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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*

Picnics. 'A joy to make,' as author Gillian Riley recalls, but 'all would end in tears' when the packager fell out with the publisher and the series was discontinued. But as *tutti i mali non vengono per nuocere*, not all evils come to harm, the National Gallery not long thereafter expressed a keen interest in having Riley – who read History at Cambridge, had built up a career in book design and typesetting, and had two significant translations of historical culinary texts under her belt – prepare a cookery book of texts and recipes related to works in the Gallery collection whose subject matter lent itself to that purpose (*Feast for the Eyes: Evocative Recipes and Surprising Tales Inspired by Paintings in the National Gallery*, Yale University Press, 1997). Several times a week, she wandered the halls of the Gallery pondering the details of the paintings. When she approached the curators with questions, they responded with kindly condescension, as she was not one of *them,* a proper art historian. 'They sometimes made me feel as if I were a little old bag lady, who had come in from Trafalgar Square, blithering on about food.' Food history had not yet carved out its niche in the upper echelons of legitimate study, and so they did their best to humour her along. 'There was a time,' she recalls, 'when if you had a barmaid in a low-cut dress waving a tankard and saying "Gadzooks, have some venison pasty," people thought that was food history. Or that film about Henry VIII with Charles Laughton, chucking joints of meat over his shoulder – that was food history. But all that has changed now.'

The impetus to couple food and art manifests in two principal forms: that of using food as an expressive medium, exemplified by the conceptual installations plated up in modernist kitchens, whose aim is to transport the senses toward the sublime; and that of using food as the subject, symbolic element, decorative detail or the cohesive activity engaging the protagonists in a work of art. Art historians have analysed the figurative language in the use and portrayal of food in art, its expressive purpose within the context of the composition and the historicity of food as a conceptual expedient. In *Food in Art* however, Gillian Riley turns the tables by approaching the food–art dyad from the vantage point of her position as a renowned authority on food history.

Food in Art is, *in primis,* a food history book. She guides both the uninitiated and the seasoned traveller on a chronological excursion through corridors and great halls of culinary lore from prehistory to the Renaissance; signposted and elucidated by works selected to tantalize both eye and intellect. It is a leisurely journey, not intended for the buzzword readership looking for 'The 100 greatest paintings of food that everyone should see before they die.'

Riley is careful to point out the limitations of observing works of art from the mind's eye of a food historian and is cautious about reading too much into an image or assuming that there is a message or narrative. For example, in discussing the depictions of model bakeries and breweries in Ancient Egyptian tombs, she warns, '… these scenes convey with charm and

humour all the bustle and liveliness of real kitchens and workshops, but when food historians try and read them as 'cook-strips' or step-by-step instructions, confusion creeps in. There was never any need to paint or engrave instructions for folk who knew perfectly well how to perform every stage in the production of beer nor for the élite who would enjoy drinking it. What they wanted was a general sense and presence of the activity to make its reincarnation possible when the need arose. The artists who decorated the tombs filled the different horizontal strips or registers with pictures that were in no particular sequence but expressed the essence of the process, the atmosphere of this bustling daily routine of strenuous preparation and cheerful consumption.'

We are afforded a glimpse of the frustrations in a food historian's mind while observing a work of art, wondering whether the goose has been trussed to be put into the oven or is just being removed in that moment; the maddening questions about what those golden mounds might be, or whether the pattern on the bread had a meaning or was purely decorative. No matter, because the goose brings to mind a delicious quote about fowl by Herodotus, which streams directly into a Welsh recipe for salt duck, published in *The First Principles of Good Cookery* (1865). Then, luckily, as often happens, once the thought has run its course, it comes to nestle in Italian food history, her foremost area of expertise, where the reader gets a glimpse into Riley's vast vault of knowledge. Although the intellectual intensity is at a brisk boil, her signature earthy English wit tempers the weighty references. While discussing the quality of wine in the goblets of reclining Grecian partners depicted on earthenware amphorae, she proposes that the taste might have been similar to the Roman rotgut that Martial so abhorred: 'This is like the source of wine Martial was snooty about … He had a farm up the Via Nomentana, but said that he might just as well buy this local plonk at the market.'

The reader's enjoyment of the featured paintings and commentary is enlivened by numerous related extracts ranging from the nineteenth-century BCE *Hymn to the Beer Goddess*, inscribed on a clay tablet, a timeless theme that was still inspiring verse more than a thousand years later in a cited Greek poem singing the praises of the voluptuous tavern girl Surisca, who sashays her way around this roadhouse amidst the ripe, red, autumnal fruit and a green cucumber, '…the guardian of the orchard…'. We move from the bawdy to an extract from the decisively sober *Du fait de cuisine* by Maître Chiquart in which 'he describes in pernickety detail' how a professional kitchen should be organized, which Riley pairs with engravings from Scappi's *Opera*.

Food in Art is regardless a stand-alone art book, inspiring the lackadaisical leaf-through, the meditative perusal and the involuntary caressing of the images (the latter being perhaps a personal proclivity). While expected favourites are not lacking, like selections from the *Tacuinum Sanitatis,* Caracci's *The Bean Eater,* as well as one of the many human cornucopias by Arcimboldo, the author also

leads us down the road less travelled, like a respite at the suggestive Pompeian wall decoration featuring a vertical centrepiece of erect, tightly bundled asparagus, flanked on either side by a reed basket bursting with fresh, creamy ricotta, a third basket tumbled onto its side, teasingly spilling its contents into the foreground (and we thought we invented food porn), or Adriaen Coortes's luminous, almost glowing, *Still-life with Asparagus* an outstanding example of the numerous mesmeric studies honouring this sensual flowering perennial. But, asparagus aside, our attention is also guided to isolated symbolic details like the prominently positioned cucumber and apple in Crivelli's *The Annunciation with the Angel Gabriel and St Emidius*, the cucumber, in this case, representing Christ's purity, and the apple, the fecundity of the Virgin.

The chosen works are neither mere handmaidens to the text, nor are they slavishly described one by one. They accompany the textual itinerary, but entice the eye independently of it, compiled, as they were, with great attention to stylistic variety, subject matter, and captivating appeal, personal favourites being De Couvin's *Three Ladies of Paris* (1325), the foremothers of 'Ladies who lunch'; Hainz's poignantly simple half-finished glass of frothy beer with a side of cracked acorns (*Still-life with Beer-glass and Nuts,* 1660); Meléndez's beckoning *Manchego Cheese, Pears and an Earthenware Jug*; not to mention, of course, anything with asparagus. Or artichokes.

Karima Moyer-Nocchi

Volker Bach: *The Kitchen, Food, and cooking in Reformation Germany*: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016: 218 pp., hardback, £69.45.

A new book on German Renaissance cooking has you looking for the origins of the unflattering stereotypes: its allegedly indigestibility or the prevalence of rye bread, sausages and pickled cabbage. In fact, from the many extant sources from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, German cooking appears quite sophisticated. As Volker Bach points out, the collected states of the Holy Roman Empire were large and climatically varied, from the chilly wastes of the north-east to the sunny, fertile hills of the south-west. Barring olives, virtually everything could be grown, fished or shot.

Smoking and pickling were already widespread, as was the enthusiastic consumption of white asparagus. Many people drank beer, but there was plenty of wine. Beef was more prevalent than pork, but there were sausages, and in 1558 the Butchers' Guild in Königsberg made a Bratwurst 500 metres long.

The historian wants to know how much this was altered by the Reformation. Luther famously asked 'Why are you not farting and belching? Didn't you enjoy your meal?' Bach makes it clear that Germans were sticklers for etiquette, and few would have heeded Luther in this. The boor, or 'Grobian' was just as much a figure of fun in Germany as he was elsewhere.

Giles MacDonogh