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

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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.

JOSEPH HARRISON
University of Manchester

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 how we got into this mess in the first place. 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 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
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.

KEN ABAHA
University of the Pacific


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 Crévecoeur’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 Crévecoeur. 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 epitomise ‘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