

*lasagne*, *tagliatelli* in the famous *ragù*) followed by a meat dish, along with a nice vegetable side dish, asparagus or *melanzane alla parmigiana*, ending with fresh fruit, and of course maybe something from the wonderful range of cakes.

This is a book to read from cover to cover, as the carefully crafted structure reveals a much more complex narrative than just a few interviews with old ladies, and chats on past foodways. Karima Moyer-Nocchi is one of a new generation of historians intent on redressing the balance of Italian food history, putting cherished myths in a less rosy perspective. Her short but incisive essays give an often-uncomfortable context to the oral histories she records. The so-called Mediterranean Diet gets an elegant but deadly hatchet job; the iconic status of pizza is shown to be a recent offspring of what was an exclusively Neapolitan *cucina povera*, only quite recently, after WW2, emerging as quintessentially Italian thanks to the expectations of tourists; pasta was not until recently a universal staple food in Italy; the tyranny of the succession of courses in the restaurant menu (*antepasto*, *primo*, *secondo* with a *contorno*, dessert, etc.) is a quite recent adaptation of the meal structure of the rich by those who were for the first time able to aspire to eat like them. Karima guides us in our attempts to avoid tipping out the baby of wholesome Italian food with the murky bathwater of invented traditions.

A brief word on the translation: how on earth does one translate the untranslatable? Apart from a couple of ladies who spoke a standard Italian that can be rendered into standard English, we have a cacophony of local accents, regional dialects and, worse still, languages, with little relationship to Italian as we know it. The hesitating or torrential floods of reminiscence, the ums and ers of conversation, the kind of, innit, sort of, approximations of everyday speech, are difficult to render in any language. Karima opted for an Anglo/American colloquial demotic, acceptable to most readers in the USA, but tough on the rest of us. What are us poor Brits to make of Veronica, born in 1928 in the remote hills of Umbria, who says: 'We lived way the heck out there in the boonies...?' There is no easy solution. Myself, I wouldn't know where to begin. I'm grateful for the consistency of Karima's version (one gets used to it), and the humanity of her interpretation of these reminiscences, catching the tone of voice of her old ladies, their quirky personalities, the truth behind the bare narratives, the unspoken tragedies and triumphs over adversity. This is a book for everyone who enjoys Italian food, and wants to know more about it.

GILLIAN RILEY

C.M. Woolgar: *The Culture of Food in England 1200–1500*: Yale University Press, 2016: 356 pp., hardback, £30.00.

Enthusiasts for food and the Middle Ages will welcome anything from the pen of Chris Woolgar, and for a book such as this, doubly so. Ever since his gripping pair of volumes on household accounts (British Academy, 1992),

Woolgar has demonstrated deep interest in medieval food and its context and a wide acquaintance with the relevant written sources. If Peter Brears has given us a better understanding of the built environment and culinary equipment, thus enabling us to essay some medieval cookery of our own, this book accumulates a wealth of instance and anecdote drawn from court records, accounts, literary works and much else. Attention should be paid to the title, it does not pretend to be a history of food in England in the Middle Ages, but rather an account of its place in life in general. It does not indulge in statistics – always hazardous for this period – and relies on a narrative of a thousand episodes: from a poor beggarwoman being savaged by a dog, to a young girl scalded when ladling food out of a pot and a young scullion wounded in the foot when dropping his knife. There is no detailed analysis of one set of sources to attempt some form of measured assessment of, for example, patterns of consumption, levels of dietary sufficiency (of any class), the ups and downs of trade. It is not a book from the *Annales* school, you might say. Its chapters survey cooking by the peasantry; drinks and drinking; the cooking of bread, meats and dairy foods; sauces and spices; the place of gardens, foraging and hunting; what we can learn of food in towns, particularly from guild records; what monks got up to (very good on Durham and its kitchens); what went on at the lord's table; something about professional cooks and kitchen staff; a section on dietetics; and a nice chapter, tugging the heartstrings, on those who had insufficient and on famines. His strength is in his sources: he has read a host of financial accounts (many still unprinted) and teases out a multitude of enlightening facts. He tends to a view of medieval foodways being unitary: that there was a trickle-down of techniques, fashions and performance from the top tables to the humble peasant's cot. He does not explore the problems of regionalism. Nor does he go to great lengths to indentify change and development in what people ate and how they cooked it. Three centuries is a long time for there to have been no movement at all. That is not to say that he does not recognize such changes, but trying to pin them down to specifics is difficult, given the sources available. But the text is rewarding on many levels, and greatly helped by clear typography, even if the notes are all at the back.

Krishnendu Ray: *The Ethnic Restaurateur*: Bloomsbury, 2016: 264 pp., paperback, £19.99.

A book by someone who might be termed an ethnic academic, teaching food studies in New York. Basing his account on interviews, Ray tells of the establishment, commercial fate and culinary intentions of two Indian/Pakistani restaurants in NYC; investigates the mindset and motivations of the Culinary Institute of America and classically trained chefs and how they interact with immigrant practitioners; looks at the way that restaurants have been covered by the press and media in the US since the end of the nineteenth century; and