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Swabian as Martellotti prefers) by birth and allegiance, had his power base in Sicily; there he grew up, speaking six languages, one of them Arabic, and when not rampaging around Europe harassing kings and popes, was at ease in the hedonistic cultural hothouse of Palermo, where the *douceur de vivre* included falconry, poetry, and refined dining. According to Martellotti the cultural and political hegemony of the Normans was the vehicle for this splendid Arab cuisine, which in word as well as deed, in kitchens and cauldrons as well as texts, was to be for centuries the main influence on European gastronomy. Martellotti traces the impact of this courtly Arab cuisine in its transmission from a master chef's lost manuscript through a text, *Liber de coquina*, copied later in several versions, to other surviving cookery texts, from a 14th century version of the *Meridionale*, published by Bostrom in 1985, to a later version in the BNF, and compares it with material from the late 12th century in the British Library, edited by Constance B. Hieatt in 1986. According to Bruno Laurioux, Hieatt's 'seductive hypothesis', outlined at the Oxford Symposium in 1996, that the *Liber de coquina* was the vehicle for this transmission of the Arab cuisine of Sicily to the rest of Europe, via Anglo-Norman MSS, is debatable.

Readers of *PPC* will enjoy comparing Martellotti's enthusiastic and carefully argued position with the equally scrupulous, but sceptical, view of the Arab influence by Bruno Laurioux in *Une histoire culinaire du Moyen Âge* (Honoré Champion, Paris, 2005) where his essay on pp. 305–335, 'Le goût médiéval est-il arabe? À propos de la "Saracen connection"' summarizes a different point of view. Laurioux examines over half a century of different takes on the Arab influence, from Maxime Rodinson to C. Anne Wilson and Charles Perry, and finally Martellotti, and eventually gives them all a clear well-reasoned thumbs down.

Gillian Riley

Tony Kitous & Dan Lepard: *Comptoir Libanais: a feast of Lebanese-style home cooking*: Preface Publishing, Random House, 2013: 288 pp., hardback, £20.

The current civil war in Syria has seen a large influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon. One project to help them has been run in conjunction with the restaurant Tawlet Souk el Tayeb in Beirut. Established by Kamal Mouzawak, who has a short essay in Tony Kitous' new book, the restaurant promotes foods from different parts of Lebanon and encourages cooks from across Lebanon to come and cook, highlighting the variations between coastal, mountain and inland cooking. They also have international themed dinners when visiting chefs demonstrate the foods of other regions of the world.

Mouzawak also founded the first farmers market in Beirut, promoting local foods and produce. His work encapsulates many aspects of Lebanese cuisine; the use of fresh ingredients, its simplicity, its connection with the land, but also its openness to other influences and the ability for it to travel. The

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latter two aspects are perhaps what defines Lebanese food for us today. The entrepreneurial spirit of the Lebanese has meant they have been open to many other cultures over time, as they have spread via trade or migration, and they continue to diversify as new challenges and opportunities present themselves. Lebanese food has become familiar across the world disproportionately in relation to the size of the country.

Lebanese food, like the country itself, has a fascinating if sometimes troubling history, related in such classic books as Anisa Helou's *Lebanese Cuisine* (1994) and Claudia Roden's *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* (1968). These were written by exiles from the turbulent region and motivated by the desire not to lose touch with foods they were bought up with. The cuisine of the Lebanon in particular benefitted from its rich geography being a part of the Fertile Crescent, and with a variety of landscapes from the Shouf mountains to the Bekaa Valley as well as a long Mediterranean coastline. The climate also suits a range of products with mild winters on the coast and snow in the mountains, which feed the Litani and Orontes rivers as they irrigate the inland Bekaa Valley.

The country's history as part of other empires, such as the Egyptian, Persian, Roman and Greek, brought in influences from across those territories, combining the cooking of the Mediterranean and the rich cuisine of Persia. Particularly significant was the arrival of the Phoenicians in Tyre, in southern Lebanon, in 4000 BC when – as the first seafaring nation in the Middle East – they established a trading post for silks and spices, building an early empire based on trade in fabric dyes. The Phoenicians also brought in pulses, wheat, nuts and olives which are the mainstays of classic dishes such as kibbeh, baclava and the ubiquitous flat bread, served at almost every meal.

From the time of the Phoenicians the Lebanese became great traders (holding some responsibility for the slave trade, particularly in East Africa). Lebanon has exported its cooking through commerce and migration, spreading Lebanese cuisine around the region and into Europe and Africa, as well as importing ingredients and styles of cooking. As a result the precise origins of Lebanese dishes are often difficult to pin down accurately.

As one of the the few Middle East countries with a large Christian community Lebanese cuisine has also been open to Christian as well as Muslim traditions. So, for example, there is a wide variety of vegetarian dishes reflecting the requirements of Lent. From 1516 to 1918 Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire. This further contributed to the spread of Lebanese culinary influence as the empire drew to itself the best of its territories, which spread from western Asia to southern Europe, as well as north Africa. It also opened Lebanon up to the foods of other parts of the empire. The Ottoman influence is still apparent in the use of lamb and rice in Lebanese cooking.

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Arab nationalism, which grew as the Ottoman Empire declined, led to individual countries laying hold of their own cookery cultures, and Lebanon, was no exception. Dishes such as *tabbouleh*, *kibbeh*, and *fattoush* were examples of Lebanese home cooking that become popular across the Middle East and beyond. The larger-scale migrations of Lebanese around the world in the late nineteenth century, initially to other Arab countries but then increasingly to the USA, resulted in these dishes finding new homes.

Before the 1975 civil war Lebanon was also perhaps the most open country in the region and as such developed a thriving tourist trade. The French influence, when that country held the mandate to rule Lebanon after the First World War, helped the country both with its cuisine, particularly pastries, and with a restaurant culture, something other Middle Eastern countries have only more recently developed. The civil war and the Israeli invasions led to the exile of many wealthy Lebanese to the West where they established restaurants showcasing Lebanese food and preserving their culinary heritage. The end of civil war in 1991 allowed people to return and a restaurant and food culture to flourish again. Like many cultures emerging from a disorienting period, the Lebanese returned to their culinary roots, with the promotion of traditional foods. The Tawlet Souk el Tayeb restaurant and the Beirut farmers market are examples of this.

But they are also examples of another trend which has been to diversify, using the varied ingredients available to them and the experiences of exile, to generate an eclectic food scene unlike anything else across the Middle East. Visiting the country in the mid-1990s soon after the end of the civil war, I ate in restaurants in Beirut serving food reflecting these different influences of a quality to match that in many London restaurants.

The classic *mezze* of Lebanon, which consists of many small dishes, usually fairly simple, such as pickled vegetables, salads, stuffed vine leaves, puréed pulses and vegetables, has come to represent Lebanese food for many. Whilst not necessarily what would be served at home, these dishes showcase both the simplicity of Lebanese food and its fresh ingredients. This simplicity has led to some experimentation, comparable to that with *tapas* in Spain, so that we now see *hummus* with different spices apart from cumin, the use of yoghurt and *tahini* dressings on various vegetables, arak (the aniseed-flavoured spirit similar to Ouzo or Pastis) being added to marinades or as a cooking medium.

Interestingly Lebanese food is in great demand in the Gulf states, as it appeals to both Western and Middle Eastern palates, and has been promoted in the West as 'healthy' given its similarity to other Mediterranean cuisines.

With the current conflict in Syria having serious consequences in Lebanon, with inter-communal tensions rising again, it may be we see another exodus from the country that may bring with it the 'new' Lebanese food, that has

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taken the best of traditional food and taken it to another level. Whatever the future its clear that one of the defining characteristics of Lebanese food is, like its people, its ability to adapt.

Tony Kitous is the owner of a chain of Lebanese-style restaurants across London, in major shopping centres and airports. The menus at these 'Comptoir Libanais' restaurants, and his Kenza restaurant in the City, feature many of the same traditional Lebanese dishes that appear in this book, which can perhaps be described as the book of the chain. There are no great surprises here, with recipes for *hummus*, *baba ghanoush*, *fattoush*, *batata harra*, *shorbat adas*, and the use of *tahina*, sumac, pomegranate, all of which I suspect we are getting used to. Many of the recipes give a little twist to the traditional but perhaps not enough for a generation now familiar with the innovative Middle Eastern cooking of the likes of Yotam Ottolenghi, or who may themselves have visited Beirut today. That said, the recipes certainly work and there are some which deserved repeated consumption, for example the salmon marinated in pomegranate and molasses, which may sound a trifle rich but in fact works really well.

The writing style leaves something to be desired, to be fair not an issue exclusive to this cook book. When you get words such as 'passion', 'love', 'simple', 'honesty', 'fun', and 'easy' all within the first two paragraphs I get a little uneasy. There is plenty of hyperbole and repetition in the introductory sections, which I suggest you skip to get to the recipes, which is a shame as the short piece there by Kamal Mouzawak, of Tawlet Souk el Tayeb fame, seems a major missed opportunity. The photos are by Dan Lepard, best known for his baking books, and are a real bonus.

Tim Harris

Anya von Bremzen: *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking. A Memoir of Food and Longing*: Doubleday, 2013: 340 pp., hardback, £16.99.

I regret not having previously encountered the work of Anya von Bremzen. Had it been otherwise, the entries on Russia and the various republics of the USSR in the *Companion* revisions would have been better. Her first cookery book, *Please to the Table: The Russian Cookbook*, written with John Welchman, was published by Workman in 1990. *Mastering…* is partly a memoir of a Russian childhood, something about dislocation and adjustment once in America and a general account, informed by her own and her family's experience, of life, food and cooking in the Soviet Union after 1917. Although her grandfather was head of Soviet Naval Intelligence and a thoroughgoing Communist, he was also Jewish, so the author's identities were split between membership of the *nomenklatura* on the one hand (a club that occasionally paid dividends) and a problematic ethnic group. Her own mother felt the difficulties to a much

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