

Pellegrino Artusi

La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene, ed. Piero Camporesi (Einaudi, Turin, 1970, 1995), 776pp., L.25.000

Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well, trans. Murtha Baca and Stephen Sartarelli (Marsilio, New York, 1997), 631pp., \$19.95

To make a “pizza alla napoletana” with Pellegrino Artusi, you will need neither tomato nor oregano, neither olive oil nor even salt. Ricotta cheese, almonds, sugar, flour, egg, lemon rind or vanilla and milk will do the trick and, correctly blended and filled into a shortcrust pastry, the mixture will make a “delicious-tasting dessert”. In Artusi’s day - about a hundred years ago - tomatoes and their use as a sauce, especially for pasta, were just becoming widespread in central and northern Italian kitchens; and that was partly because he helped to promote them.¹ The foods that we recognize today as staples of Italian cooking are not as securely or atemporally rooted in the overall history and geography of the Italian peninsula as one might expect. And contemporary Anglo-Saxon obsessions with certain Italianate ingredients (such as the sun-dried tomato) perhaps reflect the whimsical nature of culinary habits and the dependence of connotations of ‘authenticity’ on fashions, rather than on any attachment to the historically informed knowledge or experience of real traditions.

Precisely such an attachment lies at the core of the huge enterprise that Pellegrino Artusi, great amateur cook, retired banker and sometime literary critic, set out to achieve with his *La Scienza in cucina e l'Arte di mangiar bene*. The book single-handedly united culinary traditions from north and south - but mainly north - rich and poor, gathering them into a thick volume replete with anecdotes, humorous digressions and interjections, that by 1909 and its thirteenth edition included 790 recipes. (Two of these were for tomato sauce: one for tomato *sugo*, the other for tomato *salsa*.) His recipes are still consulted: the book has never been out of print, and recent editions have included a shortened, simplified version for sale in Italian supermarkets. But to divorce the substance of Artusi’s recipes from his mode of delivery can be mystifying: the recipes are the product of a particular era and of a specific set of concerns, and are best appreciated as such a product. If Artusi influenced the course of Italian cooking, then to read him, even if one doesn’t intend to cook under his guidance, is to go back to a book of sources. This is what informed the scholarly

¹ There is record of their common use in Neapolitan cuisine from the late seventeenth century on, and in English cookbooks from the late eighteenth. Castor Durante, however, mentions them in his *Il tesoro della sanità*, first published in 1585. The first to have published recipes for tomatoes is, according to Elizabeth David, Antonio Latini (steward to the Spanish prime minister of Naples) in his *Lo scalco alla moderna* (Naples, 1692-4). See Elizabeth David’s bibliographical notes in her *Italian Food* (London, 1987).

edition put out in 1970 by the recently deceased Piero Camporesi, a historian of ideas whose work has included studies of attitudes to food, blood, coffee, or landscape from the Renaissance to early modernity; it is still the edition of reference. The English-speaking public, however, until now has had no access to a dependable edition: the new, lively translation by Baca and Sartarelli rectifies this,² and includes an introduction by the food writer Lorenza de' Medici, a short but illuminating account of the book's background and significance.³

Artusi's idea of forging a national cuisine and language out of newly unified Italy's manifold regional traditions came out of his dissatisfaction with its absence. He believed in the importance of reclaiming some aspects of the long-lived vogue, amongst the Italian upper-class, for French cooking and food nomenclature, and creating an accessible, healthy cuisine - by the period's standards - principally spun out of proven local traditions. His direct audience consisted of middle-class "kind Ladies and good Housewives" who performed their science in kitchens throughout Italy, and their families of course, in homes that were reasonably well-off but perhaps not rich enough to afford a professional cook. To them he offered a viable, affordable synthesis of the "cucina dei signori" - the noble, butter- and meat-based, French-influenced cuisine of the rich north - and of the poorer, olive oil- and pulse-based cooking of peasants and southerners. Lorenza de' Medici calls Artusi "a precursor of today's rustic chic" who "took pains to show the dependence of refined, high-class cuisine on genuine, country style, home cooking". Polenta, as Camporesi remarks, certainly remained a staple of Venetian peasant food after Artusi, just as olives, pulses and tomatoes remained in the southern labourer's diet; but by including simple traditions in his compilation, Artusi uprooted them in a way that had not been done before.

Artusi was born in 1820 in Forlimpopoli, between Ravenna and Bologna, in the Romagna region. He studied literature in Bologna, first moved to Florence in 1852, and settled there permanently a year later, founding the discount bank of which he would be the successful director from then on. It was in Florence that he died, too, in 1911. A member of the city's intellectual circles, Artusi tried his hand at literary criticism - rather

² Camporesi's edition, which is still in print, surveys the writings on food, feasting, agriculture and physiology that served as the *cuoco's* sometimes explicit sources. Both the translation and this piece are based upon it.

³ For those who would like to look up the recipes in Italian, a web-site provides them all, alphabetically or thematically, and reproduces the whole book from the preface to the menu suggestions at the end. The http address is: www.cucina.iol.it/artusi/

less successfully - with a biography of the poet Ugo Foscolo and a work on the satirist Giuseppe Giusti; he also wrote an autobiography. Fond of moderation, parsimony, good taste, common sense, the avoidance of strife and indigestion, and a nineteenth-century version of family values,⁴ he was a staunch bourgeois conservative, a political moderate and a celibate who happened to dedicate to his two cats the first, self-financed 1891 edition of what would quickly become his tremendously successful tome.

It does seem quite odd, or ungracious, that the dedicatees weren't his two cooks - one, Francesco Ruffilli, was from his native town in Romagna, the other, Marietta Sabatini, from his adopted Tuscany. But such a formal acknowledgement might perhaps have seemed to him self-congratulating, in the sense that these two cooks incarnated the two, very different culinary cultures to which Artusi was attached. His allegiance would have been to those regions and traditions: not, presumably, to the employees who cooked for him. And then it was the art of *eating well* that he was keen to promote, rather than the art of cooking: cooking, he thought, could be learned easily enough, with the help of a good, clear manual, written in good, clear Italian. He found most such manuals "inaccurate or incomprehensible, especially the Italian ones. The French are a little better" and so he put together his own cookbook, foregoing his *romagnolo* dialect and adopting Tuscan, that is, Italian, which he zealously used to high, if mannered, effect. The book, as Camporesi puts it, is "a long *causerie* peppered with recipes, a kind of novel of the kitchen" whose twists and turns through irrelevant facts, histories and opinions helped to ensure its popularity. As its public increased - and it did, dramatically, with each edition - so its effect deepened. This was, along with Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* and De Amicis's *Cuore*, one of the few books with which the Italian people as a whole would be familiar, at the turn of the century, just a few decades after the political unification of the peninsula, in 1870.

For the middle-class which emerged with unification - particularly in the northern half of the country - Artusi's cookery anthology represented an attempt at giving some content to the newly forged Italian identity, and at proudly establishing the bases of the young nation on the safely acceptable grounds of tradition. He could not have predicted quite how successful his endeavour would prove, but he was certainly aware of how widely a

⁴ In the course of a recipe for "tortellini alla bolognese", he approvingly reports the opinion of "a foreign writer" that "The health, morale and joy of a family are dependent on its cooking. Therefore, it would be a wonderful thing if every woman, whether of common or high birth, knew an art that brings well-being, wealth and peace to the family."

cookbook could be diffused, and how potentially powerful a didactic tool it could be.⁵ He was familiar with the literature of cookery that preceded him, the classical, medieval, Renaissance and later treatises on an art, or science, that he viewed as noble - cooks should be honored, he thought. Together with experience and the testimony of professionals, friends, acquaintances and readers who wrote in their comments and suggestions, these constituted his sources. A culinary education was a doubly 'oral' education, in which language matters as much as food, and in which the naming of dishes echoes the history-laden art of transforming nature for human, and humanly determined, morally correct and healthy ends.⁶ If Artusi's influence was radical, it was precisely because his program was socially and morally conservative.

Indeed, the adherence to a middle way between the poles of courtly excess and pious austerity was, in Artusi's view, morally commendable *because* sensible and fair. It promoted a cuisine that steered clear both of the indigestion caused by affluence and of the - more common - malnutrition caused by indigence. And, crucially, it ensured the continuity of a tradition of honoring the land's wonderful produce, as visitors such as John Evelyn, who himself authored a cookbook, had often done: in the countryside north of Naples, Evelyn wrote in his Diary, grew "Rice, canes for Suggar, Olives, Pomegranads, Mulberryys, Cittrons, Oranges, Figgs and infinite sorts of rare fruits".⁷ (Such ingredients already appear in the classic Roman cookbook by the so-called Apicius, who lived in the first century AD, though the book probably was compiled in the 4th and 5th centuries.) Tomatoes might be relatively recent; but various kinds of pasta, grilled meats, birds and fish, cheeses like parmesan, dried meats, and of course the use of olive oil, are on record from very early on. (The combination of sweet and sour, like figs and ham or prosciutto, common throughout the world, directly descends in some of its present Italian guises from Roman and Greek customs.) Boccaccio mentions in the *Decameron* "a mountain of grated

⁵ At the end of his comically sorry account ("a bit like the story of Cinderella") of the difficulties he faced in first publishing the book, he writes "... with our century tending towards materialism and life's enjoyments, the day shall soon come when writings of this sort, which delight the mind and nourish the body, will be more widely sought and read than the works of great scientists, which are of much greater value to humanity."

⁶ "With greater eagerness than it ought to, the world is rushing to the well-springs of pleasure, and [yet - not in trans.] those who know how to temper this dangerous inclination with healthy morals shall take the palm".

⁷ 29-31 January 1645. Quoted by Chloe Chard in 'The Intensification of Italy. Food, wine and the foreign in seventeenth-century travel writing', in Gerald and Valerie Mars, eds., *Food, Culture and History*, vol.1, 1993 (London, 1993), p.103.

parmigiano, before which stood people fully occupied with the making of maccheroni and ravioli, cooking them in capon broth”, and drinking “vernaccia” wine.⁸

Artusi’s recipes still can be attractive precisely because of their reliance on the old, unpretentious simplicity now usually considered characteristic of Italian cooking. Thus, he is able to give a recipe for “polpette di tripa” (“tripe meatballs”) which comes from Latini’s 1694 manual,⁹ and which “might seem strange to you, and the mere mention of tripe will probably make you reluctant to try it”, but “with the proper seasonings it turns out quite pleasant and does not lie heavy on the stomach”. The ingredients are, in fact, hardly strange to us at all - prosciutto, parmesan, beef marrow, two eggs, parsley, nutmeg and soaked bread, besides the tripe itself. Artusi bothers, too, to list “trivial and ordinary” dishes such as “salsiccia coll’uva” (sausage with grapes), “because sausages, combined with the bittersweet taste of grapes, might tickle someone’s taste buds”; he describes many others, like his “pappardelle all’aretina” (“pappardelle noodles Arezzo style” - with duck sauce) as “not a refined dish”, though “suitable for family cooking”; while another is a pasta sauce given to him by the widow of a Sicilian who “used to amuse himself by experimenting with certain dishes of his homeland” and simply made of sardines, anchovies and fennel. And while polenta was typically poor peasant fare, Artusi gives a handful of recipes for a food that, as Camporesi notes, Pliny already recorded in his *Natural History* (XVIII,8).

There are, however, many more recipes for meat and fish in Artusi than there are for pasta, rice, polenta and potato dishes; but then in his time moderation did not at all mean cutting down on animal fat. It was the equation of the display of opulence through sophisticated culinary elaborations and the use of luxurious and exotic ingredients with what many Europeans used to mean in part by (aristocratic) *civilité*, that for Artusi was too immoderate, uneconomical, unhealthy and artificial to have much of a place in his program. In a sense he thus recreated for Italians the very concept of “civiltà” - one for which there was no longer any need to bow to transalpine or House of Savoy sophisticates.

The simplicity and economy of means and tastes that Artusi thus helped to establish are indeed very far removed from the more elaborate recipes one can find in a classic of Renaissance Italian cookery like Bartolomeo Scappi’s 1570 *Opera*. Scappi had been cook to Pope Pius V, was known to have prepared, in 1536, a banquet for Charles V which included over 780 dishes, and exerted a definite influence on later Italian cookery.

⁸ C. Segre, ed. Boccaccio, *Decameron* VIII,3 (Milan, 1966-87), pp.479-80. The reference is in Luigi Firpo’s useful introduction to his anthology, *Gastronomia del Rinascimento* (Turin, 1974), p.14.

⁹ On Latini, see n.1.

Artusi knew him too; as Camporesi notes, his “torta di ricotta” (“ricotta cheesecake”), for example, exists in Scappi as the more tortuous “torta di latte”, though the dish is much older still. Reading this *Opera*, one imagines banquets of the kind hosted by Lucullus (the legendary Roman official who, after retirement, dedicated himself entirely to gastronomy) and cooked by Carême or Escoffier. It is worlds away from today’s cosy dinner-parties prepared in a couple of hours. Take the pigeon-pie, “torta reale di piccioni”, oddly nicknamed by Neapolitans, according to Scappi, “pizza di bocca di dama” (lady’s mouth pizza): how many times a week would one want to “get the meat of three half-roasted pigeons on a skewer, without the skin, bones and nerves”, crush it in a mortar with dates, sweet marzipan paste and beef marrow, add ten fresh raw egg-yolks (ten!) and four ounces sugar, some cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg, put the whole thing in a puff-pastry case made of flour, (more) egg-yolks, sugar, butter, rose-water; bake, add to taste musk-scented *mostacchioli* (pieces of sweet almond pastry), some *malvasia* wine, juice of *melangole* (an orange-like citrus) and more sugar?

Artusi thought deplorable the excessive belabouring of nature’s bounty for the same reasons that he wanted the language of cooking to be accountably Tuscan, direct and clear. It has become an academic nostrum to point to the garrulous Artusi’s influence on the Italian language. What remains interesting is the extent to which the establishment of modern Italian was so closely tied to the kitchen and to everything that it might conserve, in all senses of the word, before television became the one most powerful vehicle for linguistic unification. I have heard the story of a linguistics student in Rome who was asked at an oral exam, not so long ago, whether she had read Saussure? yes, she answered, as well she should have; and Artusi, have you read Artusi? no, was her intrigued, nervous reply. ‘Pity the man who marries you!’ (‘Poveraccio quello che ti sposa!’), exclaimed the examining professor.

That Artusi’s impact on Italian should be considered alongside his contribution to cookery is a function of his passionate belief that linguistic elaborations and complicated jargon, especially gallicisms,¹⁰ of the kind favored by his immediate predecessors, were an

¹⁰ The “zuppa sul sugo di carne” (“soup with meat sauce”) begins with this: “Certain cooks, to give themselves airs, mangle the phrases of our less than benevolent neighbors, using names that resound mightily and say nothing. According to them, the soup I am describing should be called soup mitonnée. And if I had stuffed my book with these exotic and disagreeable names, to please the many who grovel before foreign customs, who knows how much prestige I would have enjoyed! But, for the sake of our own dignity [“di noi stessi” - trans. says wrongly “national

aberration and a betrayal of the potential of the Italian he cherished. In a recipe for “piccioni all’inglese o piccion paio” (pointlessly translated as “squabs English style, or squab pie”), he exclaims:

I would like to make it clear once and for all that names do not mean much in my kitchen, and that I give no importance to high-sounding titles. If an Englishman should tell me that I have not made this dish, which also goes by the odd name of “piccion paio”, according to the customs of his country, I do not care a fig. All I care is that it be judged tasty, and that is the end of the matter.

By this he seems to imply that jargon isn’t necessary; naming can be as immediate, natural and simple as tasting; and if one can experience food without language, then any language that is used should be as accessible and economical as possible.

The recipe is not the easiest in the book, but it is definitely feasible, calling only for one egg, along with some veal or chicken breast, some prosciutto, salted tongue, butter and broth. The joke on “pigeon pie” is quite silly, though the plea for the separation of taste from cultural context is of an ingenuous purism that seems to defeat his own purpose and clash with his anti-French program of cultural reform. Witness the recipe for “rossi d’uovo al canapè” (egg-yolk canapés”), which begins with “How repugnant it is for me to call dishes such stupid and often ridiculous names! But in order to make myself understood, I have to follow common practice.” Indeed, the Italians are all too prone, he says again in the midst of his recipe for the sweet “quattro quarti all’inglese” (“four quarters, English style”), to “turn to foreign countries for things they have right in their own back yard” - however “English style” the dish. Raisins, required in this pastry, could be made out of “a tiny, seedless red grape, which they call *uva romanina*”, found in Lower Romagna and which dries well. Why import raisins if you can make them yourself?

But a number of Artusi’s recipes do originate in French, English and German traditions. Apart from the “piccion paio”, there are two recipes for “roast-beef”, or *rosbiffe* - both excellent. The “green sauce which the French call *sauce ravigote*”, according to Artusi, “deserves to become part of Italian cuisine because it goes well with poached fish, poached eggs, and so forth”. The recipe for “cotolette imbottite” (“stuffed cutlets”), from sliced or ground veal, chicken or turkey, is obviously French; the translators point out in a note that Artusi means to “underscore the word’s French derivation” from *côtelette*, by italicizing it in the text. It includes a béchamel sauce present in other recipes too, which he calls, always in italics, a *balsamella*. There are recipes for German pastries like “Strudel”, “Kugelhupf” and

dignity”], I have made every effort to use our own beautiful and harmonious language, and so it pleases me to call the soup by its simple and natural name.”

“Krapfen”. Artusi also gives an extremely elaborate recipe for couscous, “cuscussù”. It is, he says, “a dish of Arab origin, which the descendants of Moses and Jacob, in their peregrinations, have carried around the world” but which is “used as a first course by the Jews of Italy, two of whom were kind enough to let me taste it and see how it is done”. With the help of a reworded tercet from Dante’s *Inferno*, he warns us that “I cannot guarantee I shall make you understand it”. There is also a recipe for veal and calf’s kidney-based “quenelles” translated in the English edition as “French style dumplings”, which Artusi says “are a dish of French origin as well as type, as you can tell by the name, for which there is no equivalent in Italian. Perhaps they were invented by a cook whose master had no teeth.” Perhaps, indeed.

Recipes and ingredients always have travelled. Chefs’ reputations, accidents and word of mouth, especially at the high end of gastronomy, participate in the creation of tradition as much as do geographical constraints and simple necessity. “Gastronomy nourished itself on rumour”, as M.F.K. Fisher once put it.¹¹ And today’s full-blown trans-continental mélange of styles is one extreme instance of culinary borderlessness. What of course once limited the circulation of perishables, even within one country, was the absence of proper refrigeration; and this in part is what gave rise to a regional division of culinary traditions. (Now that peaches, say, are available in winter, a cult of authenticity is perhaps alone in ensuring the survival of culinary regionalism - irrespective of the simple fact that a peach from one’s garden’s tree tastes far better than a jet-lagged one.) But culinary ideas remain fresh wherever they travel. Robert May, a chef who spent some years in France, included in his *The Accomplisht Cook, or The Art and Mystery of Cookery* (1685) recipes like “pottage in the Italian fashion”, “capons in Pottage in the French Fashion”, and indications “To boil a Capon or Chicken in the French Fashion, with Skirrets or French Beans”. (He dedicated the book, amongst others, to Kenelm Digby, philosopher, catholic, friend of Hobbes, author of works on mind and body, chemistry and food.)¹²

Eggs and butter, honey and sugar, fruit such as grapes or berries, lemon or orange, spices such as pepper, clove, mace, nutmeg, cinnamon and ginger, herbs such as sage, coriander and parsley, dried fruit, saffron, musk, ambergris, rose water, sweet wine, and, importantly, the antique *verjuice* - fermented bitter grape juice, *agresto* in Italian - all figure in

¹¹ In ‘Greek Honey and the Hon-Zo. 3000 B.C-100 A.D. Egypt, Orient, and Greece’, in *Serve it Forth*, collected in *The Art of Eating* (London, 1963/83), p.14.

May's savoury recipes, which clearly bear the mark of their origins in the use of spice trade products by Italians, later by the French and the English. (This habit might have been prompted in part by the need to cover up the effusions of rotting meat with layers of strong tastes.) They are the ingredients of the "cucina dei signori" that could only baffle the ordinary appetite and purse. One finds them again in an Italian near-contemporary of May's book, *L'arte di cucinare* (first published in 1662) by Bartolomeo Stefani, *cuoco bolognese*, head cook to the Gonzaga in Mantua in the second half of the 17th century. The manual was meant to be used for banquets as well as less lavish occasions, though the menus are all of the standard, exhausting, length. It includes zoological data about the animals the cook must scientifically chop and artfully carve - there is a long, bloody passage on ways of preparing a calf's head for cooking - in an attempt perhaps to inscribe technique and the teaching of a craft within the noble lineage of literary, erudite food writing.¹³ (Artusi knew his Stefani, and has a "zuppa alla Stefani", made of veal or lamb's brain and chicken livers, but deprived of the earlier period's usual "seasonings and spices".)

Artusi, too, however light-hearted his tone and entertaining the anecdotes, put great store in delivering his advice from the noble heights of erudition. There is a parallel between his fastidious, scholarly preoccupation with the genealogy and precisely located provenance of foods, dishes and terminology and the pleasure he took in comparing Tuscan words and customs with their regional equivalents, especially those of his native Emilia-Romagna. Thus the recipe for "crescente" ("half moon") is a disquisition upon the "strange language they speak in learned Bologna!". Baca and Sartarelli's translation does a very good job of rendering the series of comparisons that follow into English, preserving the gleeful tone, though inevitably the reasons for this glee, oft-repeated in the book, can only be lost on a reader unfamiliar with Italian. The recipe, incidentally, never appears: a "crescente", which Artusi says he first understood as a reference to the moon, is a "schacciata or focaccia, the ordinary fried dough cake that everybody recognizes and all know how to make. The only difference is that the Bolognese, to make theirs more tender and digestible, add a little lard when mixing the flour with cool water and salt." Artusi tells us with his customary chemist's authority that "the schacciata will puff up better if you

¹² Kenelm Digby, *The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digby Opened, Whereby is discovered several ways of making Metheglin, Sider, Cherry-Wine &c. Together with excellent directions for cookery* (London, 1669).

¹³ Luigi Firpo dates the advent of a technical, as opposed to literary, or erudite food writing, to the appearance of the "first two modern treatises of gastronomy, not erudite but practical", the anonymous *Ménagier* (ca. 1393) and Taillevent's *Viandier pour appareiller toutes manières de viande* (ca. 1490). See Firpo (1974), p.15.

drop it in a skillet when the fat is sizzling, but which you have removed from the fire”; gives, as the amused, sometimes bemused social critic, some general comments on the Bolognese character; and quotes, as the enthusiastic dilettante scholar, a eulogy of Bologna from Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (VII,7).

Such an eccentric parade of erudition is on full show in the peacock entry (“pavone”), oft-cited as the paragon of Artusian whimsicality: it consists entirely of an account of the lore about the origins of the bird’s presence in Italy. “The Romans”, ends Artusi,

loved the taste of these birds, which came to be highly prized after Aufidius Lurco taught his countrymen how to fatten them. He kept his peacocks in a poultry pen that apparently earned him an income of one thousand five hundred crowns. This is probably not far from the truth, if they were sold at a rate of five crowns each.

That is all. There is no indication - though the absence of a recipe says enough - as to how to roast, grill, boil or carve a peacock; nor as to whether peacocks should still actually be eaten in an era of cultivated moderation. The power to redefine the realm of food is entirely in our cook’s hands, and he is simply having fun with it. This playful love for facts also informs, of course, Artusi’s delight in linguistic and regional profusion; and in turn the delight is echoed in the rich sensuality of his descriptions of culinary variations on old, established themes. Here is how he begins the first of two recipes for “cacciucco” (“fish stew”):

Cacciucco! Let me say just a little bit about this word, which is understood perhaps only in Tuscany and on the shores of the Mediterranean, since on the shores of the Adriatic it is called “brodetto” (literally, “little broth” - trans.). In Florence, “brodetto” means a soup with bread and broth, bound with beaten eggs and lemon juice. In Italy the confusion between these and other names from province to province is such that it is almost a second Tower of Babel.

After the unification of Italy, it seemed logical to me that we should think about unifying the spoken language, and yet few can be bothered with such an undertaking and many are outright hostile to it, perhaps because of false pride and the ingrained habit that Italians have of speaking their regional dialect.

The simple recipe that follows, for what is “quite a heavy dish, so one needs to be careful and not to gorge oneself on it” is, like quite a few of Artusi’s recipes, familiar to contemporary Western taste and easy enough to perform, certainly much easier than the pigeon-pie. One browns onion, garlic and parsley in oil, adds tomatoes and tomato paste, salt and pepper, then some diluted vinegar; once the mixture has boiled, one strains it, discards the garlic and cooks the fish in it - any fish will do: “sole, red mullet, gurnard, dogfish, gudgeon, mantis shrimp, and other types of fish in season, leaving the small fish

whole and cutting the big ones into large pieces”. Once cooked, “the cacciucco is usually brought to the table on two separate platters”, one for the strained fish, another for warmed “finger-thick slices of bread to soak up all the broth”. The warning that it may weigh on the stomach notwithstanding, the dish is as acceptable by today’s cautious health standards as could be. But note that, in line with the pork-based cuisine of his native Romagna, Artusi does usually tend to favor the use of lard over that of oil.

One of Artusi’s sources was Vincenzo Corrado, known as the popularizer of the use of potatoes in Italy, who believed that they had originated there and not in America. In his classic *Il cuoco galante* (Naples, 1773), he provided, without, let it be said, the Artusian aversion to gallicisms, a huge number of summary, simple recipes and seasonally classified variations on all “products of Nature”.¹⁴ There is information about the best season in which to kill a lamb, for example, or the ideal age and sex of the best-tasting pigs (“not over two years, and male, raised in mountainous countryside and fattened at home”). But Artusi’s pronouncements on the effects of a dish on digestion and general health put him firmly in the company of those earlier figures for whom the regulation of food intake also amounted to a regulation of bowels, fertility and mores. Health advice, if not warnings, could be integral to the anthologies of excess, those very sources of menus for the banquets of gluttonous abuse, in which the discussion of food, cooking and feasting included etymological, medical, botanical or zoological data, sometimes all of these, as well as advice on kitchenware and serving etiquette.

De honesta voluptate et valetudine, by Bartolomeo Sacchi or Platina (Venice, 1474), is one such work. Known as the first printed cookbook, it catalogues virtually all the living matter fit to be eaten, from mint to quinces and from peacocks (and “how to cook a peacock so that it seems to be alive”) to turtledoves, with recipes like saffron broth (“thirty egg yolks, verjuice, the juice of veal or capon, saffron, a little cinnamon”, strained, cooked and further spiced), the preparation of capers, calves’ belly, blancmange or garlic sauce with walnuts or almonds. It is a humanist’s work - Platina was Pope Sixtus IV’s Vatican librarian when it was published - and an entertaining read, packed full of natural history data. Running as a theme throughout this humanist participation in culinary tradition and dinner-table habits is perhaps the value placed on the rhetorical categories of variety and invention for the civilisation of the body and of its passions; thus one tailored menus to humors and the availability of goods to invention.

¹⁴ A near-contemporary of Artusi, Francesco Chapusot, chief cook to the English ambassador at the Savoy court in Turin, also wrote a season-by-season cookbook, *La cucina sana, economica ed elegante* (Turin, 1846).

Books about food, then, could be much more than cooking guides. Camporesi's footnotes occasionally refer the Artusi reader back to Baldassare Pisanelli, *Medico bolognese*, whose *Trattato della natura de' cibi e del bere* (Venice, 1586) is another compilation of natural histories ("historie naturali"). Ducks, for example, should be eaten "young, fat and tender"; they are "nutritious, fattening, give nice coloring, a good voice, and increase sperm-levels, and chase away wind". Oranges should be "of a good color, and moderately tasty: for the sweet ones are quite hot" though good for melancholics; "the bitter ones are rather bad for the stomach", they "induce constipation, cool the stomach and tighten the chest and arteries", and are good, "in hot weather, for the young, and for coleric and sanguine types." In thinking about gastronomy as the transformation of nature, Artusi thus echoes the natural philosophers, doctors and cooks who described foods both in terms of their constitutive ingredients and of the effects they had on the metabolism, on humors and moods, along Hippocratic and Galenic explanatory lines. In M.L. Lemery's *A Treatise of all Sorts of Foods, Both Animal and Vegetable: and also of Drinkables* (17??),¹⁵ a French chemist's catalogue of medical prescription based on botanical, zoological and anthropological description, one finds for example that capers "provoke Women's Terms", work against "Asthmas, the Spleen, and Obstructions in the Bowels; they create an Appetite, fortify the Stomach, kill the Worms, and increase the Seed", though "when taken to Excess, they heat, and a little too much rarify the Humours." And Robert May ends his book with a section "Shewing the best way of making Diet for the Sick".

Artusi actually opens his opus with "a few health guidelines", "alcune norme d'igiene" in Italian. His second recipe is a "broth for the sick", though not quite the familiar chicken soup anti-flu prescription, since this one is made of "thin slices of veal or beef" simmered for six hours. And the very first recipe is a straightforward (beef) broth - a vital presence in any serious kitchen - which ends, too, with the medical rather than culinary comment that "doctors now say that broth does not nourish at all, and in fact its main function is to stimulate the production of gastric juices in the stomach", a "new theory, which seems to fly in the face of common sense". The culinary and medical, prescriptive modes are not separate; the recipe for "cibreo" ("chicken giblet fricassée") calls for chicken livers, coxcombs and testicles, broth, an egg yolk, flour and lemon, and "is a simple but delicate dish, appropriate for ladies with listless appetites and for convalescents". The recipe for

¹⁵ The English translation, by D. Hay, M.D., was published in 1745. Lemery was "Physician to the King, and Member of the Royal Academy". The work was endorsed by Fontenelle, then Secretary to the *Académie Royale des Sciences* and by the College of Physicians in London.

“spaghetti alla rustica” (“country-style spaghetti”) begins with a history of the use and appreciation of garlic: lower-class Romans alone touched it, Artusi says, but the Egyptians worshipped it for “its medicinal properties”. They believed that it relieves “those suffering from hysteria, promotes the secretion of urine, strengthens the stomach”, and so on. The recipe is actually for a straightforward spaghetti tomato sauce¹⁶ - garlic cloves, parsley and basil in oil, to which are added tomatoes, served “over spaghetti or vermicelli” with parmesan.

Humors, by Artusi’s day, were no longer the tools of choice for medical explanation; and if the use of spices had on occasion been justified on the back of humoral theory, then Artusi had no time for spices, either. But cookery, for him as for those he would have considered his predecessors, was not a merely technical issue: it engaged a whole body of culture, and of course the whole body. For the transformation of the most ordinary grain of barley or corn into something as common as polenta, for example, is a chemical process no less worthy of scrutiny by a scientific eye than, say, the sexual life of small fish. Artusi makes a good show of ichthyological scholarship, but long before him, matters such as these had been extensively discussed in a great 2nd-3rd-century Greco-Egyptian work dedicated to all possible manner of table-talk, Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophistae*, or “banquet of the learned”.¹⁷ Anecdotes from history and natural history fill Artusi’s pages just as much as those of the encyclopedic Athenaeus, and there is no doubt that our *cuoco* relished the notion that he might be able to carry through the venerable, ancient project of telling through food the history of humanity.

That Artusi should have such anthropological concerns, close to those at the heart of Brillat-Savarin’s great *Physiologie du goût* (1826) - a work he knew and would have looked up to - seems wholly appropriate to the kind of man he was and the intellectual and social ambience he lived in. Significantly, the first person to champion Artusi’s effort, and encourage him to print it despite publishers’ complete lack of interest in his manuscript, was Paolo Mantegazza, founder of the first Italian chair of anthropology and of the anthropology and ethnography museum in Florence, Darwinian pathologist and

¹⁶ There are two other recipes for “maccheroni alla napoletana”, both of which include tomatoes too, though they are more elaborate. In Chapusot, however, “maccheroni alla napoletana” were still tomato-free.

¹⁷ We learn in Athenaeus, for example, that to cook hare according to Arcestratus (whose 4th-century BC cookbook survives only through fragments in the *Deipnosophistae*), one should “bring the meat roasted to each guest in the midst of the drinking (...) simply sprinkled with salt”, for “all other modes of dressing are utterly superfluous to my eyes - sticky sauces with too much cheese and oil poured on, as though you were preparing an entrée of dogfish” (IX, 399). The pages on fish take up parts of Book VII and much of Book VIII.

physiologist who wrote widely about sexuality, the physiology of emotions, and hygiene, and dedicated two lectures to Artusi. The *cuoco* himself, in fact, was a member of the Italian society of anthropology. But as Camporesi points out,¹⁸ the positivist ring of the “science in the kitchen” is mitigated by the older notion of an “art of eating”: Artusi turned the necessity, rules and strictures of adequate, appropriate nutrition into an acceptable source of pleasure. The result is a sensualist’s anti-decadent creed, constructed through the agile synthesis of the early modern and the bourgeois ethics of moderation. It is also an unusual cookbook whose somewhat dated, but useful recipes will still delight the curious, the gourmet, or the gourmand, and inspire the reasonably gifted cook.

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¹⁸ See his introduction, pp. xxii-xxv, xlv-xlvii.