Franciscan Values in Spanish Culinary Culture: From Eiximenis to Altamiras

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Abstract: The Franciscan friars of early modern Spain fulfilled their commitment to “holy poverty” through mendicant food sourcing and a complementary nutritional regime (Speed and Wright, 1985, p. 1). Their food sourcing, which relied on kitchen gardening, donations of food alms and limited purchases made with funds from institutional and individual patronage, followed defined codes of practice and was often documented in friary accounts. However, when it came to cookery there were few or no rules. Even novitiates’ doctrinal handbooks covering every other area of everyday life, including refectory manners, left the subject of cookery untouched. Spanish Franciscan cooks instead followed simple principles drawn from medieval philosophical writings, most notably the avoidance of complex spicing, while the order’s Statutes defined three Lents and obliged the friars to respect local abstinence and fasting practises. Reforms within the order sought “a visible alignment” between friary eating and the diet of the poor (Yungman, 2014, unpublished), but published commentary was limited to the writings of individual Spanish friary authors who explored their own ideas for configuring diet to express humility. This tradition of early modern Franciscan food writing, largely unremarked, may be traced from Francesc Eiximenis’s late fifteenth century pedagogic texts on food and wine in Lo Crestià (Eiximenis and Gracia, 1977) to Juan Altamiras’s 1745 recipe collection entitled Nuevo arte de cocina, which became the most frequently reprinted Spanish cookbook of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Altamiras and Hayward, 2017). This paper suggests that a close reading of Nuevo arte set against the longer tradition of Spanish friary food writing reveals the extent to which his appropriation of Altamiras’s recipes, which carried them into the wider Spanish repertoire accompanied by a direct critique of the food of the powerful as unnecessarily extravagant. It is no surprise, then, that historian Serrano Larráyoz has argued perceptively of eighteenth-century Franciscan recipes, “while one cannot note any particular rupture with earlier cookery, in truth it could not but happen since the friary kitchen is ... so closely related to popular cookery” (2008, p. 175).

About the author

Vicky Hayward grew up in England and trained as a cook before studying history at the University of Cambridge. Her interest in social and cultural history shaped her work as a book editor and features writer in London, and in 1990 her writing about Spanish food and travel essays brought her to Madrid. Features for the international press since then have covered food culture and areas of the arts, in particular flamenco, while her travel writing includes essays on food and place, and three pocket guides. During the 1990s her interests in history and food came together,
and in 2016 she finished her translation and modern retelling of *New Art of Cookery, Drawn From the School of Economic Experience*, a groundbreaking eighteenth-century book of popular Spanish cookery written by Juan Altamiras, a Franciscan lay friar from southern Aragon.

Works Cited


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