A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Szu-Hui’s Yin-shan Cheng-yao
Introduction, translation, commentary, and Chinese text by Paul D. Buell and Eugene N. Anderson, with an appendix by Charles Perry

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If our heroes today are die-hard, muscle-bound Arnold Schwarzeneggers, our modern cultured person is a weedy, undernourished Woody Allen type. In our cushioned age, a meeting of brain and brawn is not essential. But in the Middle Ages, things were different. You had to be both fit and clever. You needed to be able to walk or ride huge distances, to fight for your life on and off the battlefield, and to perform missions impossible on an almost daily basis just to provide for yourself and your family. Being smart meant knowing how to change things to your advantage, being patient when you couldn’t, and wise enough to know the difference. Fail in either department—muscles or grey cells—and you didn’t stand a chance.

A Soup for the Qan offers an extraordinary opportunity to travel back in time to medieval Eurasia and glimpse a little-known people. This is the first full English translation of a remarkable dietary guide and cookery manual, one that was specially designed to keep brain and physique in harmony. Yin-shan Cheng-yao, or Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor’s Food and Drink, was written in China in 1300 by the Imperial dietary physician, Hu Szu-hui. The emperor was the Mongol Qan (Khan). Based on surviving passages of the fourteenth-century original and a later fifteenth-century Ming edition, this English edition includes a 1456 preface that summarizes the moral intention of the book and emphasizes the importance of moderation, hygiene, and a healthy diet. The Emperor is clearly no immortal deity, but a sensitive, vulnerable human being like everyone else, who must pay attention if he is to live as long a life as the Heavens have granted him. The book was presented first to the Empress, who must have approved. On her orders it was engraved on wooden printing blocks and widely disseminated: just as the Emperor would benefit, so should everyone in the Empire—an interesting insight in itself into the court of fourteenth-century Mongolian China.

The Yin-shan Cheng-yao was written when Mongolian power and cultural influence were at their peak, but the State’s attitude to its subjects was both liberal and cosmopolitan. The rise of the Mongols in Central Asia had begun less than a century earlier when, in 1206, Temüjin emerged victorious from a bloody power struggle among warring Mongolian tribes and declared himself Cinggiz-Qan, the greatly feared Genghis Khan, as we know him, or Universal Qan. By the following year he was ruling over a domain roughly corresponding to today’s Inner Mongolia. Seven years later, he had captured the capital of China. On his death in 1229, his heir succeeded to an empire which at its peak, between 1251 and 1259, would include not only Mongolia and Siberia, but nearly the whole of modern
Russia, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, northern India, Tibet, China, and even parts of Vietnam. International trade flourished. The *Yin-shan Cheng-yao* reflects an attempt to represent this new Mongolian world order in a tangible, indeed edible, form. It is the cuisine of a world empire embracing many different cultures: Mongolian, Turkic, Arabic, and Chinese. The author himself seems to have been of bilingual Chinese-Turkic origin. When the descendants of Cinggiz turned against each other, the empire crumbled as rapidly as it had grown. But the dream of its founders persisted—a belief in a universal culture, whose traces can still be seen seven centuries later in national cuisines throughout the former domains of this vast empire.

The Mongolian conquerors were open-minded in their eating habits, ever willing to try new tastes. But they never lost sight of their own approach to nutrition: eating to live, rather than living to eat. The cuisine in this book is simple yet sophisticated. Many of the recipes in the first chapter are familiar today, all the more so when you read the informative and highly engaging footnotes provided by Buell, Anderson, and Perry. These indicate deep and extensive research, experiments, and field work, not only in libraries but also in kitchens all over the region, from the monasteries of Tibet and the tents of remote nomadic tribes in arid Siberia, to the bourgeois townhouses of the Levant and the Bosphorus. Born and brought up in Turkey, I am struck by the similarities in methods of cooking then and now.

The tastes are instantly recognizable; even the names of dishes have traveled the seven hundred years virtually unaltered. True, there are unfamiliar items, such as bear and wolf meat and marmot (the latter is still eaten in Mongolia today). But the main source of protein is mutton or game; organ meats, richer in vitamins and elements than muscle meat, feature prominently.

Soups, as the title suggests, play an essential role. In the countryside in Turkey the word for soup is still used to refer to a meal (as are the related French *souper* and English *supper*). As today, meat is boiled in water to obtain a hearty stock. This is enriched with homemade vermicelli or noodles, which come in every shape and form, and added to it are meat, in the form of morsels or chunks, previously fried minced meat or small meatballs, and additional seasonings. Chickpea flour or rice is used for thickening. Soups are named either after the main ingredient, as in turtle or vegetable soup, or after the kind of vermicelli or noodle used. Less liquefied soups are prepared from trotters or heads, often mixed with other organ meat and simmered to release the gelatin from the bones, giving consistency to the broth.

Porridges, or congees, are listed as quick, filling meals and possibly as a restorative for convalescents. A snack called *Näwälä* (nevale in Turkish means “provision”) is a very modern-sounding sandwich, probably ideal for campaigns, expeditions, and journeys. It calls for hard-boiled eggs and strips of dried meat mixed with fresh vegetables (or salad leaves), eaten rolled up in bread.

Wild goose, duck, cormorant, and willow-smoked lamb (roasted in a pit covered with willow branches) require a festive or wartime campfire. Dishes to enjoy in peacetime include stews of chicken, quail, rabbit, and lights (lung), fritters of sliced sausage dipped in batter and fried crisp, fish patties, and fried meatballs made of minced meat and spices. Similar meatballs or patties turn up in every culture from Finland to Mexico and are undoubtedly the grandmother of the hamburger.

Horn- and flower-shaped pastry colored yellow, sheets of filo pastry (*yuška*) and blanched pastry sheets (called in Turkey *su böregi*) are stuffed with meat fillings, spices,
and nuts to create countless dumplings, savory pies, and böreks. Lastly come breads and various buns, including poppy-seed buns.

The second chapter deals with medicine, listing savory and sweet beverages, pastilles, syrups and preserves prepared with sugar, quince, citron, hazelnuts, peaches, cherries, and rose hips, and tisanes of herbs, some of them drunk with milk, some without. Chapter 11 classifies the ingredients according to their medicinal properties, a kind of precautionary vade mecum.

The cooking fat used is the rendered fat of the fat-tail sheep. The diet is protein-based and rich—understandable given the climate and the athletic way of life. The absence of salads and side dishes can be explained by the fact that this book is a manual for preparing dishes and not a series of menus. The vegetables, fruits, herbs, and nuts mentioned in the last chapter were most probably consumed in large quantities fresh and unprocessed, as were yogurt, cheese, and pickled fruit and vegetables. Desserts are absent: sugar is considered debilitating, and fruit preserves are confined to the chapter on medicine, possibly as aids to recovery. What was wrong, after all, with ripe, fresh fruit to finish a meal?

This cookery manual bears striking similarities to modern cookery books: there are frequent references to “stirring over a low heat” and “finely slicing”; ingredients are listed with specific quantities; there is an insistence on a moderate use of spices to highlight, rather than mask, the flavor; hearty, nutritionally balanced stews are to be mopped up with bread; and pepper, onion, ginger, and vinegar are as commonly used as they are today.

But unlike modern Western cookbooks, this book classifies ingredients according to their “humoral essences” as hot or cool, dry or wet. This idea is best expressed in the tenth-century neo-Platonic writings of the philosopher and physician Ibn Sina (Avicenna): failure to maintain a balance of the humors within ourselves is the cause of ill health. There is an instinctive wisdom at the heart of Yin-shan Cheng-yao. The leitmotiv is harmony with nature. Meals should be frequent and light; putrid, badly-cooked, or unseasonal food should be avoided. One should accommodate oneself to the four seasons and not be “foolish in rising and resting.” Dissipation should be avoided in every aspect of the lives of the Qan and his subjects.

A Soup for the Qan includes a facsimile of the Chinese text and the original Chinese woodcut illustrations. Paul D. Buell’s and Eugene N. Anderson’s historical introduction and commentary, along with Charles Perry’s superb appendix, brilliantly illuminate this remarkably accessible product of a time and place that seem almost unimaginably remote.

This was an age inhabited by real-life supermen, who wielded unparalleled power. But these almost mythical lords, larger-than-life figures who inspired European notions of chivalry, were actually human, with a modest and sensible diet. A Soup for the Qan is a book of exceptional worth and a heroic undertaking that throws new light on a controversial subject.

—Berrin Torolsan, Publisher, *Cornucopia Magazine*

**God’s Banquet: Food in Classical Arabic Literature**

Geert Jan van Gelder


186 pp. $35.00 (cloth)

More cookbooks from before the fourteenth century have survived in Arabic than in all other languages combined, and Arab aristocrats of the eighth through the tenth centuries made a cult of gastronomy. Food is a rich subject in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in classical Arab literature; and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text. He discusses the harsh world of the sixth-century Bedouin, with its celebration of generosity combined with personal abstemiousness; the gourmets of the Abbasid dynasty; the functions of food in Arabic literature, and while God’s Banquet by no means exhausts it, van Gelder covers the field admirably in 125 short pages of text.
they will bear. He observes that qaṣīda, the name of the classical Arabic ode, may be related to qaṣīd, a word for dried meat; if true, this is about as significant as the fact that the English verb “to dial” comes, by way of about five semantic shifts, from the Latin word for day. When an etymology surprises, ipso facto it is scarcely relevant to the familiar use of a word.

This book will also be valuable to the general reader with an interest in food, though at times there is rather more literature than food. In fact, if the book has a serious flaw, it is that most of the dishes van Gelder mentions are left undescribed. True, in their literary context they may, as in the breathless catalogue of dishes from Al-Azdi’s A Day in the Life of Abu al-Qasim quoted on p.76, be intended basically to overwhelm, like the catalogues in Rabelais. But to Al-Azdi’s contemporaries, these were not merely names in a list, and a little more detail would have been welcome, particularly in the case of the dishes that show up over and over, such as qaṭā‘if (crepes, usually folded around a nut filling and fried), kunāfa (depending on the period, a crepe or the modern pastry that resembles fried vermicelli), and harīsa (meat stewed with grain; the porridge would be beaten to a smooth paste before serving). It would also help the reader to know that dishes whose names end in -iyya are nearly always meat stewed with various ingredients.

To give a particular instance, ‘āṣida, khabīs, and fālūdha, the three main moist sweets, are commonly mentioned together, and the reader could conclude that khabīs and fālūdha, at least, are more or less the same. But ‘āṣida was a coarse Arabian dish of barley and dates, fālūdha an aristocratic Persian sweet thickened with cornstarch, and khabīs a pudding thickened with flour or bread crumbs, which the Arabs learned from the Aramaic-speaking peasants of Iraq. In our terms, this spectrum would run from oatmeal to the sixteenth-century Moorish cookbook known as the Manuscroto. Anónimo, they are an egg-enriched bread dough, tinted with saffron, woven into braids and fried. Ḥāshw al-lauzīnaj, the term for a gem of expression found in a less interesting context, means “the stuffing of the lauzīnaj,” not “the almond-stuffed lozenge” (p.124); lauzīnaj usually took the form of a cylinder of marzipan rolled up in a paper-thin crepe.

A few mistakes are evidently due to the translations the author relies on; e.g., on p.56, “Can fresh dates (rutaḥ) be bought for sermons (khutāb)? Or dried dates (balḥ) for pleasantries (mulḥ)?” Actually, balḥ are unripe dates and rutaḥ are best described as semi-dried, ripe but still somewhat moist. Since rutaḥ is acknowledged to be the most luscious stage of the date, you could read more into the Arab evaluation of sermons vs. pleasantries than exists (of course, the words were really chosen merely because they rhyme). Muri (also spelled mury in this book) was not “pickling brine” but a salty sauce made by rotting barley. It tastes like soy sauce and might as well be translated as such.

But these are trivial errors. This book will serve as an excellent introduction to the subject and deserves a popular readership as well.

—Charles Perry, The Los Angeles Times

A History of Cooks and Cooking
Michael Symons
Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000
xii + 388 pages. $35.00 (cloth)
(previously published as The Pudding That Took a Thousand Cooks: The Story of Cooking in Civilisation and Daily Life, Penguin Australia, 1998.)

Michael Symons, scholar and restaurateur, has produced a stylistically readable, if capriciously organized, contribution to the burgeoning field of culinary history. This ambitious book, like many currently available, is about the culture of food, its preparation, its economy, its chronological evolution. Every page offers appetizing details, apposite examples, etymologies, and pithy quotations, many doubtless familiar to the scholar but revelatory to the foodie ready to graduate from cookbooks to gastronomy (as Brillat-Savarin and Dumas defined it): that is, talking and knowing about food as well as consuming it. Or, for that matter, as Gertrude Stein defined it: "talking about talking about food."

The author’s good intentions often get the worst of him. His stated claim is to have written “the first book devoted to the essential duties and historical place of cooks” “the world’s first book on the world’s most important people.” And his preface is filled with an excess of self-congratulation.
Every Ph.D. aspires to convert what might seem the aridity of a dissertation into a wellspring of flowing prose narrative. Symons resorts to a vexatious lyrical flight: an angel descends (shades of Rilke and Wim Wenders!) into the kitchen of Sydney culinary artist Chef Philip Searle, who “guts, slashes, bubbles, frizzles, moulds, coats and displays” (p.4). The angels (and the chef) reappear in the final chapter. I learned more about the technique of “chefing” from Ang Lee’s film Eat, Drink, Man, Woman.

When the author leaves the comfortable terrain of secondary sourcing for the anecdotal and personalized (large portions of the chapter “The Sons of Mama Camous” [pp.319–320] and the attempt to appropriate Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” [pp.323–325]), he makes this reader distinctly uncomfortable at his self-conscious search for an oasis of literariness amid the stretches of expository prose. There is some synthesizing conceptualization running through Part Two of the volume, though Symons’s concepts of “a dialectic of complements (p.198) and “dialectical differentiation (p.202) strike one as supererogatory. He shows the development of food storage (p.262), of systems of distribution and exchange (pp.252–53), of sharing as a collective chain of being making cooking possible (from road building, millers, seed merchants, etc.). But this is very late in the book (pp.185 ff.), long after the reader has been befuddled (if bedazzled) by the dizzying compilation of topics and quotations that make of Part One (“What Do Cooks Do?”) a veritable potpourri.

That said, Symons’s scholarly integrity is clearly unimpeachable. The fifteen-page bibliography will provide many a reader with a plethora of “further reading.” The author is rigorously scrupulous in acknowledging his sources, to the degree that much of this most informative and impressively learned volume consists of quotations spliced together and paraphrases excerpted from listed works written by more specialized culinary historians, sociologists, and anthropologists.

Each chapter is subdivided into a series of titled sections. This book might have a greater utility for the likes of me were it to have been alphabetized in the tradition of the French Enlightenment Encyclopédie under such topical entries as Caveman Cooking, Roman Cooking, Urban Cooking, etc. Instead, in attempting to enact a narrative, the author returns again and again in a rondo perpetuum of quotations to the pillars of changing attitudes about cookery: in chronological order, Plato (twenty-three references throughout the book from Symposium and The Republic), Grimod de la Reynière (eighteen from Manuel des Amphitryons and MacDonogh’s collection from Almanach des Gourmands), Brillat-Savarin (twenty-five from Physiology of Taste), Mrs. Beeton (twenty-nine from the legendary Book of Household Management).

As one says in viewing a candidate’s résumé, these are impeccable references, but their omnipresence indicates that the author’s claim to have written “the first book devoted to the essential duties and historical place of cooks” is hyperbole. Nor is use made of such indispensable views for rigorous and scientific information on cooking as chemical process, and for anthropological conceptualization to Levi-Strauss’s The Raw and the Cooked, impenetrable and jargon-ridden though it often be.

Dare I say that this author’s reach is wider than his grasp? He resorts too frequently to argument by analogy to stretch quotes are worthwhile, well chosen, convincing, and enriching. But together, they all converge on yet another History or Anthropology of Food to join those of Farb & Armelagos (1980), Barbara Ketcham Wheaton (1983), Reay Tannahill (1988), and Maguillone Toussaint-Samat (1992). Symons has done more secondary research and is more erudite than they, but he wears his learning heavily.

As to what actually happens when cooks get cooking, the chapter “An Empire of Smoke” gives a good and chatty overview. I would, however, defer to Harold McGee’s On Food and Cooking (1986) and The Curious Cook (1990c) for rigorous and scientific information on cooking as chemical process, and for anthropological conceptualization to Levi-Strauss’s The Raw and the Cooked, impenetrable and jargon-ridden though it often be.

Every page offers appetizing details, apposite examples, etymologies, and pithy quotations, many doubtless familiar to the scholar but revelatory to the foodie ready to graduate from cookbooks to gastronomy.
his thesis that the cook is at the epicenter of civilization, despite Plato’s pre-Cromwellian caveats. For example, in discussing Roman banquets: “As a little boy at a magnificent parade, I expose the emperor as a kind of over-arching cook, whose assistants are numerous and household is estate-wide, even imperial… As landowner, tax-collector, trader, defender, law-maker, social worker, patron of the arts, and factory chief, the ruler was a courtly cook who expanded the acquisition of food, its distribution and maintenance to a higher level” (p.267).

In an early chapter, “Distributing Goodness,” Symons treats “Babette’s Feast,” Isak Dinesen’s 1958 story (and Axel’s beloved 1987 film). Here he simply gives a plot summary, applicable to the film as well, totally neglecting the basic religious conflict on matters culinary between austere Protestant Puritanism and the more generous French Catholic view embodied by Babette herself. Then, in a later subsection, “Cooks as Pleasure Providers,” the author takes up the theological implications of the first deadly sin, gluttony—hastily, as is his wont. Too hastily, I would say, in the light of Jean-Robert Pitte’s thoroughly documented and persuasive discussion of the Catholic Church’s tepid off-again, on-again condemnation of the pleasures of the gola (in Gastronomie française: Histoire d’une passion [Paris, 1989]—soon to be available in English).

There is no doubt whatsoever that food—sacramental, sacrificial, or taboo—is at the core of most religions. Is it helpful in history to think of “the temple as a kitchen… Consider the priests as elevated cooks, feeding an extended household” (p.244)? Why not therefore consider cooks as elevated priests (from my own and Symons’s perspectives anyway)? Then those angels might really put in an appearance on the six-burner altar.

—Albert Sonnenfeld, University of Southern California

**The Primal Feast: Food, Sex, Foraging, and Love**

Susan Allport


272 pp. $23.00 (cloth)

This well-written book explores the complex relationship between the production and consumption of food, the evolution of Homo sapiens, and the differences between women and men. It is an enjoyable read because Allport lets us participate in her adventures in the Canadian Arctic, in academic circles, and in her own garden. The reader comes to know her kitchen, her children, and her husband. Furthermore, Allport’s curiosity is nimble and infinite. As a work directed toward the general public, the book does an admirable job of communicating a number of areas of current scholarly research, and the author’s arguments follow pathways of good common sense and intelligence. But because Allport also straddles the world of academia, her presuppositions too often remain unsatisfying.

Allport argues against many of the simplistic formulations about what makes us human and distinctive with respect to our closest primate relatives, both alive and extinct. Instead, she constructs an interesting and complex argument about what makes humans unique. Like other primates, humans historically hunted and gathered food in groups. Also like primates, we share both vegetable and animal foods as a means of creating and cementing social bonds. Allport argues, however, that humans are characterized by a far more generalized and regularized exchange of vegetable and animal foods between the genders, which has two extremely important consequences. First, human social arrangements for reproducing and raising our young are far more stable than any such arrangements among other primates (we call this arrangement marriage). Second, the sexual division of labor between men and women is inescapable and ubiquitous in our species, and this is the underlying basis for gender inequalities among humans. Even the exceptions to this rule, Allport writes, simply prove it all the more.

This formulation is based upon two ways of thinking about and analyzing primate and human evolution and behavior, one of which Allport elaborates quite clearly; the other she is considerably more cagey about. Allport acknowledges that “optimal foraging theory” has exercised a tremendous influence upon her ideas and theories, which is not surprising, since optimal foraging theory has made quite a splash in the fields of both biology and anthropology. According to this theory, the value of a food must be sufficient to make its pursuit, capture, and consumption worthwhile. If that value—calculated in carbohydrates, protein, and fat—is high, the food will be preferred by the animal in question. If not, it will be eaten only when preferred foods are unavailable. For any animal species, food-getting behaviors are determined not only by hunger and nutritional needs, but by the behaviors of other animals that prey upon the ones under consideration. Therefore, food-getting strategies are selected not out of an unlimited set of possible strategies, but from a much narrower range of possibilities.

Optimal foraging theory offers much insight into animal behavior, though its applicability to humans remains
Much of Allport’s book is, therefore, a series of extended rambles in which she discusses and argues the case for sophisticated versions of optimal foraging theory as a way to explain the gendered behaviors of human beings, both with respect to food and in comparison to other primates. Though her discussions and arguments—with scientists of various stripes, with her husband and children, and with herself—are always interesting, they are often inconclusive. Even more troublesome is the second set of ideas she uses to think about and analyze her data. Throughout the book, Allport repeatedly treads down a slippery slope that she acknowledges but seemingly can’t keep away from. That is, she makes plain that observation and analysis of chimpanzees and baboons does not necessarily tell us much about the precursor hominin species that evolved into Homo sapiens. Yet she nevertheless persists in using data about these other primates to make arguments about human evolution. The consequence of these analogies and comparisons is invariably a set of deeply-flawed generalizations about hunting and gathering for both contemporary and historical foraging peoples.

I admit that I am possibly more sensitive to such concerns than other anthropologists, since I work with contemporary California Indians whose ancestors’ foraging ways profoundly contradict the usual characterizations of foraging peoples. Allport indeed notes that the settled, materially wealthy, socially stratified societies of ancient (and not so ancient) California Indians pose difficult issues. But she is on shaky ground precisely because the extraordinarily rich natural environment of pre-contact California was home to a vast array of different types of cultures, whose members in fact pursued food, consumed food, and constructed gender relations in astonishingly diverse ways. Since I assume that foragers of many thousands of years ago—before there was any agriculture—always did their best to land themselves in the most biotically rich habitats they could find, the foragers of habitats that we do know something about (such as those of pre-contact California) might tell us more about early humans than those foragers relegated to marginal habitats (such as the poles, deserts, and rain forests) do.

Much less revealing, then, is data about modern chimps and baboons as a means of understanding the history of human foraging. Allport does not find her way very well here. She is more successful in her discussion of how very inferior the standard of living was that agriculture offered humans, in comparison to the foragers’ ways of life. I deeply appreciate the fact that she wonders out loud why the transition to agriculture ever occurred, thereby challenging the received wisdom of every seventh-grade social studies teacher in the United States, who year after year admonishes students about the glories of the Agricultural Revolution.

Whatever its analytical flaws, Allport’s book offers many ideas that readers will find provocative and fun to consider. She discloses aspects of the human need for fat and carbohydrates, and, importantly, points out the significant dangers of high-protein, lean-meat diets. Best of all, her treatment of the nature of omnivorous eating among humans is highly entertaining and illuminating. She discusses how being omnivores led humans to cook, and how our diets are related to cravings as well as to our predilection for altering consciousness through the consumption of plants containing semi-toxic secondary compounds. Allport’s discussion of cross-cultural eating and gender will likely prove controversial, but she raises important issues. I suppose it is inevitable that to make such arguments Allport could not avoid straddling popular and academic audiences, and in the end I think she ought to be forgiven for it.

—Les Field, The University of New Mexico

No Foreign Food: The American Diet in Time and Place
Richard Pillsbury
x + 262 pp. Illustrations. $29.50 (paper)

“[American] foodways are so strikingly different from those of any other culture in the world that everyone but us knows what they are,” begins Richard Pillsbury in his latest book on American foodways. Pillsbury, a geographer by training and author of From Boarding House to Bistro: The American Restaurant Then and Now (London: Unwin and Hyman, 1995), explores national and regional foodways to “look at a single element of daily life, food, and use it to obtain some insight into the changing character of our society” (pp.2, 5). Pillsbury boldly asserts up front that “there is no foreign food,” by which he means that even though “the entire American diet is imported”—which it is not and which he himself recognizes later on—“after a very short acculturation period little of it is foreign. The ability of our culture to assimilate new concepts from other places is astounding and has played an important role in its evolution” (p.5). It is this premise that Pillsbury uses to frame the rest of the book, a historical and geographical exploration, interspersed with personal anecdotes and occasional recipes, of the ways in which American foods and food habits have evolved throughout the nation’s history.
Most of the chapters explore the historical evolution of American foodways. Pillsbury uses food in the original thirteen colonies (primarily the Northeast) as his baseline, calling it the “traditional American diet,” and then proceeds roughly chronologically to examine how food changes through advances in transportation and technology; immigration; industrialization, advertising, and distribution; cookbooks and magazines; and the evolution of restaurants and fast foods. He finishes by sketching out the contemporary American diet. While he performs a yeoman’s job of examining these phenomena, little of the history is new—Susan Strasser, Harvey Levenstein, and Richard O. Cummings, among others, have previously trodden such paths. Moreover, a book whose scope is the entire history of American food is bound to miss some important writers (what, no Betty Fussell? no Warren Belasco?). Pillsbury does, however, contribute new and compelling photos, charts, graphs, and statistics that nicely illustrate his assertions.

I am purposely accelerating this discussion to get to the last part of the book, which is especially fresh and useful. In the final chapter, Pillsbury, rolling up his geographer’s sleeves, gets down to the business of addressing whether “cuisine regions”—distinctive foodways by geography—still exist in this post-modern age of globalization. Arguing that while “[t]he national cuisine and distinctive regional cuisines of the past may have disappeared… they have not been replaced by homogeneity” (p.239), Pillsbury skillfully weaves demographics, geography, economics, immigration patterns, and modern trends in tourism to develop a multifaceted model of cuisine regions.

According to Pillsbury, each region (and there is still some semblance of regional cuisine) is made up of elements of the “traditional,” “historical,” and “national.” While “traditional” (pre-industrial) foods remain at the base of all regions, interwoven are the foodways of “historic transition zones,” by which he means the influences of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigration in numbers sufficient to alter the status quo. These zones, such as much of the Rust Belt, have retained some distinction because they have been largely passed over by the recent economic expansion. Important, too, are “national interaction zones”: formerly non-urban areas that have seen massive growth since World War II, such as California, parts of Florida, and the Carolina coastline. These new foodways zones, Pillsbury asserts, have “little or no regional, ethnic, or historical identification with the areas that surround them” (p.214). If this all sounds messy and confusing, that’s because it is, although Pillsbury’s description and accompanying maps provide clarity. These cuisine and culture regions, argues Pillsbury, are not necessarily continuously geographically based, but can be discontinuous enclaves, appearing independently, for example, in each of the nation’s growth cities. Such groups as the Vietnamese, who have settled in just this manner, are creating distinct food regions similar to the old traditional American foodways regions.

Pillsbury’s history and mapping of American foodways does have its weaknesses, though. Little is said about nutrition or about the politics of food, including connections among agriculture, business, and government that have profoundly shaped policy, health, and food availability. Further, while Pillsbury frequently hails technology and transportation for allowing the “widespread availability of foods,” absent is any discussion of their consequences on the environment, on locally grown products, on health, or on the livelihood and culture of indigenous peoples. There is evidence of loose editing (a few typos; a map anachronistically outlining all fifty states to identify American colonial foodways regions; one scholar, Dan Arreola, mentioned in the text is not cited fully in the bibliography). And though it is hardly a serious flaw, I cringed as Pillsbury related the Earl of Sandwich thing: that some obscure British noble actually was the first person to put meat between two pieces of bread and “invent” the sandwich, when common sense dictates that the average person (probably in a variety of countries, not just the British Empire) figured out long ago that carrying meat between slices of bread works pretty well. Further, if the sandwich were invented by one person at that moment, it was most likely the Earl of Sandwich’s unnamed plebian cook. I also found the dearth of footnotes lamentable and frustrating, the end result of which ultimately places the credibility of Pillsbury’s hard work into jeopardy. While I realize this trend is becoming increasingly common, even among academic presses, I find it extremely troubling.

Finally, any book that examines cuisine and foodways has to bump up against the issue of authenticity, a fraught term that food scholars love to debate endlessly. What is “authentic” cuisine, given that before Columbus there were no chiles in Asia, peanuts or cassava in Africa, or potatoes and tomatoes in Europe? Since cuisines are never static, but always evolving, how can we reconcile this absence of stasis and therefore slippery definition of “authentic” with the fact that most people have very real, distinct ideas about authenticity that do in fact have some shorter-term cultural and historical bases? Pillsbury occasionally applies the idea of authenticity but skirts around the complexity. A dinner in southern Louisiana is “authentic” because “it represented the past of those who prepared it; the food was authentic...
because it was based on recipes handed down through generations, not learned from a book” (p.235), yet elsewhere, Marion Cunningham’s recipe for gumbo today is “more authentic than the real thing ever was” without adequate explication (p.132).

In fact, in light of these complicated notions of authenticity I would even take issue with Pillsbury’s central assertion that there is no foreign food in the United States. Sure, this is a nation that absorbs and transforms food into something other than its “original” immigrant form (one thinks of Southwestern food in particular), but in reality there is a multitude of “foreign” foods out there for all of us, whether five-star restaurant quality or fast-food fare, “ethnic” or not—it is often a matter of perspective. Instead of Pillsbury’s classification of restaurant food into either “body food” (McDonald’s) or “soul food” (Le Cirque) (the difference being that in the latter, aesthetics takes precedence over substance), I much prefer Lucy Long’s concept of “culinary tourism,” where all food can be manipulated in various ways to be made more familiar or exotic, palatable or unpalatable, edible or inedible; how a food is defined depends on the individual. Still, Richard Pillsbury has done us a great service by updating our understanding of American regional cuisine.

—Amy Bentley, New York University

NOTE


Corn in Clay: Maize Paleoethnobotany in Pre-Columbian Art
Mary W. Eubanks
249 pp. Illustrations. $49.95 (cloth)

Archaeology is an interdisciplinary science, and the research reported in this book combines the fields of archaeology, botany, geography, and art. There are many points of view on what the most significant food in our diet is, but few can dispute the importance of corn. Corn in Clay offers an interesting look across disciplines at the Pre-Columbian evidence for corn, or maize (or, even more properly, Zea mays). Eubanks, who is in the Botany Department at Duke University, dedicates this book to the memory of Paul C. Mangelsdorf. Mangelsdorf devoted his life to unraveling the mystery around maize. He identified its ancestors, how it changed through time, and the people who made it all happen. To read Mangelsdorf’s Corn: Its Origin, Evolution and Improvement (Cambridge, MA, 1974) is to go to the source. You could call his book the corn bible. A testament to its importance is the fact that it is still readily available.

Eubanks’s premise for Corn in Clay is the rather amazing fact that certain Pre-Columbian ceramic vessels not only depicted maize, they were made from molds of actual ears of corn. Her ambitious project, to which she has dedicated herself since 1974, is an inspiring and exciting undertaking, which combines geographic evidence, botanical identification, and analyses of artistic attributes. Eubanks has tracked down and analyzed virtually every Pre-Columbian vessel in the world that utilized a realistic mold technique to duplicate maize, enabling us to look across time at the forms of the ancestors of corn. Her book is a page-turner, providing cultural context, identifying the various races of maize, and discussing the artistic attributes of these vessels. The vessels usually depict a deity surrounded by and partially composed of maize. These are the ancestors of today’s corn, preserved in an artistic and unique manner.

Corn in Clay consists mainly of detailed descriptions of these vessels. It is therefore extraordinarily disappointing that the image quality is so bad that in most cases it is impossible to see the details being discussed. The poor reproductions apply not to one or two, but to the majority of the 135 photographs of the ceramic vessels. Some of these photographs are probably old and were taken under difficult conditions, but they could certainly have been reproduced with a higher contrast, or even as line drawings, which would have made it possible to correlate the attribute discussion with the images. The images in Mangelsdorf’s chapter on “Corn in Prehistoric Art” (pp.187–199) are of much better quality.

Eubanks’s analyses are clearly laid out, but due to the poor quality of the images, they must be taken on faith. This detracts from the book’s value to anthropologists, and particularly to enthusiasts who may find that the image quality minimizes the significance of these extraordinary vessels in illuminating pre-Columbian agriculture and beliefs. Despite this shortcoming, the overviews of the Moche (Chapter Two) and Zapotec (Chapter Three) cultures are good. The ceramic evidence discussed supports the distribution of the races of maize, and the author has taken care to define terms, temporal periods, and cultural groups.

Eubanks’s thesis and area of investigation—the cultural context and importance of corn—can make a substantial contribution to the fields of archaeology and art history. For example, one type of vessel has smaller ears of maize with human-like faces flanking the central anthropomorphic figure (pp.52–61). This figure, which has fangs, represents
the deity Ai-apaec, who in the Moche culture is the creator. The companions to Ai-apaec have corn bodies, human-like faces, and pointed heads. Eubanks hypothesizes that these figures depict *Tripsacum*, a wild grass related to maize that produces little companion ears on the same stalk as the main ear (p. 53). Her book opens the door to an exploration of this area, but much of the story remains to be told.

—Daphne Derven, *Copia: The American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts*

### Bookends

**The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power**

Carole M. Counihan  
New York and London: Routledge, 1999  
256 pp. $19.99 (paper)

*The Anthropology of Food and Body* offers a bountiful, textured collection of essays, some previously published, some part of the author’s ongoing work, some written expressly for this volume. Counihan aims for two overlapping audiences: academics and culinary professionals. For the former, she provides numerous citations to an extensive scholarly literature. For the latter, she writes in prose that is lucid and reasonably clear of jargon. Her purpose is to analyze how foodways (“the beliefs and behavior surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food” [p. 2]) either victimize or empower women, and more largely, how they “reinforce or challenge social and economic inequality in family and society” (p. 3). She worries these concerns from a variety of angles, with chapters on bread production in Italy, Florentine cooking and eating habits, American eating compulsions, the food diaries of her students, food fantasies of toddlers, and pregnancy and eating.

Though some of her writing is dated, particularly two largely unrevised chapters reviewing books published fifteen years ago, Counihan is invariably interesting. She intersperses reflections, academic analysis, and anthropological findings in a thoughtful consideration of the complex interaction among food customs, social customs, the market, the family, and men and women. She brilliantly supports her contention that “foodways constitute an organized system, a language that...conveys meaning and contributes to the organization of the natural and social world” (p. 19). Compellingly, she includes extended quotations from field interviews with her research subjects in America and Italy.

These passages, manifesting all the messiness of lived lives, query and correct some of her formulations, which tend to drift into unexamined nostalgia (for a time when women stayed at home producing food for their families) and into oversimplified contrasts between the bad foodways of Americans (whose preoccupation with female thinness stems from consumerism, individualism, and inequality) and the good ones of Italians (who celebrate food as social interchange, female plumpness, and parity with men at meals that is “carried over into other spheres as well” [p. 188]). The villains in this book-length juxtaposition are patriarchy and corporate power. Surprisingly, in a book as intelligently argued as this one, women are the sole victims of both of these forces—despite the reference in the book’s title to “gender.” Men, when not altogether invisible, are often presented monolithically as oppressors. The reality, both at the table and away from it, is more complex.

—Margaret Lael Mikesell, John Jay College, CUNY

**The Accomplisht Cook, or The Art and Mystery of Cooking**

Robert May  
Totnes, Devon: Prospect Books, 2000  
540 pp. £20 (paper)

Robert May was a professional chef, and the son of a professional chef, and by the time his cookery book was first published, in 1660, he was more than seventy years old. That *The Accomplisht Cook* appeared the year Charles II was restored to the Crown was no coincidence; England was in no mood to embrace the thousand-plus recipes of a Catholic and Royalist chef during the dozen years of the Civil War and the Protectorate, no matter how fine the cooking or muscular the prose.

The cooking is fine indeed. In Robert May’s sixty-plus-year career, he served several noble families as chef, and his book ranks as one of the greatest cookery books in the English language. Its scope, organization, and comprehensiveness mark it as a first, according to the scholar Alan Davidson, who wrote the forward and provided a useful glossary of terms included in this facsimile edition.

Read it and hunger. May offers recipes for small fowl we can only dream of: ruffes, brewes, godwits, knots, dotterels, strenits, pewits, gravelens, red-flanks.

Half-roast any of these fowls, and stick on one side a few cloves as they roast, save the gravy, and being half-roasted, put them in a pipkin, with the gravy, some claret wine, as much strong pepper as will cover
them, some broild house-hold bread strained, also mace, cloves, pepper, ginger, some fried onions and salt; stew all well together, and serve them on fine carved sippets; sometimes for a change add capers and samphire. (p. 72)

I’m going to give it a try with a couple of plump Cornish game hens, although I’ll probably forgo the samphire, an “umbelliferous plant … of sea-cliffs and coasts, whose fleshy leaves are used in pickles,” according to the New Series Oxford English Dictionary.

Elizabeth David was quite fond of Robert May’s cookery book. May was apprenticed to a chef in Paris by the time he was fourteen; as a result he gives many French-influenced recipes. In her English Bread and Yeast Cookery, David pares down a recipe of May’s for French bread, and I had to try it. Her adaptation calls for 3 cups of unbleached flour, ⅓ cup of whole wheat, a teaspoon of dry yeast, 2 egg whites, 1 ¼ to 1 ½ cups of milk and water mixed, and 2 teaspoons of salt. I made two small round loaves. They were delicious, and I will make them again.

But even if one doesn’t want to take to the kitchen with a seventeenth-century cookbook, the prose itself of The Accomplisht Cook is a pleasure. Precise action in the kitchen brings results, and May muscles sentences in a similar way: Break that deer, leach that brawn, rear that goose, lift that swan, sauce that capon, spoil that hen… unbrace that mallard, unlace that cooney….

Prospect Books, in 1994, served forth a hardbound facsimile edition of The Accomplisht Cook, its first reprinting in more than three hundred years, with a useful introduction by Marcus Bell and Tom Jaine. This paperbound edition makes it all the better.

—Paula Panich, Editor, Dirt: A Garden Journal from the Connecticut River Valley

Ethnic Culinary Herbs: A Guide to Identification and Cultivation in Hawaii
George W. Staples and Michael S. Kristiansen
Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999
122 pp. Line drawings; color plates. $29.95 (cloth)

This well-organized, well-researched text, which discusses thirty herbs grown, sold, and used in Hawaii, will be of interest to herb fanciers, gardeners, botanists and chefs—in that order. The authors, a botanist and a horticulturist, have written a readable reference book particularly suited to the herb grower. Even the amateur gardener will find the directions on propagating, planting, and caring for these thirty herbs easily understandable. Readers will appreciate the inclusion of excellent line drawings and color photographs, which make it easy to identify the ethnic herbs. Searching for herbs will be more difficult, however, as the plants are listed by their botanical names. Locating the herb of choice often necessitates using the index, where common names are listed alphabetically. The food and culture enthusiast may also be misled by the section headings entitled “Cultural Practices,” which refer to advice on growing the herbs. To the botanist this term is common knowledge, but it may confuse some lay readers.

Each herb discussion includes a paragraph entitled “Use.” These sections are likely to be of great interest to the Gastronomica reader. Here is the passage from the entry on Tamarindus indica Linnaeus, commonly known as tamarind:

USE: Many parts are edible. The flowers, leaves, and young fruits are cooked as vegetables; the ripe fruits are cracked for the sweetish pulp, used in curries, sauces, syrups, chutney, drinks, ice cream, jellies, and preserves. Mixed with ice it makes a refreshing beverage in Latin America. The tart pulp is integral to many kinds of curry paste in India, Thailand, and Indonesia and is also used in sour soups. A cultivar with pulp sweet enough to eat off the tree is popular in north-central Thailand. The seeds can be eaten after roasting or boiling and may be ground into flour. (p. 97)

At their best, the passages on “Use” are provocative and interesting. At their worst, they can be brief and superficial. In either case, they pique the curiosity and leave the reader wishing for more.

In sum, Ethnic Culinary Herbs is a source book for readers seeking information on identifying and growing thirty ethnic herbs found in, but not native to, Hawaii. The reader interested in the histories, recipes, and detailed uses of these herbs must look elsewhere.

—Doric Little, The University of Hawaii