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tableland towards the Mediterranean. Roden writes that Catalan cooking is 'the richest, most complex and sophisticated of Spain', handing on an idea that has currency abroad, but perhaps due a mix-up over the culinary '*paises catalanes*', akin to associating all southern French cooking with Languedoc. (On home ground conventional wisdom, even among most Catalan chefs, reserves the accolades for both home and restaurant cooking for the Basque country.) On the whole, though, the regionalism is subtle, helped by recipe variations that evoke how dishes travel and are cooked with great freedom of spirit.

Beyond the recipes there is much of interest. At the book's heart lie historical essays. Roden writes densely and with passion on Spain's Muslim and Jewish cooking, a complex subject that requires filtering wide and deep sources to set local detail against the bigger picture. Especially useful is her unravelling of Muslim cooking's various strands that are usually written confusingly as one tradition. This perspective is of great value for both scholars and hands-on cooks.

A wish-list for a paperback edition might note that Jason Lowe's photographs bring a richly coloured visual narrative to the book, but occupy over a quarter of it. Perhaps some of the space might be given over to text exploring other areas of history in more depth and playing with the leisurely domestic detail that gives *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* its timeless sense. One feels that this book, in contrast, is a time-capsule, capturing the cooking of an affluent epoch that may well soon come to a close. But there is much to celebrate here and cook with Claudia Roden's own enthusiasm – and toque – sending one scuttling to look for the paella pan.

Vicky Hayward

Helen Leach, Mary Browne, Raeline Inglis: *The Twelve Cakes of Christmas: an evolutionary history with recipes*: Otago University Press, 2012, 192 pp., hardback: £24.50.

Building on her earlier 'significant study...of a vexed question' (*PPC* 89), *The Story of the Pavlova*, Helen Leach and her co-authors here explore the history of what is still for most of us an essential part of Christmas cuisine – the cake. Underpinning her approach is the idea of the recipe as a proxy-artefact or piece of material culture, and a text that 'encodes the flavour and texture of a dish-in-waiting'. Recipes matter more to cake-makers than to, say, stew-makers, since variations in proportions, temperatures, and

procedures can mean an outright disaster rather than a slightly different taste or texture, and so ample material with which to trace the development of the Christmas cake, from its origins as a seventeenth-century Twelfth Cake in England to a twentieth-century Cathedral Cake in New Zealand, is to be found in private cookbooks, articles, and published books. Raelene Inglis contributes a wonderfully detailed statistical analysis of over 800 recipes covering the whole of the twentieth century, and Helen's sister Mary Browne once again embarks on the labour of translating recipes into modern terms, baking them, and – no doubt with considerable difficulty – managing to photograph the results before they are eaten by her fortunate family and friends.

The Christmas cake is a particularly good subject for this material culture approach since it would have been an annual and isolated cooking Event – undertaken deliberatively by the household cook, not least because the cake has always, as part of a ritual feast, tended to feature expensive and rich ingredients. The shift to people drawing lots for their Twelfth Night roles, instead of searching for a token baked into the cake, meant it no longer had to be eaten in one go on one particular night, and it changed from yeast-based 'cake' to something richer and more long-lasting, generally though not exclusively made by the method of creaming fat and sugar to incorporate air, and eaten from the start of the festive period. Since the Christmas cake is a food that arouses strong emotion, as part of the personal tradition of a household or family at Christmas, my expectation would have been that recipes would be relatively constant, subject only to the pressures of economic circumstances, wartime shortages, and household size – yet the authors show a surprising degree of variation in the cakes made, especially during the twentieth century. There are discernible trends that crossed continents, some the result of new products like baking powder, some simply due to fashion (I remember adding chocolate and even, once, a tin of strawberries, to my own cake), but a continuing enthusiasm for pineapple, condensed milk, brazil nuts and brightly coloured cherries marks the later recipes out as distinctively and deliciously antipodean.

The book is a combination of serious research presented succinctly and clearly, and practical cookbook written with the engagingly informal tone of someone sharing personal experiences with her peers. Reading it, I found myself wondering about the unexplained chemistry of cake making – why does adding egg custard mean you can use fewer eggs? Would milk and egg

added separately have worked as well? – and would have welcomed rather more comparative description of the finished cakes, especially the differing textures of the crumb. What some describe as 'moist' is sometimes, to my taste, too soggy and the excellent photographs of cut cake suggest a range of density that is not always identified in the text. However, the remedy for this is obvious, and also welcome: I shall have to get baking!

PAM GEGGUS

Abbie Rosner: *Breaking Bread in Galilee – A Culinary Journey into the Promised Land*: Hilayon Press, Israel, 2012, 238 pp., paperback, $15.00.

The power of food to unite as well as divide is nicely illustrated by this account by a Jewish author of her travels around Galilee observing, studying and recording modern, yet infinitely traditional food habits, shared of course by Arab and Jew alike. Her starting point was edible wild plants; her backstop was the Old Testament; her range extended from the harvest of the desert to bread baking, fig eating, and olive growing. Her account is eloquent and will yield you some good information on the *tabun* clay oven and the making of *freekeh*, as well as the use of wild plants *zaatar*, *luf*, asparagus and mandrake. Both mandrake and *luf* are of course poisonous. The mandrake can be unmanned by removing the seeds, and the *luf* can be neutralized by sucking on lemon (it's also possible that sorrel can help). It was, however, quite difficult to discover which plant was meant by *luf*. She never tells us and diligent Internet search yielded little. It may be *Arum palaestinum*, but then again it may not. Anyway, it was jolly interesting.

Amy Goldman: *The Heirloom Tomato. From Garden to Table*: Bloomsbury, 2008, 260 pp., hardback, £25.00.

The bibliography of the heirloom tomato accumulates at a surprising rate. Those of you with long memories will recall our approval of Mark Harvey, Steven Quilley and Huw Beynon's *Exploring the Tomato*. Then there is David Gentlecore's new history noticed on another page, as well as Andrew Smith's account of the tomato in America (and we shouldn't forget Lindsey Bareham's *Big Red Book of Tomatoes*), and now this volume which was recommended to me in the books pages of that estimable journal, *Hortus*. There, Joe Eck chose Amy Goldman's book as 'one of his three favourite books to have been published in the past 25 years.' The book is