

that John's charity and almsgiving went beyond what might "conventionally" be expected of a king. Particularly striking are the alms given to small nunneries and solitary religious.

John's reputation as a king who lacked respect for religion rests in part on the long period during which England was under interdict (1208–1214) and John himself was excommunicated (1209–1213). Without special pleading, Webster unpicks the documentary sources to highlight not only how John's reputation has been shaped by the negative stories told by chroniclers but also his dilemma during the events surrounding the election of an archbishop of Canterbury to succeed Hubert Walter—on whom he had relied so greatly—that led to the breakdown in relations with Rome. In seeking to have an archbishop of Canterbury acceptable to the king, he was following in the footsteps of his predecessors. Henry I had exiled Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury; John's own father was held by many to have ordered the murder of Thomas Becket. Yet—and Webster argues that this is a crucial difference—they lived long enough after these events for their reputations to recover: "King John died during the crises generated by his rule" (172), and he did not live long enough to repair the damage done to relations with the church. It was these circumstances that forged his obituary and his reputation, all the other expressions of his religiosity forgotten.

Some of the topics treated in *King John and Religion* have, naturally, already received much scholarly attention. However, others—notably those manifestations of personal religiosity or expressions of religious sentiment that are so difficult to uncover—receive sustained treatment for the first time here. Webster has offered us new insights into John's rule, as well as a fresh perspective on such matters as John's "exploitation" of the church through taxation and the complexities of his relations with Rome. He has produced a wide-ranging and detailed study on which he is to be congratulated.

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C. M. WOOLGAR. *The Culture of Food in England, 1200–1500*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. Pp. xiii, 341. \$45.00 (cloth).  
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C. M. Woolgar's broad survey, *The Culture of Food in England, 1200–1500*, covers both a basic aspect of survival and the elaborate world of ceremony and ostentation constructed in and around the kitchens and tables of those who have left most of the extant records. He focuses on late medieval England, where the specter of scarcity (and famine) was real and where the basic ritual of religious observance was the ingestion of the host at the mass.

Woolgar follows two lines of discussion. One the "what" of foods—what was available in the realms of meat, fish, products of field and orchard, and, more exotically, spices, high-quality wines, and such luxury foods as oranges and lemons. The other is how these foods were prepared and served: recipes and household manuals, menus of great feasts and banquets, regular meals and mealtimes as delineated in regulations covering aristocratic and episcopal households, and records of and receipts from guild dinners. One theme that Woolgar drives home is the power of aspiration, or what we might call a trickle-down effect of cuisine and the drive toward emulation: the peasantry and urban poor were eager to follow their social superiors in patterns of choice and consumption.

Given Woolgar's long-established expertise on great households and their foods, we have come to expect that he will have tapped vast range of sources. Not only does he range through more than three hundred years and cover the kingdom from one corner to another, but his dip into many different sources allows him to offer a comparative assessment of variety, custom, and change, as well as the pleasures and the risks of the food world. His

accounts of accidents related to the preparation of food, such as those scalded by heavy pots of liquid or those who fell while in a fruit tree, vie with the details of the high wages offered to sought-after cooks, men who were wooed in a fashion comparable to the pursuit of free-agent athletes in our day.

What did people of the day actually eat and drink? The many types of food that Woolgar covers in chapters 3 through 6 are presented with a concern for their socioeconomic setting and the cost of labor and of stocking the larder. Food was a daily business: a small breakfast, perhaps the big meal at midday, a medieval equivalent of “tea” for the later hours—all to be readied for numbers that could run from the nuclear family to a vast congregation of guests, retainers, and servants. The demand, and decisions about how to meet it, never ended: Was it easier for a household to make its own dough or to use a bakehouse? Who supervised butchers and their activity, and how was it determined whether it was better to slaughter livestock in the countryside or to drive living animals toward London (and having to feed them on the way)? The *Paston Letters* are rich in references to the special values and opportunities of London shopping. Sauces were a mark of a sophisticated table, with honey and sugar and all sorts of other ingredients going into their preparation. At least fruits and vegetables were homegrown, more accessible across the social scale, with availability less dependent on exorbitant pricing and the vagaries of the import trade.

One qualification that Woolgar offers about his broad survey—which could almost serve as a reference book—concerns the bias and limitations of the sources. We know much more about what went on at the upper rungs of the social and economic ladder than we can determine about life and food and eating farther down. Aping one’s betters is understandable but not always possible. The eight tables that Woolgar offers, based on his study of household books, inventories, and special menus, speak to annual levels of consumption, what implements and tableware were at the ready for the occasion, and what food one might expect to be served and how (for example, on trenchers at a civic or aristocratic banquet). For this material Woolgar turns to records from Norwich Cathedral Priory (the annual consumption of sugar and the like); the vast inventory of the household of the bishop of Winchester (for example, 72 ells of napery for his tables); the extensive household of Queen Philippa (thirty-two silver saucers “signed with the letter P” among the scores and scores of cups and plates listed). Obviously, we know much less when we move away from the wealthy, whether in a secular or religious setting. What is also of interest is that we know much less about some very basic areas of diet and cooking, such as the world of dairy products, “white meat” that, whether as milk or cheese, played a real, if un-measurable, part in both preparation and consumption. Since great households drew much of their daily supplies from their own manors, we have relatively few records covering their price, quantity, and transportation. Furthermore, while Woolgar does his best to keep an eye on the gender of those involved, at all levels, from housewives and brewsters to sous-chefs in the great kitchens, women do not get their due in the kinds of records that survive.

*The Culture of Food* can serve as an introduction to an area of historiography now of considerable interest. It can also be used to advantage by those already versed in the field. To add to its “user-friendly” features, the book includes a table of weights and measures and a glossary. The thirty-two illustrations take us from a fourteenth-century illumination of the Last Supper to the brass of a cider maker and his wife in Hereford and on to the great abbot’s kitchen at Glasstonbury. In sum, Woolgar’s desire to present a study that introduces us to “the experience of day to day” is well realized.

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