IV. BOOK REVIEWS

From the Heart to the Mind, Through the Stomach. A Review of Donald Phillip Verene's *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well: Philosophical and Historical Reflections on Food and Dining in Culture*, ibidem Press, 2018, 120 pp., $25, ISBN: 9783838211985.

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In his preface, Donald Verene states that "two things distinctive to human culture are the development of language and the cooking of food."[1] As someone born and raised in Italy, this definitely resonates in both my mind and my heart — not to mention my stomach, especially given that a common saying in my native South Tyrol states that "*Liab geat durch'n Mågn.*"[2]

Verene points out that food and medicine were deeply interconnected since the beginning of history, and a true philosophy focused on the understanding, prevention, and treatment of illnesses cannot overlook this aspect. But the author goes further, connecting these elements to Tradition, often with a capital "T," particularly in the Greco-Roman sense. Therefore, a recipe is both medical and gastronomic, in the sense that it contains all the relevant ingredients for specific effects. What makes this book very interesting is that the author is able to navigate through ancient authors such as Galen, Plato, Plutarch, Athenaeus, Apicius, Lucullus, Seneca, Cicero, Pliny, Petronius, all the way to Artusi (*Buon gusto e buona salute*),[3] Brillat-Savarin,[4] Lévi-Strauss (and

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1 Donald Phillip Verene, *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well: Philosophical and Historical Reflections on Food and Dining in Culture* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2018), 8.

2 South Tyrolean for "The way to the heart is through the stomach."

3 Connected to the more ancient "food for thought and food for the body," as well as to *Buon pro* (p. 22) *vs*. the not necessarily antithetical, but contrastive, *Pro Bono*.

4 In particular, regarding French cuisine, as well as in connection to kinetic and katastematic pleasures of Epicurean origin.

many others) and even the author's personal, decade-long experience living and dining in Florence, *La culla del Rinascimento Italiano*.[5]

Furthermore, Verene uses an appropriate narrative-historical style that guides the reader through multiple philosophical descriptions, starting from the Promethean myth, and linking it to the works of Vico and Eliade. Verene summarizes the connection between gods and men, in relation to the "shared power of fire," by describing the four main elements contained therein — farming (the *Giganti*), transmutation (potters-smiths-alchemists), cooking/baking (sacrifice),[6] and a second level of transmutation, namely boiling water (thus including seasoning and condiments).

In this sense, Verene's book is a true "Symposium," a gathering and *drinking party for deipnosophists* following a philosophical banquet,[7] in four acts — "Introduction," "The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men," "The Learned Banqueters," and "The Cookbook: Apicius and Artusi" (Chapters 1 through 4). We perceive this in the very precise analysis of the mythological-psychoanalytic components of dining, where archetypes play a fundamental role (in the triadic sense Jung-Evola-Eliade) and are transferred/transmitted/translated/transmuted[8] through "the unique ability of the human being to be an *archmime*."[9]

This book is not only about the interpretive analysis of cooking in relation to philosophy. It also provides historical evidence of the evolution of customs from Roman and pre-Roman times (for instance, the *aqua et igni* ceremonies and sacred ablutions in general), as well as the organizational aspects such as place, time, number of diners and (fixed, as discussed by Bugialli) order of courses.[10] In this regard, one of my

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5 "The cradle of the Italian Renaissance."

6 Verene points out that ancient cooks were "in charge of both wedding feasts and sacrifices" and "[h]umans are the only animals who cook and hence the only animals who eat rather than feed."

7 Thus also referring to the Roman-Latin "Life of the Party" counterpart, the *Convivium*.

8 In this sense, the author appropriately describes the semantic-syntactic component of cooking and eating, from the symbol to the (dia)logos of discourse-dialectic.

9 Donald Phillip Verene, *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well*, op. cit., 19, emphasis added.

10 Some very interesting anecdotes are mentioned in the book as well. They further prove Verene's knowledge and love of Italian culture and tradition, such as demonstrating the full Italian autochthonous origin of pasta, spaghetti, and modern forks.

favorite statements in the book is this: "There is no national tradition of eating or cooking that justifies stacked food."[11] From a native Italian standpoint, one must say that Verene knows the "*do*s" and "*don't*s" of the Italian *Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well*… very well.

The book continues by describing the relation between food and chemistry (starting from its ancient sister, alchemy)[12] all the way to clinical recommendations, which perfectly fit modern integrative-complementary-alternative medicine, particularly in connection to nutrition and gastro-intestinal *vs*. neuro-endocrine processes. This is particularly relevant, because Verene's attempt to combine mind and body in his discourse around cooking and eating is corroborated (I would say: justified, or even proven) by scientific peer-reviewed research in the field. Moreover, this connection is also found in general health, where "general" stands for the *triple p* "public, policy, politics." This quasi-epigenetic framework serves to illustrate statements such as: "The acquisition of taste, like the acquisition of knowledge, requires leisure."[13] Thus, *The Science of Cookery and the Art of Eating Well* does a good job at providing evidence for good conversations in both the private and the public sphere, which in turn lead to good politics, manners, morals, and economics (especially in Chapters 2 and 3).

Certainly, some might disagree with Verene on the exact level (read: percentage or prevalence) of impact that eating and cooking might have on the areas above. Some might even argue that the author presents a semi-utopian (or at least anachronistic) view of this impact in modernity. However, given that some of the author's intent is precisely captured by the subtitle, "Philosophical and Historical Reflections on Food and Dining in Culture," we beg to differ.

These considerations are further clarified in the metaphysical component of this type of philosophical reflection. Verene writes, with reference to Plutarch, Thales and Solon, in "The Dinner of the Seven Wise

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[11] Op. cit., p. 28. Similarly and precisely, Verene also writes that "[s]tacked food, processed food, and fast food form a continuum" (ibid.), although he is willing to also list some of the positive aspects of heart foods such as *Eintopfgerichte*, described in Chapter 4 (p. 104).

[12] It is worth to note that alchemy is connected to the ancestral-archetypical *formae mentis* of the Greco-Roman concept of proportion.

[13] Op. cit., p. 35

Men," that the body is not only fed, but nourished through culture — in this sense linking again *cultus* and agriculture, as in the Italian *cultura e coltura*, which, we might say is the true (innermost and real) combination of "nature and nurture." Verene cites Thales's claim that "God as mind or spirit is in the world as the soul is in the human body," and Anacharsis: "For the body is the soul's instrument, and the soul is God's instrument."[14] This brings us back to the intrinsic value of a recipe, which is both a list of ingredients as well as the proper sequence of a ritual, of a sacrifice. To *in*struct means to arrange, to build, to *con*struct, and that is the value of conviviality, which is also *Gemütlichkeit*, it is *Сабур*, which in turn is directly derived from ربص, but also (in this case folk etymology should be considered "evidence-based when dining with friends") connected to *sapere e sapore*,[15] where wisdom and taste are deeply intertwined.

Eating and cooking are true mirrors of life in Verene's book; they reflect upon life itself, they are spectators and spectacles of desires, wishes, wants, cravings, appetites, and everything within and everything without. Morals and ethics are ultimately better understood through the stomach, an altar to/of the body. This perspective is certainly not new, especially if we consider all the theoretical, empirical, and laboratory-based knowledge around embodied cognition, but in this book by Verene... it *tastes* so much better!

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[14] Ibid., p. 53

[15] As well as, of course, *density* and *thickness/tastiness*, *gustare and tastare (denso e gustoso)*, *гъстo* and *вкус*, *saving and savory*, *healthy* and *healing*, *wholesome*, etc.