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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

form of welcome throughout the period of Ottoman rule and which is still today the traditional greeting offered to visitors in many of the countries once a part of their empire, may well have turned away the wrath of many a menacing warlord. Sharing food was an essential precept of Ottoman culture, including feeding the poor. Food provision and its regulation were the Sultan's main obligation to the empire and throughout its six centuries of existence, from its inception in Anatolia in 1299 to the dissolution of the Sultanate in 1922 it was the culture of food that bound all those of different classes and backgrounds together, with its acceptance that the centuries-old offer of bread and salt to even the humblest of strangers creates a bond of loyalty and friendship that is not easily broken. The Ottoman empire at its apogee included Syria, Egypt, Anatolia, the Balkans, Hungary, Iraq and Yemen. The roots of its cuisine are to be found in Central Asia but its culinary influences extended well beyond the empire's boundaries leaving linguistic traces of its cuisine in many different languages. Priscilla Mary Isin treats us to a whistle-stop introduction to the historical evolution of Ottoman cuisine between 1299 and 1922. Though relatively accelerated, she covers a lot of ground while still managing to lighten the whole with, for instance, anecdotal accounts of the diet of Turcoman nomads and a recipe for fat-tailed sheep. Successive chapters cover subjects as diverse as the introduction of forks, the use of kitchen utensils and tableware; we learn of the elaborate feasts which celebrated circumcision of highborn male infants; of fashionable picnics; Ottoman food laws; etiquette; and that, like soldiers everywhere, troops marched on their stomachs. Water, coffee and alcohol each has a separate chapter devoted to their stories. I read this scholarly work rather like an unputdownable thriller. Sadly it is a little too cumbersome to read in bed but having read it once fairly quickly for the purpose of this review I now look forward to a much more leisurely acquaintance in a summer garden aided by good coffee, sherbets and glasses of cool wine. My own Ottoman feast recently cooked for friends, though without such dainties as 'stewed sheep's feet served on bread to soak up the juices and capped with an omelette', was nevertheless much enlivened by my new-found knowledge provided by the author. Sadly, her book does not contain any recipes but a useful glossary allows one to describe one's own dishes, culled mainly from latter-day Greek and Turkish cookery books, in a rather more 'au fait' way. Finally, a quick mention of the illustrations: they do draw one in. They are acute observations showing the detail of many aspects of culinary life during the time of the Ottoman empire. I love the thought of Priscilla Mary Isin bringing her lens to bear upon, for instance, the image shown on page 98. This shows the royal encampment at the Archery Field during festivities surrounding the circumcision of the sons of Ahmed III in 1720. She points out that the tiny rectangular tents on the periphery of the picture are lavatories.

Di Murrell