

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.

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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.

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