especially in his ability to situate each person, each object, and each thought in its various milieus. And what an adventure it is for the reader as Cook skilfully captains us across the globe. We sail with the traders of the East India Company out to Batavia and back, and botanize with the physician Jacobus Bontius in Java. We chase butterflies and caterpillars with Maria Sybilla Merian in Surinam, follow Dr Willem ten Rhijne to far-off Japan, and accompany the physician Willem Piso to Brazil. But the story is also grounded (often literally!) in Europe: in the *hortus botanicus* in Leiden, in the sojourns of Descartes in the Low Countries, and in the politics of the Dutch Republic. The range of topics Cook successfully integrates into his analysis is breath-taking and if the reader is sometimes left a little breathless, he or she also feels that the effort pays great dividends.

Medicine and natural history were the "big sciences" of the early modern period and medical men play a particularly consequential role here. Many new philosophers trained as physicians, travelled to distant lands, and compiled natural history tomes. Cook devotes a goodly percentage of his pages to analysing their several roles in "matters of exchange". While some physicians, such as Georg Stahl, never abandoned a search for the ways in which God controlled the physical world and still "went far in their speculations" (p. 409), many others did not. Physicians like Herman Boerhaave did not turn their backs on reason, despite dethroning her. She became instead a handmaiden to new goddesses: Observation, Experience, and Experiment. Boerhaave, like Thomas Sydenham, privileged scrutiny over speculation. This shift worked the real revolution in medicine and natural philosophy: one no longer sought wisdom or knowledge for its own sake, but rather knowledge for its practical applicability.

For far too long affairs of business and commerce have been shoved off to the margins of historical writing. The "money-grubbing" merchants of the Dutch Republic (or other commercial centres) have often been stereotyped as philistines little interested in "pure" knowledge (if such ever existed) and singularly uncurious about anything that did not enrich them. Cook explodes these myths and places the man of exchange (admittedly not necessarily the man of commerce or business) at the heart of European intellectual life. It is a brilliant insight and his book is an important achievement. Admittedly, readers may sometimes feel overwhelmed by the wealth of information or a little baffled by what seem extraneous (if always engrossing) details. One might also quibble that Cook perhaps overplays practicality as the driving force behind the desire to know and perhaps underestimates the role of wonder or curiosity. Such tiny gnats of criticism, however, in no way detract from what is a strikingly good and strikingly original scholarly accomplishment, as well as a beautifully produced and reasonably priced volume.

Mary Lindemann,
University of Miami

Joan Thirsk, *Food in early modern England: phases, fads, fashions, 1500–1760*, London and New York, Hambledon Continuum Press, 2007, pp. xx, 396, £37.99, $65.00 (hardback 978-1-85285-538-3).

Food in early modern England is a nuanced and exhaustive study of food habits and changes in food consumption in England between 1500–1750. Drawing on an array of sources that includes food writers, probate records, diaries, cookery books, literary figures, and household management and husbandry guides, Thirsk focuses on the meticulous detail of what, exactly, the English ate and drank in this period.

Thirsk's aims are threefold: to acquaint the reader with the diversity of foods in early modern England and thereby counter the idea that earlier diets were monotonous; to demonstrate regional and class variation in foods eaten; and to present both early modern food fads and gradual overall changes to England's diet. Throughout the book, she makes an effort to give all of these subjects considerable weight. Thus *Food in early modern England*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300002404 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is structured both chronologically and topically. The first seven chapters present gradual trends in food use in fifty-year periods from 1500–1760. Chapter 8 focuses on regional and social patterns of diet, and Chapter 9 gives a "closer look" at a number of different food types: bread, meat, fowl and eggs, fish, dairy foods, vegetables and herbs, fruit, drinks, and condiments and spices.

Thirsk argues that the English diet was far from monotonous even at the beginning of the period under consideration, but she also presents a lucid story of England's gradual inundation with new foods. This transition happened relatively quickly in London and other busy ports and far more slowly in rural, inland regions, but the steady influx of new foodstuffs spread widely. Traders' importation of foreign foods is only part of the story: travellers also introduced unfamiliar eating habits to England, such as the Italian fashion of dressing salad leaves with olive oil and vinegar. Many new trends made use of existing resources. Butter and cheese, for example, were not eaten widely in England until travellers observed their ubiquity in Germany and the Low Countries. Gardening became a fad in aristocratic circles in the sixteenth century, leading to the cultivation of both foreign and domestic fruits and vegetables such as strawberries, cucumbers, radishes, and sweet cherries. These trends were most obvious in London and among the gentry, but Thirsk provides evidence of a slow trickle out to the countryside and down to the lower classes.

Aside from the introduction of new foods, Thirsk points out other developments that changed the English diet. Frequent cycles of poor harvests from the late sixteenth century prompted a continual search for famine foods, eventually encouraging the cultivation of the potato, while the English Civil War spurred on the dairy industry after butter and cheese became indispensable soldiers' foods. New pickling methods drastically improved the ability to preserve foods, and the addition of chimneys to houses changed the way it was cooked. Commercialization, moreover, began to alter approaches towards gardening and animal husbandry: London foodmongers' reliance on hothouse vegetables and stall-fattened animals drew criticism in the eighteenth century, reminiscent of similar protests in our time.

Food in early modern England is a nuanced and thorough book, and it presents the reader with a gold mine of information. Occasionally one can get lost in this barrage of data, but Thirsk provides enough anecdotes to keep the narrative moving along. Among her most effective themes is her evocation of a lost world of taste. Strong salad leaves, rye pastry, distilled herbal essences, and barberries are among the once-prevalent flavours that have slipped away, and a sense of nostalgia for these vanished foods pervades the book. The paucity of sources on rural and lower-class people forces Thirsk to devote the most space to food patterns in London and among the gentry, but she recognizes this problem and offsets it with details about the habits of "ordinary folk" whenever possible (although finicky readers might question her vague use of the term). Occasionally the book suffers from repetition: in particular, the last two chapters recapitulate a number of details mentioned earlier. Historians of medicine, moreover, might wish to see the relationship between food and medicine teased out a bit more. These minor points aside, *Food in early modern England* is an informative and impressive book, and it convincingly demonstrates that the early modern diet was at least as diverse as our own.

Alisha Rankin,
University of Cambridge

Leonard Smith, *Lunatic hospitals in Georgian England, 1750–1830*, Routledge Studies in the Social History of Medicine, New York and London, Routledge, 2007, pp. xvi, 288, illus., £70.00, $120.00 (hardback 978-0-415-37516-0).

This useful study moves on from Leonard Smith's first book: '*Cure, comfort and safe custody*'*: public lunatic asylums in early nineteenth century England* (London, 1999). Also sharing its strengths, it is based on original

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300002404 Published online by Cambridge University Press