

Sandra Sherman: *Fresh from the Past: recipes and revelations from Moll Flanders' kitchen*, with recipes interpreted by Henry and Karen Chotkowski: Taylor Trade Publishing, Lanham, Maryland, 2004: ISBN 158979088X; 387 pp., colour illus., hardback \$28.95, £18.95.

The slightly fevered title masks an excellent book that students of the period (Moll Flanders' period is interpreted pretty loosely) and those interested in dipping their toes in eighteenth-century kitchens would be well advised to read. Sandra Sherman supplies the historical background and discussion; her colleagues get to grips with the recipes. There are photographs of the finished dishes, in polished period dress so to speak. Sandra Sherman was an orthodox English scholar who branched out into cookery books after realizing just how much they had to tell us about the ways of instruction, the place of women as authors and as consumers and the role of food within the larger social organism. She attacked cookery books as if they were another literary form, when too often they had been taken as no more than recipes. Her approach is deepened by reference to wide reading of related texts and by her knowledge of the context as a whole. And the book is enriched by many well-chosen illustrations. The recipes offer first the original text (which may come from a book of 1600 or one of 1800) and then a modern, feasible interpretation. They are as clear as the crystal that ornaments the photographs, as polished as the silverware. The author seems to have more than one constituency in mind, and (that title apart) manages them without too great a conflict of interests: the knowledgeable student will be satisfied, but so too will the tyro be instructed. The price is generous, the production handsome – though brown print on cream pages tires my ageing eyes.

John Thacker: *The Art of Cookery* (1758), facsimile edition, with an introduction by Ivan Day: Southover Press, 2005: ISBN 1870962206: 400pp., hardback, £25.

Attentive readers of the works of Ivan Day – and there will be many among subscribers – will have noticed his previous interest in this book. John Thacker was cook to the Dean and Chapter of Durham, a notably conservative community. Its practices of hospitality and feast-giving survived the Reformation and the recipes deployed in its kitchens had long histories too. Thacker demonstrates these as well as more up-to-date devices learned when he was cook to the Earl of Exeter and the politician George Treby. Thacker supplemented his income by running a cookery school and it was for the benefit of his students that he created this book. The recipes are arranged on a month-by-month basis (there is an index).

The corporate life of the cathedral at Durham was dominated by the requirement that any canon with an income above £40 per annum was bound to keep residence for twenty-one consecutive days in the year and during that time entertain liberally at his table. Thus was preserved the old monastic way of hospitality and open house, and the cook worked hard to supply all these dinners. Thacker's repertoire is sometimes old-fashioned, sometimes new-fangled and French; his book is liberally illustrated with plans of tarts and pies; his recipes are full of otherwise hard-to-find details such as the proper way to roast on a spit and how best to decorate a peacock pie. An important book, therefore; another contribution to eighteenth-century studies, but this time from the provinces; a job worth doing and done well.

Josephine Bacon: *Exotic Fruits and Vegetables A-Z*. UPSO, 2004: ISBN 1843750384: 236 pp., paperback, £11.99. Copies available from the publishers at 5 Stirling Road, Castleham Business Park, St Leonards on Sea TN38 9NW, or via websites at www.josephinebacon.co.uk or www.americanization.com.

From acerola to yard-long bean this handy manual takes the reader through short identifying descriptions (with very attractive drawings by the Lao artist Soun Vannithone) to paradigm recipes. It's just the necessary when exploring the shops and markets of north and south London, or faced with an utter novelty imported by an enterprising supermarket buyer. An essential for the reference shelf in the kitchen.