Review articles / Comptes rendus
Daniëlle de Vooght, who obtained her doctoral degree in 2010 with a study on food culture at the nineteenth-century Belgian court, has edited a volume based on a session of the European Social Science History Conference in Lisbon, held in 2008. Four papers, by the editor herself, Anne Lair, Özge Samancı and David Burrow, were presented at this conference; three additional chapters by Rengenier Rittersma, Charles Ludington, and Ken Albala were added later. An introduction by the editor and Peter Scholliers and a concluding chapter by Stephen Mennell complete the volume.

The volume title gives 1789 as its starting point, but in fact four contributions deal at least partly with the preceding period. Moreover, the court of Louis XIV is a presence in most papers, in its classic interpretation by Norbert Elias, surprisingly un tarnished by the intense academic discussion following the publication of Die höfische Gesellschaft. Indeed, Elias rules supreme in the volume, although his model is sometimes connected to the work of modern luminaries such as Pierre Bourdieu and Clifford Geertz, or to classics such as Werner Sombart, Georg Simmel, and Thorstein Veblen. Elite food preparation and consumption, the introduction states, tell us something about power, status, and distinction. Forms of banqueting and hospitality can be related to the legitimation of ruling houses. How do the various chapters substantiate this reasonable claim? Most contributors relate changes in food culture to changing patterns of interaction between royals and the population at large, or more specifically between rulers and elites.

Ken Albala, author of numerous books on food, provides a dazzling ‘expository essay and prologue’. His general typology of food and cooking in various periods and nations, however, threatens to turn into a repetition of clichés, whereas it remains unclear what the author wants to add in particular. Surprisingly, Roy Strong’s overview of Grand Eating (2002), a similar though more balanced undertaking, does not appear in the bibliography. More down to earth is Rengenier Rittersma’s discussion of the emergence of the truffle as a Sabaudian delicacy, and particularly its role as a gift in the eighteenth-century diplomatic exchange between Turin and Vienna. The author seems to overstate the specific role of the truffle in the diplomatic successes obtained by Savoy, and fits court gossip somewhat facilely into the grand Eliasian framework (p. 49), but he cites some interesting materials. Charles Ludington provides an alcoholic intermezzo with his study of the consumption of port, sherry, claret and, hock at the British court from George III to Victoria and Albert. The essay is well grounded in recent literature as well as in archival materials and is rich
in detail, entertaining, and on the whole plausible. Somewhat unsurprisingly, Ludington connects the changes in consumption patterns to the increasingly ‘bourgeois’ character of British monarchy. This reader had some doubts about the male and female characteristics attributed to port and sherry (p. 76, 82) respectively – I would have liked to read some contemporary assessments. On the whole, however, among all papers in this volume, Ludington’s achieves the best balance between hypothesis and substantiation.

David Burrow presents a description of changes at the Russian court in four periods – pre-petrine, petrine, eighteenth-century up to the Decembrists’ revolt, and the era of Nicholas I. While Burrow relies strongly on Richard Wortman’s 1994 Scenarios of power, he has a good grasp of the literature and gives a careful description of changes in Russia. Where Burrow strays from description to connect food culture to wider patterns, he is not invariably convincing. The connection between Nicholas I’s banqueting style and his estrangement from Russian elites, for example, doesn’t follow necessarily from the previous descriptive passages. Özge Samancı’s contribution turns the attention of the reader southward, to the Ottoman palaces of Topkapı, Yildiz, Dolmabahçe and Beylerbeyi. Samancı traces the reception of ambassadors at court and their Ottoman-style banquets with the grand vizier. From Mahmut II onwards, the Sultan’s culinary habits changed, and diplomatic reception, too, increasingly followed an ‘alafranga’ or European-style model. Towards the end of the dynasty, only pilaf and börek retained their place on the menu, while the table service had become thoroughly European. Samancı traces an interesting but roughly familiar story, and the materials on court dining 1911-1918 presented in the annex are too detailed to add much to her text.

Anne Lair’s chapter on Napoleon III opens with a wholly unsurprising recapitulation of Elias’ depiction of Versailles, and proceeds with a description of Napoleon III’s banquets and the emergence of haute cuisine restaurants in Paris. Lair relies on the work of others dealing with these themes, and her contribution seems to reside in the retelling of this story. The book’s editor contributes a paper with a potentially highly interesting analysis of guest lists at the nineteenth-century Belgian court. De Vooght, too, opens her paper with a digest of Elias, ending with the question whether his framework can be used for the study of courts other than seventeenth-century Versailles. After a brief explanation of the contours of her network-analysis, she presents data on Belgian court dining in complicated tables and elegant but highly intricate diagrams. These representations, explained only in passing, lead to modest conclusions about the frequency of banquets, the number of guests, and their interactions. In the end De Vooght’s more
general conclusions about the relevance of networking remain tentative, and emerge almost in isolation from the data presented. The link with Elias’ model, moreover, seems very thin. Stephen Mennell, a veteran in the fields of both food studies and the academic figurations around Norbert Elias, contributes a concluding overview in grand style, with some interesting but unsubstantiated suppositions. Mennell himself expresses his doubts (p. 196) about the conceptual framework attributed to him and to Elias by the editor, and makes sure to distance himself from the conceptual naïveté of the introduction.

The opening and closing statements of Royal Taste present an interesting project and an important ambition: the connection between food, rulers, and elites, to be studied in a way that brings together the best of history and social sciences. I applaud the ambition, and recognize the relevance of the project. The current volume, however, brings to light mercilessly the difficulties of such a venture. The classic problem of social-science-oriented history resides in the balance between materials and conclusions, empirical data and theory. Elias’ ambition to present a middle way between these extremes may not have been conclusive, but in its time represented an interesting opening. Most contributions to this volume, eager to demonstrate the impact of food culture on power and status, jump to conclusions and fail to carefully substantiate their arguments. A wide gap yawns between empirical knowledge and theoretically informed assertions. In fact, the best parts of Royal Taste consist of careful description in the core chapters by Rittersma, Ludington, Burrow and Samancı; where they leave this relatively safe track, they become less convincing.

In their introduction, De Vooght and Scholliers rightly point to the rich bibliography of early modern court life (p. 9), only haphazardly represented in this volume. On the same page they stress the lack of attention for post-1800 courts – yet in the wake of David Cannadine and others, an expanding literature deals with courts and elites beyond the ancien régime. Many of these works actively seek to find a plausible, middle-level conceptual approach to history. Johannes Paulmann’s Pomp und Politik (2000) can be cited as an example, but he does not stand alone. At the conceptual level the discussion of various classic interpretations – recently re-examined coherently in Jean-Pascal Daloz’s Elite Distinction (2009) – could have been integrated more effectively into this volume. The editor can be praised for her verve in bringing this initiative to publication, but the result is disappointing.

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"Je dévore alternativement une page et un morceau : c’est comme si mon livre dinoit avec moi" (Rousseau). La citation choisie comme exergue de cet ouvrage monumental, issu d’une thèse d’habilitation (soutenue à Marburg en 2009), suggère déjà toute la complexité de la métaphore de la "bibliophagie" dans la littérature française. Celle-ci est étudiée, sur 520 pages, à travers toutes les époques et dans les discours les plus divers (religieux, philosophique, médical, etc.), avec toutefois une concentration sur le siècle bourgeois et sur les "belles-lettres", notamment sur l’œuvre de Rousseau, de Flaubert et de Proust.

Selon l’“Introduction” (p. 15-32), l’étude comble une lacune, car la figure rhétorique n’avait pas encore fait l’objet d’une analyse approfondie. Ce retard semble à l’auteure assez étonnant, étant donné que la bibliophagie constitue “un des topoï les plus importants de la tradition occidentale” dont la virulence se fait avant tout sentir pendant les époques de transition, celles des révolutions dans le domaine des sciences et celui des moyens de communication. Cette forme spécifique de la fusion du code alimentaire et de la production esthétique propose un “modèle de pensée”, une “métaphysique de la dévoration”, apte à suggérer de nouveaux concepts anthropologiques et artistiques et offrant un moyen privilégié de la connaissance du monde et de l’auto-réflexion de l’écrivain (p. 13). Tandis que la recherche littéraire sur la convergence entre littérature et nourriture avait, jusqu’à nos jours, surtout considéré soit l’aspect “discursif” soit la portée “psychologique” (voir l’état de la recherche p. 17-29 ; les travaux sociohistoriques, peu nombreux, ne figurent que dans une note de bas de page, p. 21), l’intérêt de l’étude de Christine Ott est à situer sur le plan sémiologique et métaesthétique : il s’agit pour elle de démontrer que la “rhétorique osmotique” de la bibliophagie met en question la hiérarchie établie entre le corps et l’esprit et cherche donc à redéfinir les notions de “Natur und Kultur” (p. 16).

Le livre commence par un aperçu historique, qui retrace d’abord l’évolution du discours “gastro-logique” de ses origines dans l’Antiquité et dans la tradition biblique jusqu’au siècle des Lumières (p. 33-54). L’image chrétienne de l’écriture comme nourriture spirituelle se trouve secularisée pendant le Renaissance, âge d’une “crise” du savoir et du langage, due à la multiplication des livres et à l’anonymat de la lecture : ainsi, Rabelais et Montaigne procèdent, à l’aide des métaphores alimentaires, à une “rénaturalisation” du rapport que l’homme devrait entretenir avec l’écrit. À l’âge classique, les règles de la bienséance interdisant le “bas corporel”, le recours

Le chapitre suivant (p. 55-87) poursuit l’analyse chronologique, en résumant les recherches sur les “gastromythes” du siècle bourgeois, qui considère la cuisine et la gastronomie non seulement comme un “art”, mais aussi comme une “science” et un “culte”. Le discours gastronomique, omniprésent dans la littérature médicale, pédagogique, philosophique, etc., reste pourtant ambivalent, situé à mi-chemin entre l’éloge du plaisir individualisé et la nécessité d’un contrôle des instincts : la sensualité des gastronomes serait finalement “zerebral, diszipliniert und politisch korrekt” (p. 81). Les dangers d’une gourmandise incontrôlée sont maintenant comparés à une tendance néfaste dans les couches inférieures de la population qui consiste à “dévorer” des romans médiocres.

Un autre chapitre préliminaire (p. 88-104) est consacré à la “gastro-philosophie”, d’abord à la “philosophie de l’incorporation” hégélienne, qui idéalise le primat de l’esprit “dévorant” la matière, ensuite aux théories matérialistes de Feuerbach et de Nietzsche, qui revalorisent le corps en attribuant à l’alimentation un impact immédiat sur les facultés intellectuelles et morales (“Der Mensch ist, was er ißt”). Toujours dans le cadre du survol diachronique, les pages suivantes (p. 112-129) abordent les discussions théoriques sur l’alliance du discours gastronomique et du langage littéraire telles qu’elles passionnent le XIXᵉ siècle. D’une part, les gastronomes recourent à la comparaison avec les “belles-lettres” et à un style métaphorique pour conférer à la gastronomie une dignité esthétique inouïe. D’autre part, la théorie littéraire s’empare du discours gastronomique, en décrivant le processus de la création (ou de la réception) sous la forme d’une métaphore culinaire : ainsi, Balzac et Hugo préfèrent une production “substantielle” et “excessive”, tandis que Baudelaire et Flaubert privilégiennent l’ascèse, une écriture “diététique”.

La partie principale de l’ouvrage est consacrée à l’œuvre de Rousseau, de Flaubert et de Proust, avec un chapitre intercalé, plus bref, sur Huysmans. Les pages sur Rousseau (p. 133-204) considèrent d’abord sa correspondance, qui montre un mangeur angoissé par la culpabilité, prônant une nourriture simple, “naturelle” et “innocente”, garant d’une intégrité morale et d’un cœur sensible. Ensuite, Ott analyse la deuxième partie de *La Nouvelle
Héloïse, qui décrit le “système” exemplaire d’une vie basée sur l’ordre et la vertu. Il s’agit d’influencer le comportement “vertueux” des personnages par un régime ascétique et “naturel”, de réprimer l’appétit (et d’autres désirs) au nom d’une vie communautaire harmonieuse. Basé sur la théorie humorale, ce régime sert surtout à contrôler la sexualité de la femme, qu’il faut protéger contre ses instincts en lui interdisant des nourritures dangereuses. Pourtant, sur son lit de mort, Julie proteste contre cette discipline rigoureuse (“elle eut appétit”), en mettant en question le bien-fondé du projet. En dernier lieu, Ott considère les écrits autobiographiques et surtout les Confessions, qui trahissent le rapport ambigu que Rousseau entretient avec l’alimentation. L’auteur se montre tiraillé entre une conception “picaresque”, qui thématise sans vergogne les besoins corporels, et une approche “sensualiste et introspective”, qui cherche la sublimation, notamment dans une valorisation affective des aliments. Finalement, le repas solitaire et “narcissique”, partagé avec un livre, semble la seule issue : l’acte de manger et la lecture deviennent des activités complémentaires, fortifiant une identité précaire et autarcique : “réduit à moi seul, je me nourris il est vrai de ma propre substance” (Rêveries du promeneur solitaire).

Le chapitre consacré à Flaubert (p. 205-312) commence, lui aussi, par une analyse de sa correspondance, où l’auteur réfléchit sur sa créativité et son écriture par le moyen des métaphores alimentaires. Dans ses lettres, il se permet des analogies “ludiques”, qui compensent le travail ascétique sur ses romans : ainsi, il compare le style des romantiques à des sucreries, nourritures sans substance ; il reproche au public bourgeois des lectures “grasses” et “indigestes” ; il “se bourre”, quant à lui, des classiques (“j’ai une indigestion de bouquins”) ; dans ses romans, il chercherait à “dévorer” et à “assimiler” la réalité (“dans chaque page, il doit y avoir à boire et à manger”) ; et son style servirait à travailler la “pâte” de la matière des romans. Ensuite, Ott étudie Madame Bovary, où Flaubert utilise les symboles culinaires pour dénoncer les lectures sentimentales d’Emma, suggérées par son comportement alimentaire “anorectique” et “hystérique”, axé sur les nourritures sucrées et liquides, faciles à consommer : la fameuse formule “Madame Bovary, c’est moi” pourrait alors signifier “elle est le poète que moi-même, Flaubert, ne veux pas être” (p. 266). Un autre sous-chapitre considère La tentation de saint Antoine, où l’ermite est assailli par plusieurs figures démoniaques incarnant la gourmandise. En dernier lieu, Ott analyse la bibliophagie excessive de Bouvard et Pécuchet, protagonistes du roman éponyme, qui “dévorent”, dans une véritable boluimie, un nombre extraordinaire de livres, sans vraiment “assimiler” tout ce savoir.

Le bref chapitre sur Huysmans (p. 313-326) considère l’auteur dans son rôle d’intermédiaire entre Flaubert et Proust. Auteur de la décadence,
Huysmans privilégie un style “faisandé”, qui exprime la corruption de l’orga-
nique, la nausée et la peur de la mort. Les artifices d’un style raffiné ne peu-
vent pas vraiment cacher cette tendance morbide, comme ces “marinades qui
masquaient l’odeur de graisse et le fumet de sang des viandes”. À la nourri-
ture vulgaire de la littérature réaliste et naturaliste, le protagoniste du roman
À rebours, des Esseintes, préfère le poème en prose, qui serait “le suc concret,
l’osmazome de la littérature, l’huile essentielle de l’art”. Cherchant à réduire
la nourriture à une “essence”, à consommer sans manger et sans digérer, des
Esseintes pratique une alimentation vouée à l’échec – échec que Proust saura
dépasser par une révitalisation du discours bibliophagie.

L’étude de l’œuvre proustienne (p. 327-460) part, elle aussi, de sa cor-
respondance, qui montre un auteur maladif, préférant des aliments sucrés,
qui compensent la solitude et le sentiment d’être mal-aimé. Vivant dans
l’isolement et suivant un régime ascétique, l’auteur se concentre sur des plai-
sirs sensibles minimes, qu’il cherche à évoquer dans une véritable “écriture
gourmande” dans son œuvre romanesque. Dans la Recherche, les expériences
gustatives et olfactives, qui provoquent une “mémoire involontaire”, présentent
un double aspect : d’une part, elles expriment la perspective naïve du jeune
Marcel, qui croit s’approprier la réalité sensible en l’incorporant ; d’autre part,
le protagoniste doit apprendre que tout n’est pas mangeable, qu’il existe une
beauté superficielle et fugace, qu’on ne saurait assimiler que par une imagina-
tion subjective, façonnée au fil des années. C’est cette seconde “nourriture” qui
forme la source de l’écritain, comme le montre l’analyse de la célèbre scène de
la madeleine (“cette essence n’était pas en moi, elle était moi”) ou bien l’étude
du “bœuf à la mode” comme métaphore de la composition romanesque : la
“recette” recommande la sélection et la condensation d’éléments hétérogènes
et leur harmonisation grâce à une “gelée” unifiante (“Je voudrais bien [...] que
mon style soit aussi brillant, aussi clair, aussi solide que votre gelée – que mes
idées soient aussi savoureuses que vos carottes et aussi nourrissantes et fraîches
que votre viande”).

La thèse de Christine Ott, consacrée à un sujet passionnant, est elle-
même “solide” et “substantielle”, malgré certaines redondances, dues surtout
aux longs résumés en fin de chapitres. Même les lecteurs moins intéressés
par une approche sémiologique et métalittéraire y trouveront de nombreux
détails fascinants, aptes à “nourrir” des recherches futures portant sur l’his-
toire parallèle du discours gastronomique et du langage littéraire.

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Food historians and sociologists generally agree that a number of literary genres have been crucial in the dissemination and codification of culinary practices. Cookbooks and recipes, gastronomic literature, restaurant reviews and menus have all been used as sources by historians, sociologists, linguists and other scientists interested in various aspects of food and drink. Nevertheless, even though such sources have been widely used, purely linguistic aspects of such texts have not received much of attention or were completely ignored in many cases. The source text is regarded as a source of information, while the way in which this information is structured, worded or expressed is treated as less important. The 28th edition of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery was therefore a welcome attempt to highlight such linguistic aspects of culinary discourse in the broadest sense.

The proceedings of this symposium reflect the impressive diversity within the general theme of food and language, not only regarding the number of languages (and, indeed, their associated cuisines), but also on a methodological and theoretical level. The result is a rather eclectic collection of papers, dealing with such diverse topics as Japanese menus, the visual language of recipes, problems in translating Italian food vocabulary, political aspects of culinary discourse and more traditional, etymologically inspired inventories of foodstuffs in a number of languages. Since this book contains over forty articles, it is impossible to individually review all of them. Instead, a number of texts are selected. This selection is not meant to suggest any judgment on the value of these or other texts in the volume. Quite on the contrary, I have made an attempt to choose articles which reflect both the strengths and weaknesses of these proceedings.

One of the fundamental links between food and language is the naming of dishes and ingredients. Thus, it should come as no surprise that a significant number of articles deal with such naming patterns. It is, however, interesting to see the different ways in which different authors tackle this question. Joan P. Alcock’s paper *Food and Language: What’s In a Name* details several interesting aspects of food names in England. After an interesting paragraph on the legal protection of food names, she takes the reader on a trip throughout England and suggests a wide range of explanations for several curiously named dishes. It is somewhat regrettable that sociological variables such as social class (or alternatively, lifestyle), ethnicity or gender were hardly considered. Age, however, was included in the form of a discussion of culinary-themed nursery rhymes and boarding school slang names for foods. The finding that
contemporary schoolchildren lack slang names for dishes is somewhat puzzling, since it seems that boarding schools would still serve their own menus. I do not necessarily agree with the conclusion that the loss of such local terminology would be a loss to language, as this is an inherent part of language evolution: just like recipes are forgotten, so are words and expressions. On the bright side, they are replaced with new ones all the time, some more imaginative than others.

In her very condensed paper on Japanese restaurant menus, Elizabeth Andoh details the intricate links between dish names, olfactory and gustative criteria and aesthetic considerations, so important in Japanese food culture. I particularly enjoyed the observations on the connections between Japanese folklore and dishes, especially how this influences naming strategies on multiple levels (ingredients, textures, shape, taste). Finally, the author shows great knowledge of Japanese regional differences, both in the image of particular dishes and their names. One point of gentle criticism: the author did not include a single bibliographical reference. However, other papers in this volume have the same shortcoming, so this may have been an editorial decision.

If food and aesthetics are inextricably connected in Japanese cuisine, Maureen B. Fant’s article on Italian dish names suggests a rather different orientation. Her article details the myriad ways in which Italian links food, sex and gender. The author takes an interesting approach by considering the difficulties such metaphors present in translations into languages where these are not used at all. The section on cultural imperialism of Americans was rather amusing, because a similar debate occurred in Dutch-speaking countries, particularly on the use of scampo and scampi. In the end, the Nederlandse Taalunie, a commission regulating the use of Dutch, decided in favor of the ‘imperialistic’ form. Thus, one scampi, two scampi’s. Obviously, the example of romanesco, which is used as an adjective to modify other foodstuffs, is much more problematic, as the author indicates. Still, while I can imagine that some of the other examples that are presented are difficult to translate, they do seem normal instances of language evolution. Nevertheless, an interesting and broad article on many different aspect of difficulties in translating between Italian and English.

That names of dishes and their meaning change as they are spread throughout the world is also demonstrated by Alexandra Grigorieva in a brief paper on Russian food words. With a small number of examples she shows not only how dishes change as they migrate, but also how dish names from classical French cuisine have come to denote completely different ingredients or preparations in Russian cuisine. She also takes into account how Soviet-era shortages may have influenced these transformations.

Ursula Heinzelmann convincingly reveals that political trends and transformations can have a profound influence on culinary discourse. The article shows how different groups and actors tried to ‘Germanize’ German
society and how this occurred in waves according to the ideological climate of the day. The case of the restaurant menu is a special one, since France was not only the place of origin for restaurant culture, and the hegemony of French gastronomy was unquestioned. The fact that the Nazis did not, at first sight and based on very limited data, try to purify the restaurant menu was surprising, but explained in an elegant fashion. Heinzelmann compares the situation before the Second World War with the present. It is quite telling that the current owner feels the need to indicate on the menu why some linguistic choices were made, going as far as to present a list of pros and cons. Finally, the article also succeeds in relating these events to the German tradition of linguistic awareness.

All these articles dealt with language on restaurant menus or with names of dishes. However, a significant amount of articles take a rather different perspective on the relation between language and food. One approach is to study other culinary genres, such as cookbooks, recipes, manuals. Another is to look at the role of food in more literary genres, such as novels or religious prose. Carolyn A. Nadeau, for example, chooses a peculiar cookbook: rather than concentrating on the significant works of Nola or Montiño, she focuses on the oeuvre of the historically much less successful Diego Granado. The article begins with an introduction to Nola’s life and his 1520 *Llibre de coch*. Both Nola and the Italian chef Scappi had their work plagiarized by Granado. However, Nadeau argues that such plagiarism is relatively unsurprising and common in Spanish scholarship, extending well into the 20th century. Also, the author systematically shows what alterations the recipes underwent after they were ‘borrowed’. These changes are not only linguistic, but also fundamental, such as the addition or removal of particular ingredients. The author builds a compelling case for re-evaluating Granado’s plagiarism and suggests that it is not the reason for the short success of his work, as his contemporaries would not have interpreted his borrowing of recipes as plagiarism in the modern sense of the word. Twelve years later, another cook, Montiño, published his *Arte de cocina, pastelería, vizcochería y conservería* in which he criticizes Granado’s cookbook. This could be one possible factor in why Granado’s work was only reprinted in 1971 and 1990, while Montiño’s work was highly influential for three centuries. However, the author adds that other more fundamental differences such as a greater attention to organization and cleanliness in the kitchen exist. Summarized, the author provides a vivid description of similarities and differences between three cooks, their styles and their writing.

Mark McWilliams investigates the role of food in eighteenth-century Anglo-American novels. While most other articles in this volume are interested in how food is described, this article is mainly concerned with its remarkable absence within the genre. McWilliams presents the reader with
an apparent paradox: although novels are mainly concerned with aspects of daily life, food is hardly ever mentioned and much less described in a detailed manner. The author makes the argument that it was at the time considered impolite to talk about food in particular situations. He does, however, an excellent job in relating his argument to other theoretical approaches, such as the work of Watt, McKeon, Lane, Bourdieu and others. The connection between class prejudices and the (in)appropriateness of discussing food at length or in detail is convincingly demonstrated. The fact that descriptions of food are reserved for characters of low breeding or poor manners, reinforces this argument. A second line of thought, i.e. that, particularly in the United States, foodstuffs of different social groups were relatively homogeneous, is also well-developed.

Finally, in their highly original paper, Birgit Ricquier and Koen Bostoen start from the question of how we can hope to study food histories from cultures without a written tradition. Through a historical-comparative study of vocabulary, the authors yield fascinating insights into the culinary history of Bantuphone communities. The methodology is fairly straightforward, but explained in a clear way. In a brief state of affairs, the authors place their work within a framework of similar research. In a series of examples, additional evidence (e.g. from archaeological research) is provided, the distribution patterns of a wide array of cultivated plants, domesticated animals, wild food and cooking techniques are presented. The article is a prime example of how linguistics can aid historians in the study of cultures and periods of which written records are non-existent and archaeological evidence is scarce.

In conclusion, this book is a fascinating read for anyone who is interested in food or language. It is accessible for those who are professionally involved in the food industry, social scientists and interested laymen alike. It approaches the subject of food and language from widely different angles, both geographically and methodologically. From Africa to the Arctic, from twentieth-century restaurant menus to sixteenth-century cookbooks, from politics over religion to the arts: it is all there. On the other hand, as a scientific work, a number of contributions remain too superficial and suffer from substantial theoretical and methodological vagueness. While this may be due to certain editorial decisions such as a preference for the inclusion of a larger number of shorter articles or accessibility for a broad audience, this remains the weak point of this bundle.

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