

Yuan Mei: *Recipes from the Garden of Contentment: Yuan Mei's Manual of Gastronomy*, translated and annotated by Sean J.S. Chen: Berkshire, 2019: 468 pp., hardback, \$105.00.

This is a bi-lingual, parallel edition of the master treatise on gastronomy from the Chinese poet and scholar Yuan Mei (1716–97). It is the first complete translation into English and will therefore be welcomed everywhere. Sean Chen has provided plenty of explicatory footnotes, so the text, which might sometimes bemuse, may more often enlighten. The bulk of the text is a survey or ingredients and how best to cook them, rather than a step-by-step cookery book. The pearl in the oyster is the preliminary matter, where he talks of waste, show, service, right eating. When people talk of China possessing one of the big cuisines of the world, reference to this book is essential ammunition.

Helen Saberi: *Teatimes: A World Tour*: Reaktion, 2018: 252 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Helen Saberi's first essay on tea, also published by Reaktion, was most welcome. Allowing her more space to delve further into the question was a wise move. The broader pages, the larger and even more entertaining illustrations, and the more generous word-count allow the author to take a world tour of tea tables. Pride of place, and pages, goes of course to Britain, but subsequent chapters pass through Europe, the USA, the anglophone empire, India, central Asia, and the Far East, with a nod to Patagonia and some etceteras, before diving into recipes of teatime favourites. How she managed to assemble so many perfect illustrations I cannot tell. Most enjoyable.

Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson: *A Day at Home in Early Modern England. Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500–1700*: Yale, 2018: 312 pp., hardback, £40.00.

You will need your glasses, for the type is tiny. I had to give up reading it in bed as I required a brighter light. First, divide the day into functional units: waking, shopping, cooking, dining, socializing, evening jollies and sleeping; second, allocate rooms to each of these activities; third, restrict yourself to houses of the middling classes, largely, but not exclusively in towns. There is the recipe for the book, which discusses the decoration, furnishings, functions and interactions of these rooms to the lives of their inhabitants. It's good stuff, although the project is truly vitiated by its lack of legibility and the fact that some of the many photographs are too small to be of value to a dying eye. Historiographically, the authors' intention seems to be to deepen and improve upon, and often to dispute, the eminent W.G. Hoskins' theory of the great rebuilding of early modern England: to refine it in terms of urban and rural housing, in regional variation, and in its chronology. Much use has been made of inventories, or court records and of diaries and accounts, where they exist.

Much emphasis, too, has been laid on decoration. There are moments when the account of the day, or of a single room and its function, descend into a catalogue, neither entertaining nor arresting, but they do have a nice eye for some particular event or action such as the boy falling into the porridge pot on the fire, or rumpy pumpy among the servants at the close of day. Some of this suffers from an excess of theoretical enthusiasm, but there is too a plethora of facts, enough for the keenest reader.

Ken Albala: *Noodle Soup: Recipes, Techniques, Obsession*: University of Illinois Press, 2018: 186 pp., paperback, £16.99.

The energy of Ken Albala is breathtaking. If he's not editing a series here, organizing a conference there, undertaking a world tour of gastronomic symposia everywhere, or just teaching his students back home in Stockton, California, he's spending the last three years devising, cooking and eating a new noodle soup every day. This is the book: the history, the whys and the wherefores, then the recipes – some old, some classic, some new and entirely of his own invention – and photographs to prove it. Bravo! Perhaps this winter we should throw out the toaster and start simmering the stock: begone, dull colds, now is the time puff out the chest and slurp for good health.