

Jojo Tulloh: *The Modern Peasant: Adventures in City Food*: Chatto & Windus, 2013, 320 pp., paperback, £12.99.

We have always approved of everything that Jojo Tulloh has written: you can follow her columns in *The Week*. As time went by she obviously got bored with just journalism and took to an allotment in east London: and don't think that this is just a five minutes a week job. Her first book was enlightening and this one takes the business of food production up a notch. It kicks off (one very good reason for notice here) with a portrait of Patience Gray and her life in southern Italy. She went down to Spigolizzi, wrote a lovely article on her trip and re-cycled it for her preface here. The book takes us through most aspects of subsistence cookery: there's a good chapter on pickling; helpful instructions on salting cod or bacon, although she stops short of smoking salmon, visiting instead Ole-Martin Hansen in Stoke Newington who has set up his own smokehouse. Peasants don't mess about, so we have recipes for brains, for faggots, for rillettes, and lots of wild mushrooms. Moving on to the brewhouse, ginger beer, *sauerkraut* and *kimchi* are usefully described, as well as an instructive section on making tofu. She's pretty instructive on cheese too. The writing is clean, sensible and enthusiastic enough to give you heart. What Steven Poole (above) would make of it, I am not sure, but it does not resort to hyperbole.

Jan Gross: *Jam Dreaming*: Sid Harta Publishers Pty Ltd., 2011, 382 pp., paperback.

Australian readers may already have seen this book published in Victoria and other subscribers have read a couple of pieces between these covers. This is a novel with food, a Bildungsroman where young Eileen (an aborigine) pursues marker-dishes through the agency of Mama Jocsdi, a deli owner in Melbourne. Jan Gross's writing is ever readable, nicely allusive and usually full of memory. Of course, she has a lot to remember, having lead a full and rich life in worlds far distant from writing mere novels.

Roberta Gilchrist: *Medieval Life. Archaeology and the Life Course*: The Boydell Press, 2012, 336 pp., hardback, £30.00.

This is a material culture book. I had hoped for information about food and cookery, but didn't get much. It is an extended discussion of archaeological discovery and the way in which the things discovered relate to the human life span (and beyond). That is to say, birth, sex, everyday life, death. The

book suffers from an excess of material culture theorizing. But nonetheless contains some quite pleasing notes of very pleasing artefacts: a double-ended ear scoop; a plethora of amulets; dice and counters; various bits of jewellery and knives and spoons; and some pots. As your homework project for the day, could you please discuss the following: ‘The permeability of the person/object boundary is also demonstrated by the process of *objectification*, when the agency of persons and things becomes entwined.’ There are many such sentences and their meaning is sometimes a nice thing to consider when chopping logs.

Lucy Lethbridge: *Servants: A Downstairs View of Twentieth-century Britain*: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013, 385 pp., hardback, £20.00.

Highly recommended. A most entertaining and thoughtful romp through the world of service up to about 1950. We, the modern reader, find the subject a constant wonder, hence perhaps the success of *Upstairs Downstairs* and *Downton Abbey*. Ms Lethbridge has read widely and deployed her evidence with skill, and a telling eye for an anecdote. If your memory for jokes is short, each one is a winner, though some have been told before. I enjoyed (again?) the tale of the servants’ plate-scrappings and leftovers being swept into a single dish, sweet and savoury commingled, because the poor won’t notice. She has a good eye too for early signs of bolsiness in the British proletariat and the contempt expressed by the real workers for liveried servants when they strayed beyond the confines of their employment (shopping for instance, or walking down a market street). She also navigates the various differences in practice and attitude of the employing classes, for the history of service among the aristocracy is mighty different from that among the bourgeoisie. My regret is that the book stops, effectively at least, with the 1950s, because the tale I hoped to hear as well was the astonishing growth of domestic service in contemporary Britain. Think of the au pairs, the Spaniards (in the ’60s), the Filipinos and now the Poles, eastern Europeans and ex-colonial travellers. *The Economist* had a nice piece on servants a year or two ago (comparing Brazil today to inter-war Britain on the service question) and it remarked ‘According to Britain’s Office for National Statistics (ONS), household expenditure on domestic service hit a low point in 1978, since when it has quadrupled in real terms. It estimates there are as many domestic workers in London now as in Victorian times. But everything except the raw number has