

chronological focus of this book. Unfortunately, this focus leads to a huge gap, from the mid-seventeenth century to the nineteenth, when many culinary changes occurred along with changes in vessels and flatware. It is hard to feel that the subtitle “from the Burgundian Dukes to the Belgian Royalty” is justified, considering this gap of almost two hundred important years.

Organized into a preface and two parts, “Dishes and Wines” and “The Organization of Festivities and the Selection of Guests,” *Dining Nobility* has thirteen chapters by eleven authors. Following a brief preface, Chapter 1 is, in effect, a second preface by the editors, who give a synoptic preview of coming attractions and offer analytical comments to define the volume’s themes of gastronomy and conviviality.

Sophie Onghena, the author of the FOST volume on desserts, contributes an essay on exoticism in nineteenth-century dessert culture, which is one of the most interesting for those not primarily interested in Belgian history. Although the author focuses on the Belgian upper classes, she does so with a much broader European brush, touching on the enthusiasm for exotic travel, architecture, and imported foods encountered elsewhere.

The use of the collection menus is responsible for much information, some repetitive, about the Belgian royalty and their meals at public functions, hunting, and elsewhere, including their participation as guests. An analysis of how much these menus differed from their counterparts in other European countries and, in fact, from important honorary American functions would be useful and would help the authors better define specifically Belgian characteristics while giving the work a broader context. While the menus make wonderful illustrations and supply us with some information on the wines and foods served, there is no attempt to compare them with those in other collections, such as the Buttolph collection at the New York Public Library, which has over twenty-five thousand examples from the same period.

For culinary historians, these essays provide some interesting nuggets, especially for those who read more than menu French, though most will not need to revisit the change to *service à la russe*. This volume should be looked on not as the sum of its parts, but for the details in its separate parts, read selectively, according to one’s own particular interests.

—Sarah Coffin, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, NY

*Arboreal Archeology: A Diary of Two Fruit Explorers*

Isabella and Livio Dalla Ragione

Translated by Cecilia Galiena

Perugia: ali&no editrice, 2008

151 pp. Illustrations. 14€ (paper)

Available at [www.fedcoseeds.com/trees.htm](http://www.fedcoseeds.com/trees.htm)

The adventures of plant hunter Livio Dalla Ragione in the abandoned farmsteads of Umbria and Tuscany have been reported in the Italian media for well over a decade and outside of Italy have come even to the notice of the American magazine *The New Yorker*. In 1997 Livio and his daughter (and fellow explorer) Isabella were able to tell their own story in *Archaeologia arborea: diario di due cercatori di piante*. But in a nation with many centuries of comedic tradition, it was all too easy for Italian journalists to caricature their pastime and the almost apologetic vocabulary of the book’s introduction as *una bizzarria rustica*, rather than recognizing their work as a valid, and useful, offering.

Livio’s and Isabella’s hobby of plant-hunting (the book’s English subtitle better describes it as “fruit exploring”) is more common and widely pursued than the urban public might believe. Committed individuals contribute to our fruit patrimony by searching out, identifying, and preserving our many varieties of fruit, both greater and lesser, from certain oblivion. Livio Dalla Ragione discovered that in Italy, as in the United States, there is no governmental repository with encyclopedic collections of the traditional apple and other fruit varieties of the countryside. Rather, the countryside itself is the repository, and as it degrades, so too does the collection. By comparison, the admirable French system of regional conservatories of traditional fruits and useful plants endeavors, with varying degrees of effectiveness, to preserve both the indigenous varieties and their folk uses in cuisine, husbandry, and industry.

Livio succumbed to the cult of fruit two decades after World War II when he purchased a ruined church in the area of Umbria bordering Tuscany. San Lorenzo in Lerchi was a hillside property, with many grapevines planted in *cultura promiscua*, that ancient art of training vines up fruit trees that allowed wheat to be grown between the rows. Livio’s trees were, for the most part, dead, but he wanted to restore the plantation—and the original varieties. This project required searching other near-abandoned sites, which by the early 1960s were common in Umbria.

And so an arboreal archaeologist was born. Livio would inquire of any sympathetic villager, Where are the old fruit trees? Abandoned monasteries were prime sources, but

private farms could yield a better harvest of both varieties and accounts of their traditional uses. After visits to both sides of the Tuscan-Umbrian border, Livio had collected several hundred fruit varieties and their histories. *Arboreal Archaeology* is chiefly his account, as recorded in his diary, of the individual varieties, their natural history, and how he encountered them (hence the title of the Italian original). He eventually propagated nearly all of the varieties and added them to the orchard at S. Lorenzo.

The present book is an embellishment of the 1997 original, the passage of time having afforded the authors a more mature reflection upon their work, as well as an update on particular fruit varieties that they believed had been lost. This is encouraging news. Over the intervening decade Livio and Isabella were able to cover more territory and interview more landowners than they had for the first edition. The illustrations of each of the outstanding varieties they found make an important contribution to the record of the traditional fruits of Italy.

A countryside that has been cultivated for two millennia necessarily yields up many and diverse local fruits and makes for a big assignment. But there is something unique about fruit exploring in Italy: the court of the Medici, never far from its native soil, delighted in fruits, and for over two centuries commissioned the greatest documentation of fruit varieties in the history of horticulture. Soderini, Micheli, Trinci, de Crescenzi, and above all Mattioli, all patronized by the Medici, form the foundation of fruit science, and the family commissioned the earliest translations of Theophrastus, Cato, Varro, and Columella into a modern tongue. Most outstanding of all are the immense oil paintings depicting some thousands of fruits grown in the several Medici properties around Florence, which Cosimo III ordered Bartolomeo Bimbi to produce (they are now at the Pitti Palace and the Museo Botanico dell'Università). All of these sources are available to fruit explorers there; we in the States have nothing like that.

Some of the fruits Livio found will be recognized in this country (Kadota fig, Vicar of Winkfield pear) while many others are new even to those who live not far from their place of discovery. The orchard at S. Lorenzo remains today, but additions are now fewer and less frequent. The Italian countryside is much emptier of fruits now than when Livio began his collection; fruit trees do not survive their owners forever. Along with the farmers who chose a life of subsistence farming, the farms and fruit trees are also now gone.

Livio died in 2007. Isabella continues to hunt for fruits.

—C. Todd Kennedy, Esq., San Francisco

*Edible Ideologies: Representing Food & Meaning*

Edited by Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato

Albany: State University of New York, 2008

xiv + 252 pp. Illustrations. \$24.95 (paper)

In their introduction to *Edible Ideologies* the volume's editors make a recurrent assertion about hegemonic power and challenges to it—for instance, “representations produce both power and pleasure. . . . representations actively *produce* cultural sensibilities and the possibility of transgression” (p.2).

Well, I'm tempted to reply, maybe yes, maybe no. To assume that wherever power appears, resistance automatically arises is to forestall analysis before it starts. Putting it bluntly, the problem with power is that it pretty much is everywhere, while the problem with resistance is that it can pretty much be *imagined* to be everywhere. Despite the editors' declaration a few pages in that French philosopher Michel Foucault serves “as a theoretical guide throughout the book” (p.3), their contrast of “repressive power” and “opportunities for pleasure” is not Foucauldian. Pointedly, Foucault himself, in his classic *History of Sexuality*, strongly critiqued conceptions of power as repressive: for him, power was productive of pleasures, and that explained how power pulled ordinary social subjects into its web, making adherence to it seem desirable and fun. In specific instances power may in fact *cultivate* “opportunities for pleasure,” all the better to discipline them (which is not the same as repressing them).

Thus, in *Edible Ideologies*, Kathleen Banks Nutter's essay on chocolate chronicles a shift in advertising from sweets as something offered by women to others (a beau, for instance) to something consumed lasciviously by oneself, thereby pinpointing a new twist in the dynamics of power, whereby collective advancement (of women) actually becomes a narcissism of individualized, isolated enjoyments. Likewise, Jean P. Retzinger's contribution on the rhetoric of healthiness in ads for chain restaurants' salad bowls shows how such ads invoke a strong and hip consumer, though at the cost of exploitation—for example, African American women are often depicted in such ads as the epitome of Cool and thereby exoticized.

Indeed, a number of the essays in *Edible Ideologies* suggest that in cases where they empower the consumer, food representations do so by disempowering others. Thus, the exoticism that Retzinger trenchantly uncovers in the salad-bowl ads compares to the invocation of Sephardic cuisine that Eric Mann pinpoints in new Jewish cookbooks that mythologize Sephardi culinary practices as proto-global counter-representations of bland and backward-looking