing behaviour as one goes down the social scale. As late as 1816, an Essex farmer, using his own knife to carve a piece of fowl for himself 'unluckily helped himself to a gentleman's middle finger' when his fellow diners all had their hands on the dish at the same time. Keith Thomas's command of historical sources is formidable, daunting to a humble sociologist like me. His book is a fascinating goldmine of information. However, the reason that food historians should pay it attention is less because of the wealth of informative nuggets, but rather because of the picture that emerges of long-term processes of cultural change, of which matters relating to eating are a small though significant part.

Stephen Mennell

Sharon Hudgins (with recipes by Sharon and Tom Hudgins): *T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks: Cooking with Two Texans in Siberia and the Russian Far East* (Great American Cooking Series, book 5): University of North Texas Press, 2018: 448 pp., hardback, £41.50.

When discussing Russian food, Siberia hardly springs to mind as a centre of gastronomic excellence. *T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks* by Sharon Hudgins reveals this remote area of Russia is far from being the culinary backwater we may imagine. *T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks* bills itself as a cookbook but is so much more. Its pages delve into the culinary adventures of two Texans who spent a year living in Siberia and the Russian Far East during the early 1990s. It is part memoir, part food history and cultural digest combined with an eclectic mix of recipes inspired by the authors' time living in this part of

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