

Platina, *On Right Pleasure and Good Health: a Critical Edition and Translation of De honesta Voluptate et Valetudine*, by Mary Ella Milham: Tempe AZ, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998: ISBN 0 86698 208 6: xii + 515 pp, 1 b/w illustration, bibliography, three indexes, h/b, \$32.00 / £28.00.

A 'dangerous malcontent' with an 'enormous ego' and a 'fearsome temper', Platina was imprisoned twice and tortured. For someone so deeply involved in papal politics and sensational scandal, the subject of good health through diet and exercise seems 'quite outside his usual interests'. But Platina's famous book is 'no mere cookbook'. Mary Ella Milham worked on this parallel text edition of the first ever printed cookbook for thirty years. This daunting task meant disentangling the complex relations among different manuscripts and printed texts and making sense of obscure vocabulary – especially names for fish and Latinized forms of Italian names for local dishes. Ms Milham's comprehensive introduction shows that the work was composed in 1465, earlier than is usually thought, and she has reconstructed that original Latin manuscript alongside a literal but readable English translation.

Platina was the pseudonym of Bartolomeo Sacchi. About half of his text consists of 240 recipes from a manuscript by Martino de Rossi, but he was also indebted to Pliny's *Natural History*, the *Tacuinum sanitatis*, Galen, Hippocrates, and a long medico-herbal tradition. Selection and arrangement are Sacchi's. So too is the tone: crane meat has 'more indigestible residue than nourishment'; roast suckling pig 'is of poor and little nourishment, digests slowly and harms the stomach, head, eyes, and liver. It makes obstructions, creates stones, and increases phlegm.' It tastes good, however. A pleasing characteristic of Sacchi's tone is that the whole text is sprinkled with genial allusions to friends as the author recalls good times at the table.

The recipes respect natural flavors and recommend relatively short cooking times. For seasoning, the watchwords are 'a sufficient quantity'. With ginger, cinnamon, or saffron, Platina rarely specifies any quantity, but a pot of broth 'tinted yellow' with saffron does not suggest especially lavish quantities of expensive spice. One flavoring that is used liberally and frequently is sugar. Occasional recipes call for sugar and cinnamon sprinkled over an otherwise savory dish, or sauces flavored with raisins as well as prunes, suggesting Arabic influence. Imported ingredients generally do not imply imported methods of preparation, as Platina confidently shows the place in Italian cooking of aniseed, dates, pomegranates, rice, oranges and porcupine – the last, he says, brought from Africa or India. Most recipes are recognizably native to Italy. Many recipes are dominated by substantial quantities of meat, or whole birds in a sauce. There are large numbers of soups and stews, together with a wide range of mostly simple recipes for

cooking fish, also often whole. Purees and porridges are mostly neglected here, but vegetables are prominent, cooked whole or fried as fritters.

Although Platina's book was frequently reprinted and quickly translated into several languages, it never appeared in English until Elizabeth Andrews' underrated 1967 edition for the Mallinckrodt series. Ms Milham's edition is an advance on that earlier landmark, both for the quality of her translation and for her informative introduction. This guide to the preferences of well-heeled 15th century Italians is reasonably priced, sturdy, printed in readable type, and indexed with the classicist rather than the cook in mind.

S.V.

Peter Brears: *Ryedale Recipes*: Hutton-le-Hole and Beverley, Yorkshire: Ryedale Folk Museum and Hutton Press, 1998: ISBN 1 872167 96 9: 80 pp, b/w illustrations and photographs, notes, index of recipes, large format p/b, £5.95.

Another feather in the cap of Yorkshire food historian Peter Brears. Here he has been working in 'close-up mode', fashioning a charming book out of culinary material which all belongs to a small part of Yorkshire. The kitchen equipment of which he provides scores and scores of his beautifully executed drawings (see the example displayed as our frontispiece) is all from the Ryedale Museum (which won the 1995 Museum of the Year Award in Britain), Ryedale being the fertile region centred on the Vale of Pickering with the North York Moors to the north, the Wolds to the south and Howardian Hills to the west. The majority of the items displayed come from within a 10 mile radius of Hutton-le-Hole. The same seems to be true of the recipes collected from local sources for this book, some of them representing farmhouse cookery while others are 'country house food', eg those from Mrs Hartley (fl c 1800) of Middleton Lodge at Middleton Tyas. The recipes have been carefully reworded for use by cooks today, but remain entirely faithful to the originals.

Besides being full of charm and providing an abundance of interesting information, this book is an outstanding bargain at £5.95.

A.E.D.

K. T. Achaya: *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food*: New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998: ISBN 0 19 564254 6: 347 pp, references, indexes, h/b, \$35.00.

As soon as we knew that this is a completely new book, (not to be confused with the same author's *Indian Food – A Historical Companion*, which we reviewed enthusiastically in *PPC* 48), we at *PPC* wrote off for a copy. When the parcel was opened, imagine my delight when I saw on the cover a