



Title	Angela Jianu and Violeta Barbu, eds., <i>Earthly Delights: Economies and Cultures of Food in Ottoman and Danubian Europe, c. 1500-1900</i> (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 535 pp.
Author(s)	Carmichael, Cathie
Citation	<i>Acta Slavica Iaponica</i> , 42, 61-62
Issue Date	2021
DOI	https://doi.org/10.14943/ASI.42.61
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/84172
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	Acta42-06_BookReviews61-62.pdf



Angela Jianu and Violeta Barbu, eds., *Earthly Delights: Economies and Cultures of Food in Ottoman and Danubian Europe, c. 1500–1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 535 pp.

The contemporary world still benefits from an Ottoman and Danubian contribution to cuisine. Coffee, yoghurt, stuffed vegetables, pilaff rice dishes and kebabs are some more well-known examples. Readers of this book will discover many accounts of the way in which food cultures adapted and flourished over the centuries including the welcome arrival of turkey from the Americas to the palaces of Constantinople/Istanbul in the eighteenth century, where it eventually replaced the consumption of pigeon (p. 85). Tomato, another new world food, also seems to have displaced the traditional turmeric in sauces, reminding us that what seems “authentic” in food cultures is subject to frequent reinterpretation. The editors Angela Jianu and the late Violeta Barbu have brought together a wide variety of articles on the history of food in the post-medieval period up to the eve of the First World War. Divided into five distinct parts (on “Flavours, Tastes and Culinary Exchanges,” “Ingredients and Kitchen,” “Cities,” “Cooking” and “Representations,”) it offers detailed empirical investigations as well as new scholarship. The editors argue in their detailed introduction that “(o)n the world map of food history, the Balkans and South-East European cuisines represent a ‘new world’, only recently discovered and hardly explored” (p. 3).

Diversity, even eclecticism, is one of the real strengths of this book, as well as its transnational reach. Mária Pakucs-Willcocks considers the vibrant trade in spices such as saffron and pepper (pp. 299–230) in her chapter on Wallachia in the 1600s. There is detailed consideration of primary sources such as cookbooks, travel accounts (by Evliya Çelebi and Ami Boué) as well as economic and trade records. The first essay is an elegant contribution by Suraiya Faroqhi about the Early Modern Ottoman Empire which tackles the intriguing question as to why so little olive oil was consumed in this part of the Eastern Mediterranean at this time, despite the ubiquity of olive groves. She links the preference of Orthodox people for olives and dishes cooked in olive oil to meat-free days and fasting, rather than the more modern concern for health which has led to the rise in olive consumption in modern Turkey. Özge Samancı’s chapter on Istanbul also discusses the minimal use of olive oil for salad dressing and the preference instead for clarified butter (p. 84) as well as the growing French influence on cooking (p. 94). Gruel and porridges were frequently consumed as staple foods in South East Europe in historic times. In Violeta Barbu’s chapter about “food, fasting and feasting in Wallachia,” we learn about the seventeenth century introduction of polenta (*mămăligă*) and the eighteenth century imports of vermicelli and macaroni to the Romanian lands and the way in which the golden and versatile maize as well as wheat pasta became part of the staple diet, displacing the older habit of eating millet. We also learn from Barbu that “sea fruits” including “crabs, mussels, oysters, sea urchins, octopus, cuttlefish, and crustaceans (shrimps, langoustines, lobster)” (p. 243) were eaten by Orthodox monks who would otherwise have been obliged to avoid “meat” and to fast on lighter food, unlike the peasantry who appeared to have lived in a state of “bewildering frugality.” Travellers were an important primary source for cuisine and local variations of food cultures as well as remarks on music and decor. Like many English travellers before and since, John Paget commented on the “well-garlicked sausage” near Hunyad in his

1839 book (p. 417).

Food practices as an ethnic or religious boundary marker is an important theme throughout the book. If beer was consumed in or within the reach of the Habsburg regions of the Balkans, then sherbet was generally only found in Ottoman regions (p. 415), as Andrew Dalby argues in his chapter on food and hospitality in nineteenth century Transylvania. Bread and apples were given out as gifts after Ramadan to break the fast, and apples and nuts given as Christmas gifts in Romania (p. 121). Christians exchanged pork products such as sausages as gifts with family and relatives, a practice still found in the Balkans whereas Muslims eat beef products and variations of pastrami (p. 184). There is also an association between the Vlach peoples and the consumption of roast lamb. As in other part of Europe, it appears that the consumption of horse meat was rare (p. 173) resorted to only in times of scarcity and there was avoidance of (un-slaughtered) game and duck as “unclean meats” by Muslims as discussed in Anna Matthaïou’s fascinating chapter on 19th century Macedonia. Matthaïou’s chapter bursts with colour as she describes the use of capsicums in local cuisine: “the market gardens of Macedonia ... stand out for the abundance of... emblematic peppers of all varieties: red, yellow and green peppers, round, oblong or tomato-shaped peppers, sweet or hot ones (*tsoukes*), fresh or dried, red ones for stuffing (*bampkes*), small green skinny ones for pickling, as well as the fleshy Florina variety (*platikes*) for roasting” (p. 473). The reader will also discover about the reception of coffee in eighteenth century Moldavia and Wallachia, where some authorities worried about the excessive consumption of the powerful brew by children, as Olivia Sencuic argues. Balkan coffee (variously described as Turkish, Greek or Bosnian coffee) is now well-known for retaining parts of the grounds within the beverage (p. 139). We also learn from Sencuic that peasants generally avoided caffeine, preferring inns and taverns well into the nineteenth century. The final essay is a virtuoso piece on Jewish Tavern-Keepers and Antisemitic legends by Romanian historian Andrei Oișteanu.

Already a substantial book of over 500 pages, 16 illustrations, 1 map and a usefully detailed index, if anything I would have liked to have read even more especially about East-Central Europe and the Danubian worlds around Vienna and Budapest. This book is recommended to all regional specialists and has reach and significance beyond the relatively narrow confines of food history. I plan to dip into this as a source of reference many times and I look forward to the next volume.

CATHIE CARMICHAEL