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spice and excitement of Mexico and black bean stew from Brazil. This book should leave you feeling inspired and experimental but, at the very least, it is a very pleasant book to read.

Alice Richardson

Ursula Heinzelmann: *Beyond Bratwurst. A History of Food in Germany*: Reaktion Books, 2014: 384 pp., hardback, £25.00.
Fabio Parasecoli: *Al Dente. A History of Food in Italy*: Reaktion Books, 2014: 332 pp., hardback, £25.00.
Reaktion Books continues to expand its presence in the world of food studies with a new series, 'Foods & Nations'. Its first two titles relate to Germany and Italy, both are worth the purchase and your close attention. Nicely produced, with Reaktion's usual attention to the melding of words and image, they will each provide a thought-provoking launchpad for the curious.

Arnt Gulbrandsen has kindly contributed this comment on Ursula Heinzelmann's book: 'Judging by this book, the series will be well-produced, with good paper and printing, fine editing and a decent index. Speaking as a expatriate in Germany, I didn't think it possible for a German to write English as well as Ms. Heinzelmann does in this book. The book itself is a rather thorough look at German food throughout history, from the neolithic to the modern. The changes are surprisingly small: these days there's enough food and that was not always the case, but areas where the neolithics ate rye is also where bakers still have good rye bread today, the places where the Romans planted vineyards is where you can be served fine local wine and the right kind of food to go with it, and the beer, meat and cheese that Germans like now are also what Tacitus mentioned 2000 years ago. Between the neolithics and the artisanal organic bakers, you'll learn that the Nazis were absolutely crazy in the kitchen too, that there are many regional sausages, how *biergärten* came to be, and how a cookbook pizza looked in East Germany.'

The great quality of the German book is the humane education of its author which allows wide terms of reference and plenty of allusive comment. She is also very revealing about the spread of German food beyond its borders, particularly in the United States. The whole subject is one that has been rarely addressed and the book's importance is therefore redoubled.

Fabio Parasecoli, who is the Co-ordinator of the Food Studies Program at The New School in New York has done a good job on Italy too. Perhaps because of the complexity of Italian history (although the ins and outs of the German polity were probably just as labyrinthine), he has elected to weld the gustatory to the political narrative. This makes it rather useful for the epicure who knows nothing of Italian history, and it puts a nice slant for the political historian on his daily bread and butter. It might be said that this is a book

about food issues rather than food, but it's none the worse for that, and is full of most enjoyable illustrations and nicely untoward information. Good stuff.

Florine Boucher: *Tutto Risotto, alles wat je wilt weten, over dat bijzondere Italiaanse rijstgerecht*, Philippe Boucher, 2013: 320 pp., paperback, 29.50 Euros.

Ever since I watched Anna del Conte, at a Guild of Food Writers workshop, demonstrate, with elegant expertise, how to cook risotto, I have had a deep respect for the concept and procedures of this north Italian dish. It is unique in the repertoire of rice cookery. Each stage does things to the rice that contribute to a creamy but chewable ensemble. In *Tutto Risotto* Florine Boucher enhances our understanding of this methodology, and tells of the background, geographical and historical, of the rice culture of northern Italy, especially the Vercellese, where she has lived, and cooked, for over a year. This province, up in the top left hand corner of Italy, between Piedmont and Lombardy, has cultivated rice for centuries. The landscape has been shaped by this, with the abundant tributaries of the Po and other Alpine rivers channelled and controlled to provide essential irrigation to a patchwork area pf ricefields, flooded in spring and dry and rustling with the golden grains in autumn, making the most of the horrible damp cold winters and the punishingly hot summers to create an environment just right for the development of the selected strains of rice that are used to cook risottos.

A risotto depends on the variety of rice, the nature of the cooking liquid, (we are given 15 different broths) and the size and shape of the pan you use. The rice varieties listed by Boucher are Arborio, Baldo, Carnaroli, Roma, Sant'Andrea and Vialone Nano. The kinds of risotto you could make with these can be *all'onda, all'onda pigra,* or *asciutto*: almost soupy (making waves), just slightly sloppy, and dry. She describes the way different varieties, handled in different ways, can give us a whole range of risottos, with different textures and consistencies, with this in common: the rice has to be *al dente*, to have some bite to it, whether floating in a creamy mass, or sitting high and dry on its plate. What you aim at and how you get there is a matter of both dogma and personal taste, depending on regional usage and local variations. Never mind about being innovative, in a brave youthful urge for self expression, let's get our heads round the old ways first, is Florine's approach, like that of Maureen B. Fant and Oretta Zanini de Vita in their book on pasta, reviewed here recently.

Boucher gives us the basic risotto method, and then six variations on it. First of all the preparation of the *trito*, softening a mixture of finely chopped onion, garlic, leeks, whatever, in oil or an appropriate fat. This aromatizes