

Antonella CAMPANINI, *Il cibo e la storia: il Medioevo europeo* (Roma, Carocci, 2016), 173 pp., € 14,00. ISBN 9788843080496.

"Ingredients" is how the author defines the keywords of her slender volume, which immediately appear on the title page: "the Middle Ages", "Europe" and "food history". Three risky co-ordinates, as Antonella Campanini correctly acknowledges. If the label "food history" can hardly be misunderstood, the other two are highly problematic at the very least. The term "medieval" is not only "a container of commonplaces", as Giuseppe Sergi observed almost twenty years ago,¹⁴ but is also a negatively connoted adjective which was coined well after the historical period to which it refers. Besides, it presumes to encompass about one thousand years of human history, trampling over fractures, continuities, revolutions and crises. The same can be said about the notion of "Europe", which in medieval times was employed to draw a line between *us* and *them*, Christians and Muslims, *civilitas* and *barbaritas*, West and (Middle-)East, depending on the case. For centuries, the term embodied a "negative image" (to use an expression from photography) of a geographical and cultural entity that was not well defined. Rather than stating what Europe was supposed to be, our sources often tell us what it was not.

The author addresses the problem of dealing with such tricky concepts by resorting to a well-established idea among food historians, according to which the history of food naturally lends itself to long-range and cross-cultural analyses. Campanini notes how the origins of the idea of "Europe" concerning foodways date back to the post-Roman world, at the beginning of the so-called Middle Ages, and slowly develop and take shape through exchanges with different cultures. Unity overlaps with the inner diversity of its individual components.

The inherent difficulties of such an approach are effectively dealt with by resorting to the metaphorical expedient of the journey. It is a journey which aims to taste the gradual evolution of a "European" identity in the kitchen and around the table, and which is not solely metaphorical, after all. Indeed, from the fall of the Roman Empire to the discovery of America, goods, recipes and ideas frantically travelled across the known world. For this reason, Campanini offers the reader a map consisting of a heterogeneous range of historical documents.

Il cibo e la storia comprises an introduction, in which the author addresses the above-mentioned notions, and six chapters dealing, respectively, with: 1) the clash/blending of the two hemispheres – the Roman and the Barbarian – which in fact marks the end of Late Antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages (c. 5th–8th century); 2) the emergence of a more or

¹⁴ Giuseppe SERGI, *L'idea di Medioevo: fra storia e senso comune* (Roma, 1998), p. 9 (my translation).

less defined European identity with regards to foodways in parallel with the Carolingian renaissance, the rebirth of cities and the revival of trade (9th–12th century); 3) long-distance trades of *things* (spices, recipes) and *ideas* (taste, cooking, dietetics and stereotypes) between Europe and Asia; 4) the role the Christian liturgical calendar played in the matter of people's foodways, the notions of famine and abundance, and the undisputed authority of the theories of Hippocrates and Galen; 5) the rise of new identity-marking boundaries, both vertically (stressing social differences) and horizontally (highlighting geographical or ethnic characteristics), with special attention to the exchange of products, ideas and men which contributed to the formation of a European culinary identity but, at the same time, which consisted of a constellation of national and regional variations (13th–14th centuries); and 6) the luxury characterizing late medieval courts, the contribution of the printing press to the production and availability of recipe books, and the impact of the new products from the Americas on Europe (15th century).

The reader is immediately thrown into a divided landscape – on one side the Romans, on the other the invaders (the “Barbarians”) – where (s)he can familiarize with one of the more common instruments concerning the creation of a people's identity: stereotypes. Lévi-Strauss's well-known association of the notion of “civilized” with “cooked”, and of “uncivilized” with “raw”, is particularly fitting if we read Mediterranean historical sources, as Massimo Montanari already did back in 1997.¹⁵ Campanini discusses the numerous food-related identity markers recurring, for instance, in emperors' biographies (*Historia Augusta*) and early medieval chronicles (such as *Getica*), where such stereotypes are indeed used as powerful rhetoric instruments. Meanwhile, the reference to Einhard's *Vita Karoli* is helpful to observe their dynamicity, and how they adapt to new political and cultural frameworks.

By paying attention to the interplay between historical and rhetorical evidence, the author highlights three fundamental aspects, among the others. First of all, that the lifespan of these stereotypes tends to be pretty long. Brillat-Savarin's apocalyptic description of the “Barbarian” invasion would not be the last one, unfortunately. Secondly, that sometimes stereotypes do exist for a reason, of which the Old Norse inexhaustible pig Saehrímnir and the bread and wine as symbols of Christ's body and blood are effective examples. Finally, that foodways and taste are historical products which, just like languages, set boundaries and allow for contacts – and occasionally misunderstandings – between different cultures (as the quotation from Artusi's brilliantly shows, p. 38). By resorting to this classical structuralist definition, the author brings the example of the most important and problematic contact characterizing those centuries: that between the West and the Arabs.

¹⁵ Massimo MONTANARI, *La fame e l'abbondanza. Storia dell'alimentazione in Europa* (Roma-Bari, 1997).

Campanini's history of food in medieval times does not merely focus on the past, though. Numerous references are made to survivals, echoes and misconceptions that have nimbly reached our age, and that are unlikely to disappear. But fundamental changes are correctly stressed, when appropriate: from old to new dietary triads (from "bread-wine-oil" to "bread-wine-meat"); from old to new tastes (the history of *garum* being a key example); from old to new forms of property (the manorial system seemingly represents a common "European" solution); and, most importantly, from crisis to rebirth. This specific aspect, concerning the role cities started to play as centres of large-scale exchange, is analysed on the basis of different typologies of historical documents which offer an overview of many aspects characterizing this "new life" of Europe. The new food-supply politics are critically discussed by bringing substantial examples. Again, both local differences and "European" common traits emerge vividly, along with important direct consequences that are often ignored by scholarship (namely, hygiene-related issues, pp. 61-62).

As a whole, the reader who is familiar with scholarly works on the history of food in medieval times will gladly recognize the contribution of experts in the field, such as Paul Freedman, Bruno Laurioux, Massimo Montanari and Carlo Maria Cipolla (to name just a few). Campanini shares both the ease of their writing style and their accuracy, as she touches on a number of hot topics with agility without presuming to answer completely all the questions she asks or proposes. Rather, she offers the reader a variety of solutions, different routes to follow. Thus, food-related matters intertwine with observations concerning the market, circuits of exchange, the circulation of recipe collections, faith, social status and medical debate. This latter theme is occasionally supported by references to the figure and the works of Hildegard of Bingen, who has recently attracted the author's interest.¹⁶ Campanini's volume thus places itself within a solid tradition of studies suited to a pretty wide audience, as it confidently summarizes well-established notions concerning food in medieval times and, at the same time, breathes new life into the field by summoning documents which do justice to her "journey" metaphor. This is the case, for instance, of Liutprand's *Relatio* (pp. 48-52), of Marco Polo's record of his travels to the East (pp. 78-84), or of Andrea Navagero's *Viaggio in Spagna* (p. 146). While there is no doubt that these new perspectives will need further research, there is also no doubt that the aim of Campanini's slim *Il cibo e la storia* is to stimulate the reader in this direction. As the author herself states: "Il viaggio prosegue" ("The voyage continues", p. 150).

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¹⁶ Antonella CAMPANINI (ed.), *Hildegarda di Bingen, Libro delle creature. Differenze sottili delle nature diverse* (Roma, 2011).