



1-1-2008

Food and the City in Europe since 1800 by Peter J. Atkins, Peter Lummel, Derek J. Oddy, (eds.)

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Recommended Citation

Albala, K. (2008). Food and the City in Europe since 1800 by Peter J. Atkins, Peter Lummel, Derek J. Oddy, (eds.). *Agricultural History Review*, 56(1), 118–119.

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ELVIS MALLORQUÍ (ed.), *Toponímia, paisatge i cultura. Els noms de lloc des de la lingüística, la geografia i la història* (Universitat de Girona, Documenta Universitaria, 2006). 183 pp., 26 figs. €17.31.

In this nicely produced and useful little book, based on short papers presented to a conference at the University of Girona in 2004, researchers with backgrounds in linguistics, geography, history and sociology, debate the importance of rural place names in Catalonia (north-east Spain) for the point of view of their own academic disciplines. As the historian Elvis Mallorquí points out in his tidily written introductory essay, toponymy, defined by the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as 'the place names of a country or district as a subject of study', can provide invaluable information for both amateur and professional investigators on the evolution of a particular locality over the centuries. In particular, considerable emphasis is placed on the original significance of names, on subsequent changes and, in a number of cases their disappearance. Some place names are fairly self-explanatory (for instance rocks, ravines or mountains), some descriptive (mills and monuments), whilst others make little or no apparent sense.

According to Ramon Amigó, the doyen of Catalan toponymists, it was not until the 1970s that studies of place names were first carried out in the Principality, mostly covering the south of the region, above all the wine growing area of the Priorat (Tarragona). While many of these accounts were based on archival research, others were derived from oral evidence including interviews with peasant farmers, shepherds, fishermen. Place names on the region's maps, he tells us, are often far from reliable. Even so, by Amigó's reckoning, such studies, published in a variety of sources, cover no more than ten per cent of Catalan municipalities: hence the urgent need for further research, not least in the under-researched province of Girona. In his own contribution, Mallorquí pays tribute to the English secondary school teacher John Field whose pioneering work *English Field-Names* (1972) demonstrated how men and women perceived a particular territory over time and how the latter supported a succession of social practices. Mallorquí then uses local place names, found in seigniorial ledgers (*capbreus*), in an attempt to reconstruct the Catalan landscape during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Such a source, he argues, provides much detailed information on such topics as crop types (e.g. beans), land use (meadows) or economic activity (mills). By consulting similar sources for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when viticulture took off in the Principality, he also shows how, at this stage, the names of cereals were frequently replaced by those of vines.

The study of rural place names south of the Pyrenees

is clearly in its infancy, and often takes the form of amateur enthusiasts compiling lengthy alphabetical lists. This valuable little pocket book, with its exhaustive bibliography, informative maps and excellent photographic illustrations may go some way to further the progress of a sadly neglected area of research.

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PETER J. ATKINS, PETER LUMMEL and DEREK J. ODDY (eds), *Food and the city in Europe since 1800* (Ashgate, 2007). xvi + 260 pp., 14 tables, 6 figs. £55.

For a collection of essays drawn from conference proceedings, this volume hangs together remarkably well. With the exception of only a few articles in the final sections, this book aptly traces practically all the important issues regarding food supply in the past two centuries in a fascinating range of European locales. We are taken to Berlin and Paris, London and Barcelona, Brussels and Bordeaux, Oslo and Prague. We are introduced to problems of supply and distribution, the battles over conflicting jurisdictions in food safety, arguments over nutritional theory, the replacement of small shops with supermarkets, the impact of exotic and immigrant food, and cultural issues of consumption. In a nutshell, this book traces everything that has gone wrong with food in the modern era, and why. Rather than an overarching theoretical summary of the history, this is a series of concise snapshots that bring into close focus the problems and processes that constitute the greatest transformation of the human diet since the Neolithic Revolution. The details are not always surprising, but they inform in a way that most food histories with their broad brushstrokes never manage to accomplish. Here are the results of meticulous research which will someday be used to paint a more complete picture of how we got into this mess in the first place.

Admittedly, the articles do not always depict a bleak picture. There are bright spots, just as there are some very good things about the way we eat today. Food is undoubtedly safer, we know more about nutrition, while famines are a thing of the past, at least in Europe. There are a wide range of affordable and interesting ingredients, good restaurants, and a thriving 'foodie' culture. But somehow, the problems, particularly those in the first half of the book still seem to confound us. We still suffer serious food scares and problems with adulteration. The public is still confused about what constitutes a health-promoting diet. Our food still travels great distances, and its price is still inflated mostly by superfluous handling, packaging, advertising, marketing and retailing. And of course there are still gross inequities in food accessibility, not merely among social classes within Europe, but

around the world. Many of these articles, unwittingly perhaps, provide a stern caveat for developing nations: learn from the mistakes of European cities. The book is entirely historical in scope, but its implications are timeless for the modern era.

It would be impossible to summarize the contents, but a few examples should illustrate the strengths of this collection. Peter Atkins discusses the structural and institutional differences in Paris and London after 1850 and how the two cities differed in managing their food supply. The role of the state in urban planning, the desire to allow free trade, and even differences between Covent Garden and English street vendors and Les Halles and fixed retail shops, explain how these two food cultures diverged. Corinna Treitel focuses on German physiologist Max Rubner to show how nutritional theory interacted with state policy in dealing with the urban poor. Peter Scholliers examines Belgian legislation in the great era of food fraud, detailing the actors' motivations, and how advanced chemical technologies changed the very definition of adulteration. Derek Oddy reveals the fascinating interplay among rival agencies in London dealing with analysis of food for safety, and how public demand for pure food influenced legislation. Alessandro Stanziani takes a similar look at Paris and the administrative problems of laboratories testing food clashing with other experts in assessing food quality with very different criteria. Vera Heirholzer shows how grass roots efforts to ensure food safety were co-opted by the government in late nineteenth-century Germany, a story which would be replayed many times in the next century right down to the present. The Dutch dairy industry and the impact of canned condensed milk is examined in an article by Adel den Hartog, again evoking *déjà vu* for readers who are accustomed to seeing products sold with explicit health claims while dangers are carefully left off labels. Jukka Gronow details the bizarre ideological inconsistencies in Soviet food culture, embracing both grim workers canteens and opulent department stores and restaurants for elite consumers. Peter Lummel's article on German supermarkets is a concise account of how and why food retail changed in the twentieth century, a process that of course is still under way. Final contributions detail foreign food in Amsterdam, immigrant cuisines in London, efforts at natural food reform beginning in the nineteenth century (which are certainly still in process, even though the definition of natural keeps shifting), plus another article by Virginie Amilien on how social classes in Oslo maintained distinction in culinary terms. The twentieth chapter by Isabelle Téhoueyres offers a fascinating discussion on the emergence of open air markets in Bordeaux, and their role as an elite or tourist leisure activity.

This collection provides not only some extremely interesting studies of the difficulties in feeding cities well, but a fascinating glimpse of the roots of problems with which we still grapple.

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ROBERT DAVIES (ed.), *Letters from an American Farmer, Hector de Crèvecoeur* (Serendipity, 2006). xii + 85 pp. £7.95.

This volume contains a series of extracts from a minor classic of eighteenth-century American literature. Originally published in England in 1782, the *Letters* were a much larger, more amorphous work, ostensibly describing rural life in Pennsylvania in the preceding decade, through the eyes of an 'American farmer'. They covered a wide range of topics, from descriptions of the realities of mixed farming in the middle colonies, the home-spun rural economy, prospects for new settlers, the flora and fauna of the region, and some contrasting observations about other areas, such as Nantucket in the north, and Charleston in the south.

However, while these were based largely on the author's experiences, there was more literary artifice in de Crèvecoeur's account than first meets the eye, as the editor's very helpful introduction makes clear. For a start, he was hardly the typical 'American farmer', in whose name he wrote. His name was Michel-Guillaume St Jean de Crèvecoeur. He had spent a year with English relatives in Wiltshire learning English, before leaving for the French army in Canada in 1755. There he fought against the British, until he was wounded in 1759, after which he made for New York. He took up tenant farming, became a British subject in 1765, and eventually bought land in southern New York colony, near the Pennsylvania border. He lived there, with his wife, family, and several slaves, until 1779. By this time, the War of Independence had forced him to choose sides, and he offered (tacit) support to the Loyalists. He returned to France in 1780, became an American citizen in 1783, and returned to New York as the French Consul-General until 1790, when he returned to France for good.

Similarly, while his vivid, direct descriptions of rural life were undoubtedly based on his own experience, they also conform to contemporary literary genres. The letters privileged bucolic American 'self-reliance', over corrupting, metropolitan consumption and dissipation. They epitomize 'Enlightenment' attitudes to man as the arbiter and improver of nature. They idealize the home-making wife, the 'noble savage' and contrast the docile subordination of the black slave in the northern colonies, with the cruelties of the southern 'slave' colonies. In this respect, it is easy to understand why no less a