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BOOK REVIEW

Henry Notaker, 2017, *A History of Cookbooks. From kitchen to page over seven centuries*

Oakland, University of California Press, 384 p.

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Published in the reference collection "California Studies in Food and Culture" edited by Darra Goldstein, this book by Henry Notaker is the result of a long study that began in the early 1980s. It is the work of a polyglot, a researcher passionate about his subject, and an indefatigable reader. The chronological and geographical scope of the author's knowledge of Western cookbooks impresses seven centuries, from the reappearance of culinary manuscripts in Western society (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) to the late twentieth century, not to mention useful historical reminders from antiquity (e.g. Apicius, Athenaeus, Galenus and Hippocrates), and covering all European countries from the Italian peninsula to Scandinavia and from Portugal to Russia, as well as the English, French and Spanish speaking Americas, South Africa and even Australia!

The book is organised into three main sections: it opens in a pleasant and relevant way with an interwoven cameo of a writer and a cook from the fifteenth century, Platina and Maestro Martino, key figures in the Western history of culinary treatises. This is followed by two chapters, the first on the status and representations of male and female cooks in the West and the second on cookbook writers and/or authors: "cookbooks are often collections of recipes that have been compiled and edited rather than creative works written by single individuals" (p. 45). From the outset, Henry Notaker positions his book between these two tutelary figure—the male or female cook and the author—characters that accompany us throughout the work in a constant examination placing us exactly at the interface of the historian and its source: why do people write cookbooks? Can we talk about an "author" when the book offers a compilation of recipes? Who uses cookbooks? The second section contains eight chapters devoted to cookbooks and their forms, and the third and final section is made up of nine chapters dealing with cookbooks contextualised in Western food culture. The book concludes with twenty pages of bibliographic references combining printed sources and bibliography *stricto*

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sensu, and a very comprehensive index of personal names, titles of culinary treatises, geographical places and notions (e.g. cleanliness and hygiene, gluttony, health and medicine, pleasure, vegetarianism and so on), all the more useful as the chapters are thematic rather than structured around major historical periods.

Henry Notaker offers us a double story: a classic history of food cultures through cookbooks, "The text and its world", pp. 187–298 with aspects ranging from medical and dietary, religion (Christianity and Judaism), art and taste and social and political aspects in the third section and, above all, a history of cookbooks in their own right in the second section. It is here in Part II, "The text and its form" (pp. 49–183), that the book's essential contribution is to be found. In line with Bruno Laurioux's pioneering work (Laurioux 1997a,b), Notaker studies cookbooks to understand their genesis such as the transition from orality to writing, seeking to discover what became of the gestures that accompanied the oral tradition and how to find orality in cookbooks (the second person singular, step-by-step and repetitive formulas, etc.). While the printing press played a decisive role, it did not destroy the culture of the manuscript in the culinary field, and people continued to copy recipes, sometimes from printed books, collect manuscripts and annotate books throughout the entire early modern period—and continue to do so today.... Notaker addresses the copying, plagiarism, adaptation and circulation of recipes. The author estimates that before the eighteenth century, 20% of published cookbooks were plagiarised and that 20 to 30% are translations often lacking the name of the original author (p. 77). Contrary to what some might think, printing did not settle or stabilise recipes; since recipes are not considered a literary production, they are modified and adapted from one work to another (p. 80).

Notaker is also interested in how to conceive of cookbooks, by the classification of recipes within the book (by culinary operation, ingredient, sequence of a meal, month or season, fast or feast days, etc.) and the way recipes are written and named (-Chapter 6). He points out a very pertinent parallel between the enthusiasm for lists at the end of the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, and the stylistic kinship with medical remedies, especially in "Books of Secrets" and confectionery books: the term "recipe" began to be used for culinary preparations via confectionery books (p.145); the author could have referred to these when evoking the question of cooking times and temperatures (pp. 121–122) as they describe different methods of cooking sugar.

Notaker also studies the cookbook as a literary text in its own right. An entire chapter is devoted to the paratext as defined by the French linguist Genette (1987), the texts surrounding and accompanying the basic text: author's name, title, dedicatory epistles, preface, headings and index of a book (Chapter 8). By looking at the stylistic form of the recipe (Chapter 9), the verb tenses and vocabulary used before conceiving of the cookbook as a particular genre, Notaker rightly seeks to situate the cookbook in the Western literary landscape and then studies the significant relationships with other similar genres from the cataloguing classification (from the Renaissance to the Dewey system) and considers the diversity of texts including culinary recipes (pp. 168–172). If we look at cookbooks written between 1470 and 1700, more than half of the 164 works examined include information other than culinary (medical material, recipes for confectionery and to preserve foodstuffs, general household information, etc.) and while 71 of these 164 books are purely cookbooks, two thirds of them were published in the seventeenth century (p.165).

The iconography of culinary treatises is also included in the thirty-two duly commented illustrations that accompany and enlighten the author's comments. An example of this is the title page of Anna Wecker's *Ein köstlich new Kochbuch* (1598, figure 24, p. 202), the first printed European cookbook attributed to a woman, whose engraving reproduces the engraving on the title page of *Ein new Kochbuch* (1587, first edition 1581) by Marx Rumpolt (Figure 1, p. 9), except that the male cook was replaced by a female cook; this judicious choice calls for both a comprehensive study of early modern cookbook illustrations, a study that has not yet been conducted and one that would probably qualify the author's comments ("illustrations may provide more information about book history than food history", p. 128), and a gendered history of the cookbook, which Notaker often mentions before devoting his final chapter to it (Chapter 19, "Gender in Cookbooks and Household Books", p. 288–298). According to the author, in the early modern period, there was a feminine style of writing cookbooks with simplified recipes adapted to local products and care taken to translate foreign terms, especially French ones (p. 80).

Among the book's slightly weak points, we could mention the many repetitions, and the plan, often closer to a catalogue than an essay, which is not always convincing. Some developments are off topic, such as the art of carving (pp. 266–267) or the metaphorical use of dish names in cookbooks (p. 111). There are a few aspects that are missing from the book, but admittedly, the topic tackled by the author is vast. For example, it would have been interesting to read about the controversies that cookbooks sometimes cause, such as the one provoked in France by the *Don de Comus* (1739), studied by Mennell (1981), or by the *Cuisinier françois* (1651). In particular, one essential aspect of the history of books (whether cookbooks or not) is not mentioned—the number of copies published. The crucial issue of prints is never discussed, not even for the nineteenth and twentieth century cookbooks. The figures given by the author mainly concern the *incunabula* and the *Ancien Régime*. He tells us that cookbooks represented only 0.1% of total editions before 1500 and 0.15% of those in the sixteenth century (p. 65) and that English, French and German books represented 75% of the titles and 85% of all editions published before 1700 (p. 70). The eighteenth century saw the publication of 300 culinary titles for a total of 1200 editions, 80% of which were English, French or German. These figures and percentages are in themselves interesting, but we would have appreciated knowing how they were divided between England, France and Germany, and similar data for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would have been welcome, for which the author could have presented graphs.

Despite these shortcomings, I would like to conclude my review by emphasising the amount of reading this book represents and its undeniable interest for students and anyone interested in the history not only of cookbooks but also of books in general. Henry Notaker's work is a reference book worth having in any good library as it offers an initial overview on this topic as well as an exciting history lesson on one source—the cookbook—and takes into consideration historians' issues not only about books and food but also social, political, religious, gender and many other issues.

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