

of affairs relating: 'Back in the 1970's, KFC ran billboards depicting a family-sized bucket of fried chicken under the slogan "Women's Liberation".' So rather than solve the issue of gender roles in the family the big companies took it away saying 'we can do this for you' by providing already processed food.

While encouraging all of us, men, women and children, to get into the kitchen, he suggests that cooking, as well being a political act in reducing our reliance on 'Big Food', can also be an outlet for our inherent creativity. This, perhaps the main theme of the book, shows how cooking allows us to get our hands on real ingredients and transform them into food we can enjoy, using all five senses in ways that our usual daily activities do not. He said 'one of the key things about cooking is that it re-connects us to our senses' in a world where for most of our day our senses are underemployed.

In the last chapter on fermentation he hypothesizes that the lack of certain bacteria in our lives as a result of not eating so many fermented foods, such as proper pickles, sauerkraut, or unpasteurized cheeses, may be responsible for the rise in auto-immune conditions including asthma and allergy. The theory goes that 'bacteria essentially "train" our immune system to create a world (inside us) that is safe for them. If we don't have these (bacteria) our immune system fails to distinguish between friends and foe, and will treat a friend, such as gluten or nut protein, as a foe and overreact.' This is an area of work that Pollan has gone on to develop further since writing this book and I look forward to reading the fruits of his further research on this.

Covering obesity, dieting, the costs of processed food, the many and varied skills of cooking, marketing, the role of cooks over history, agriculture, and microbiology, this is a wonderfully varied, informative and enjoyable read from one of *Time Magazine's* 100 most influential men in the USA and we can only hope this influence hits home. Most importantly the book gives us some compelling reasons to get back into the kitchen.

TIM HARRIS

Adam Gopnik, *The Table Comes First. Family, France, and the Meaning of Food*, Quercus, 2011, 293pp, hardback: £18.99 (paperback: £11.04).

Returning to *The Table Comes First*, now out in paperback, reveals a book that lasts. The big questions that give it shape, for example 'How Does

Taste Happen?', would send many writers running for cover, but Gopnik happily jumps in, drawing together scholarly research, wide reading on the arts, childhood memories, major press interviews, and 'plain facts of the kitchen,' as he calls them.

There is a body to the text that supports much telling detail. 'All the good stuff,' he writes on taste, 'is at once universal and overwhelming, and if local, tempered by taste, finely articulated to the place and moment.' So Gopnik is not afraid of linking food and emotion. His opening pages combine a dedication to comic food writer Calvin Trillin, a bittersweet chunk of W.H. Auden poetry and a young Frenchman's letter to his parents written hours before execution in 1942.

The big questions, though, guide the text. The first is 'Who Made the Restaurant?' The answer here is a synthesis of the work of the 'sizzlists', as he calls them, a group of historians whose research has changed the story of the Parisian restaurant as we knew it, redating its birth to the 1750s. The text is absorbing both in its specifics and Gopnik's idea that cities may have a food scene akin, say, to London's music scene in the 1960s, that allow new things to happen and even paradigms to change. Interestingly he also links men's and women's desire for a solo place in public life to the restaurant's birth.

Gopnik finds many different ways to answer his own questions through his mastery of reportage. For example, 'Meat or Vegetable?', the fourth, finds its reply through an affectionate 2005 *New Yorker* double interview with Fergus Henderson, London's meat man, and Parisian vegetable-gardening chef Alain Passard. Gopnik's inner debate on their apparently contradictory approaches ends up reconciling them.

At the end of the book there is a slight change of pace when Gopnik comes to explore bits of food culture we already know through the media. He writes about Parisian Le Fooding then takes on the Catalan avant-garde. He flies to Barcelona where he eats, reads and interviews key players – there is much self-revelation here – without revealing many of his own thoughts. But it turns out he had not missed a trick. Pithily he goes straight to the point about why the innovation on this 'three-star stage' is not comparable to Carême's and Guérard's changes of paradigm.

Kindly he throws in a second idea: that a great avant-garde meal offers a time-out-of-time experience comparable to those the slow-food movement creates. In both cases, he says, you go to eat rather than eat to

go. That gives cause for reflection now that researchers say they do not know which comes first, anxiety or obesity. The book ends 'Reading On The Way Home', a generously commented list of sources, further reading and authors whose work has fascinated, touched or inspired Gopnik.

VICKY HAYWARD

Marco Johannes Bartoldus: *Palladius Rutilius Taurus Aemilianus: Welt und Wert spätrömischer Landwirtschaft*. Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2012: 376 pp. paperback, € 29.80.

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Monographs on Palladius have been few but good. In 1935 came Josef Svennung's magisterial study of Palladius' late Latinity; in 1975, R.H. Rodgers' definitive analysis of the textual tradition. Now we have Bartoldus' engaging assessment of the farming practices found in Palladius' manual. Palladius, who presents himself as a practical farmer, keen to 'quicken the surface of a well-dug field' ('Poem on Grafting' 168), would have been pleased by Bartoldus' approach.

Chapter 1 tackles the vexed question of Palladius' date, which Bartoldus sets c. 400–470. Chapter 2 surveys the organization of the *Opus Agriculturae*, its *Nachleben*, its sources, and the history of modern Palladian scholarship. Then we reach the heart of the book, a series of discussions of selected passages from the *Opus* illustrating all its major subjects, viz. production of vegetables, trees, fruits, wine, olive oil, honey, fowl and livestock, and construction of farm buildings.

This selective strategy is a useful one, allowing Bartoldus to delve deeply into topics without producing the proverbial comprehensive mega-bibliion. Since he is an unabashed enthusiast for Palladius, his selected passages tend to be those which show Palladius at his best and most original, though not exclusively so. His greatest merit is to discuss Palladius' advice not only vis-à-vis the other ancient *scriptores rei rusticae*, but also in the light of ancient farming practice as revealed by archeological and historical sources – and indeed in the light of modern farming practice. To this end he deploys a huge bibliography. Where other commentators sometimes make vague claims that such-and-such a technique 'is still practised today', Bartoldus properly gives chapter and verse.

A few examples will illustrate Bartoldus' approach. Palladius counsels, from his own experience, that quince trees need pruning, and that they can