

David Gentilcore, *Food and Health in Early Modern Europe: Diet, Medicine and Society, 1450-1800* (2016), 249 (Bloomsbury, London and New York, £19.99/\$34.95).

In this wide-ranging and engrossing book David Gentilcore explores changing fashions in early modern European food cultures. Drawing on a range of sources he reveals the ways in which medical writers sought to influence changing tastes, but ultimately adapted their theories to acquiesce to popular demand. He convincingly shows how the shift from Galenic medicine to iatrochemical and iatromechanical notions of the body changed food theory. The first two chapters chart the rise, fall, and rise of dietetics; from the Renaissance revival of Galenic medicine which fostered interest in preventative medicine, to the seventeenth-century rise of curative, particularly Paracelsian, medicines which diminished the role of dietetics, to the eighteenth-century resurgence when a new generation of medical men considered the importance of a natural diet that avoided luxury.

Gentilcore then examines the effect of wealth, and outlines the belief that the rich and poor were physiologically different. The refined bodies of the wealthy could not, therefore, properly digest the rugged food of the labouring man, and attempts to do so led to ill health. He argues that as regimen writers were increasingly distanced from court life they became more critical of courtly aristocratic consumption. Diets also varied according to location, as chapter four demonstrates. The beginnings of national stereotypes shaped by food choices can be discerned in this era. Galenic theory fuelled these ideas by emphasising that the food of one's birthplace was the most suitable for nourishing the body. Yet Galenic ideas only applied easily to the Mediterranean world resulting in an increasing tendency to give weight to experience and preference as well as medical theory.

Chapter five examines connections between religion and food. The Reformation removed strict rules about fasting in the face of corrupt practices that allowed the elites to substitute one luxury food for another during lent, but left poorer people without sustenance. This aligned with medical notions that fasting threatened God's creation by causing the body to consume itself in the absence of food. Chapter six reveals that vegetarianism was rarely advocated in this era, although some radical Protestant group moralised that people should avoid meat. But vegetables underwent a transformation. Initially seen as poor nourishment that had to be corrected with the use of hot spices over two hundred years they became a delicacy and then a fashionable food.

Chapter seven considers medical writers concerns about New World novelties. As diet had become localized the adoption of many new foods was complicated. Some did become popular staples, but often this was facilitated by comparing them to familiar foods –chili for example was compared to pepper. Others, like maize, initially entered the European diet as famine foods and animal feed, taking longer to be fully integrated. The book concludes by discussing drink. It shows that New World drinks gained in popularity over the era but alcohol always remained the main social drink of Europe. When introduced chocolate was praised as invigorating, particularly to the libido, but if drunk to excess was thought to induce obstructions. While coffee was praised for inducing lucidity, and could be drunk in public without fear of intoxication, matching new bourgeoisie views on productivity.

Gentilcore's book offers a comprehensive overview of thinking on food and drink in this era, and importantly covers source material from across Europe including England, France, Italy and Poland. It encourages scholars to remember that while food is fundamental part of human existence its consumption is shaped by evolving social, religious, and medical theories.

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