PPC 107 (2017) 124-125
https://doi.org/10.1558/ppc.28123 Petits Propos Culinaires (print) ISSN 0142-7857
Petits Propos Culinaires (online) ISSN 3029-0651

If rich, buy the two-volume set. If poor, look through it when you next visit an academic library, and if that's your plan you'll be able to skim the general introduction in advance: it's online at academia.edu.

Andrew Dalby

Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and James Kelly, eds.: *Food and Drink in Ireland*: Royal Irish Academy, 2016: 430pp., paperback, €25.00.

This giant volume, at very reasonable price, first appeared in 2015 as part of the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C* (Volume 115). It is a collection of essays by people qualified in word and deed on the consumption of meat and drink from the Mesolithic to the modern era. It should be proclaimed from the rooftops that each contribution is comprehensible and has been largely stripped of the discourse of academe, without sacrificing the footnotes. It is a model of its type. Every essay seems to produce something worth chewing on. I hesitate to mention one without unintentionally denigrating another, but I made beelines for Cherie N. Peters on the diet of early medieval Irish peasants, Susan Lyons on the archaeological evidence pertaining to fruit, vegetables and foreign foodstuffs in medieval Ireland, Fiona Beglane on game in the medieval Irish diet, Madeline Shenahan's piece about Irish manuscript recipe books as source for culinary material culture, Regina Sexton on the food culture of pre-Famine Ireland, Máirtín MacConIomaire on *haute cuisine* restaurants in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dublin and Rhona Richman Kenneally's grand discussion of the improvement of the domestic kitchen in the Irish countryside during the 'long' 1950s, from which came the brilliant answer of one housewife to an enquiry about the best kitchen improvement in that period: 'running water' (in 1961, only one rural household in eight had running water). Usually, the heart sinks with books such as these: this is the exception.

Matthew Richardson: *The Hunger War, Food, Rations & Rationing 1914–1918*: Pen & Sword Military 2015: 290pp., hardback, £25.00.

Matthew Richardson's name will be unfamiliar to those interested in the history of food, but he is one of the brightest lights in the present generation of museum-based social historians. His books concentrate on the personal experiences of the troops and ordinary people involved in warfare, a subject for which his years as a keeper of the Liddle Collection at Leeds University provided him with an invaluable body of knowledge. One of the characteristics of his work is his eagerness to let his long-deceased informants speak directly to the reader in their own words, these first-hand quotations then being analysed and set into their historical, social and geographical contexts. As a result, his immaculate, original scholarship reads with all the pace and freshness of a good novel, constantly surprising us with its informed insights into the ordinary lives of the past.

© Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2023, Office 415, The Workstation, 15 Paternoster Row, Sheffield, S1 2BX
equinoxonline

In *The Hunger War* the everyday foods of all those involved in the First World War are given their first detailed yet all-embracing study. It commences with the foods eaten by troops on both sides of the conflict on the Western, Eastern, Russian, Mesopotamian, and East African fronts before moving on to the Home Fronts in Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, the United States and the major neutral countries. By translating the languages of the diverse cultures into English, we are enabled to discover how the war affected the lives of millions around the globe. The wartime disruption of food production and trade, exacerbated by the problems of financing and supplying huge mobile armies and populations including refugees caused both privation and real hunger. Conflicting factions used the blockade of food supplies as an instrument of war, their governments having to introduce legislation to ration their distribution.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is that it presents infallible evidence that our preconceived views of national characteristics are surprisingly accurate, as summarized in its conclusion. Germany's over-regulation crippled its efficiency, Turkey's corruption fed the rich and starved the poor, Russia's disorganization and shortages led to revolution, the French introduced strict food controls and thrived on ignoring them, while the egalitarian British rationed their supplies equitably to become the most efficient of all. Despite the massive, industrial-scale battlefield slaughter that informs our overview of the First World War, Matthew's book reveals that the Allies' ability to feed their people was of at least equal importance in gaining victory.

This finding might have been drawn from cold statistics, but here it comes from the vivid testimonies of those who actually experienced its effects first hand and for some five years. Their voices present the realities of wartime life both in the armies and in the streets and homes they were defending. Their impact is greatly enhanced by over 150 well-chosen photographs and illustrations showing everything from field kitchens and soup kitchens to ration queues and food containers recovered from the trenches, along with much else.

It is impossible to do full justice to this excellently produced book in a short review, but I found it to be one of the most informative and enthralling account of the relationship between people and their food at a specific period. It should greatly expand the horizons of those who think that food history should not extend beyond the study of recipe books.

Peter Brears

Gillian Riley: *Food in Art: From Prehistory to the Renaissance*: Reaktion Books, 2015: 288 pp., hardback, £30.

In the early '90s an obscure packager called Pomegranate had series of books published combining food and fine art. They were slim volumes of fifty or sixty pages with such titles as *The Dutch Table*, *Renaissance Recipes*, and *Impressionist*

equinoxonline