Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, eds. *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550–1800.*

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Recipe books have not hitherto received the attention they deserve, yet they are important historical documents as well as being records of what and how people might have cooked. As the introduction to this fine collection of interdisciplinary essays points out, recipe books — such as the seventeenth-century collection by Lady Ann Fanshawe — can tell us much about attitudes to disease as well as providing evidence of social connections. They also allow us to explore the issue of authorship, the role of publishers and printers, and the book as physical object.

The collection's essays are typically divided into sections, although it would have been useful if all had contained a concluding section summing up each essay's findings. Michelle DiMeo sets the tone for the rest of the collection by focusing on the broader social context of early modern manuscript recipe books via two case studies from seventeenth-century collections in the British Library, one by Lady Katherine Ranelagh and one by the Brockman family. Ranelagh's collection was probably written out by a man (it reveals evidence of secretary hand, which women were not taught), and the collection tells us that most of Ranelagh's social contacts were beneath her in rank, coming from members of the lower gentry, which suggests that "medical authority was not undermined by social status" (31). However, this doesn't give the full picture because Ranelagh's letters indicate that her social network was primarily elite. DiMeo thus highlights how wary the scholar must be when using such collections as evidence of social networks.

The Brockman collection contains recipes by a grandmother and granddaughter and while the older woman appears to write with a readership in mind, the younger presents a more personal document. Anne Gray considers what these collections can tell us about material culture, for example the objects required for cooking and even what the kitchen might have looked like. Francisco Alonso-Almeida takes

a linguistic approach, surveying twenty-nine print and manuscript English-language recipe books from 1600 to 1800 in order to consider changes over time, such as form and word use.

Gilly Lehmann notes a historical shift in patterns for using various foodstuffs, and, staying true to the collection's interdisciplinary trajectory, traces the way in which cookery could be a kind of art. Jayne Elisabeth Archer considers what she terms "the creative potential of the recipe" (120) and how writing recipes encouraged women to write poetry; Lauren F. Winner's focus is on "lived religion," the recipe book providing a record of religious practices such as fasting during Lent. Margaret J. M. Ezell surveys the books attributed to Hannah Woolley and the problem of author-centered criticism, suggesting that the claim that Woolley's *Gentlewoman's Companion* was actually authored by a male hack writer — Elaine Hobby "aggressively challenged the attribution in 1995" (168) — is unconvincing when compared with Gilly Lehmann's persuasive argument that there are many similarities between this work and Woolley's *The Queen Like Closet*.

Alun Withey provides a fascinating insight into medical recipe collections in early modern Wales; these collections were compiled by men and women and reveal "a lively culture of recipe exchange" (194–95) between English and Welsh compilers and an increasing use of English words. Anne Stobart shows that medical recipes gathered by the Boscawen family of Cornwall for curing sores and swellings, commonly termed the king's evil, reveal the family to be typical of many Protestants in avoiding reference to the condition being cured by the royal touch; criticism of medical advice given by doctors also indicates the degree to which practical experience took precedence over intellectual authority. The final essay in the collection, by Sara Pennell, considers four eighteenth-century recipe books, tracing what they can tell us about biography, authorship, and family history.

Anyone interested in writings about food knows that they are almost never just about food but also signal historical and cultural phenomena; this superb collection makes a valuable contribution to food history. It should appeal to students and scholars at all levels, and, since it is written in a scholarly yet accessible style, it should appeal also to the educated, nonspecialist reader. It is an essential addition to any library and a must read for anyone interested in food, history, and culture. Its interdisciplinary focus is especially appealing.

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