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Carmen Soares, Cilene da Silva Gomes Ribeiro, eds.: *Mesas luso-brasileiras*: Coimbra University Press, 2018: 2 vols.

These two virtual volumes grew out of the 2017 conference in a biennial Portuguese-Brazilian series organized by DIAITA, a very active network of research on food history based at Coimbra. The primary focus may be on the Portuguese and Brazilians – their food, nutritional health, gastronomic pleasures – but, after all, the Portuguese travelled the world and conquered no small part of it, imbibing influences from ancient and medieval Europe, from the Orient, and the Occident. Expect to be surprised by the cultural and historical range of these volumes. The main language is Portuguese, but with several articles in English (Bruno Laurioux is always worth reading) and with abstracts in English throughout. The two volumes are available online: go to www.doabooks.org/ and search for 'Mesas luso-brasileiras'. The books are also available as paperbacks if you would rather read print.

Andrew Dalby

Roblyn Rawlins and David Livert: *Making Dinner: How American cooks produce and make meaning out of the evening meal*: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019: 218 pp., hardback, £85.00.

There is an old saying about not judging a book by its cover so perhaps I'm being too pernickety here, but looking at the vegetables displayed on the cover of *Making Dinner* I find myself wondering, 'Just what's going on? Why is someone slicing through the middle of an unpeeled onion, and the broccoli already cut in half? Shouldn't those carrots have a good scrape first? Who eats carrots and asparagus together anyway?' My irritation with the illustration is perhaps a little unfair as the book itself is a piece of serious research. It seeks to determine whether home-cooked food is, as is often said, really being usurped in favour of eating out and if cooking skills are being lost. In their attempt to find the answer the authors present a study of some 50 or so families across America and how they approach their evening meal. A combination of research methods includes in-depth interviews with each main provider who also kept a cooking journal detailing the meals made during the course of 14 days. The journals document some 300 dinners which Rawlins and Livert use to explore how American home cooks think about themselves and their relationships with their families through the medium of food and cooking. A sociological study such as this regarding the eating habits of American families, carried out at a particular point in time, makes a useful contribution, becoming part of a cohesive body of knowledge on the subject and perhaps in fifty or a hundred years time will provide an insight into how patterns of food consumption in the home in the early part of the twenty-first century have changed or become modified over time. Scholars who research food history and related fields will be more able than I to comment on its value. My own stance is that of an

amateur enthusiast of food with a keen interest in home cooking and therefore, hopefully, will be forgiven if I query whether this study does actually answer in any definitive way the questions that it poses. I wonder how a study of just 50 participants, all sharing much the same age and socio-economic range, at work all day and with families to feed, is going to arrive at any definitive answer to the question posed. It seems obvious to me that this specific group, given the constraints of time, affordability and the natural pickiness of their children's age-group, would tend to eat at home far more frequently than out. The same might not apply to, say, singles, younger childless couples, older retired people, the financially better off or that growing band who don't ever cook anything. All would influence the argument on whether home cooking is losing out to meals bought in or eaten in restaurants. There is also a big question mark over what the researchers even consider to be home cooking. They don't seek to define this and their term 'making dinner' means no more than whatever has been bought which is prepared and eaten at home. The authors themselves say that 'the terms of the debate are not clear' – for example does unfreezing commercially made chicken nuggets and making a salad count as preparing a family dinner? Without any precise definition these questions go largely unanswered. Even the participants are not sure what constitutes 'home cooking' other than that it is something consumed at home by the whole family even when they might not all sit down together to eat it. Perhaps then I am not entirely wrong to take issue with that cover. It is somewhat ambiguous – akin to the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn by the authors perhaps?

Di Murrell

Priscilla Mary Isin: *Bountiful Empire: A History of Ottoman Cuisine*: Reaktion Books, 2018: 230 pp., hardback, £30.00.

This is an hugely scholarly work clearly involving author Priscilla Mary Isin in countless hours of meticulous research; witness the fifty or more pages of references and bibliographies at the end of this most entertaining book. Scholarly – yes, but neither dry nor boring; quite the opposite in fact, her account of Ottoman eating just romps along. It is always refreshing to examine life through the lens of the food historian. It both focuses on and magnifies significant historical moments in a particular way and allows for other interpretations of particular events. A food historian studies the minutiae of everyday life from a very different perspective to the normal chronicler, turning up detail which may have escaped the eye or understanding of the more conventional scholar who may have little interest in how (or possibly why) food and its preparation, its meaning, and the eating habits of earlier eras might relate to the bigger historical picture involving diplomacy, politics, wars, religion and hierarchy. A gift of bread and salt to the stranger, the standard