

Book Reviews

WILLIAM J. DARBY, PAUL GHALIOUNGUI and LOUIS GRIVETTI, *Food: the gift of Osiris*, 2 vols., London, Academic Press, 1977, pp. xxxiii, 452, XLII, and xxxiii, 453–877, XLII, illus., £25.00 the set.

The authors of this monumental work are aiming at a wide audience ranging from the Egyptologist to the inquisitive general reader. For the latter there is a general introduction concerning Ancient Egypt and the sources available, followed by a chapter on the nutritional state of the Egyptians. Then each foodstuff in turn, including sweetening agents and salt, together with beverages, spices and herbs, is discussed at length. The book has a multitude of illustrations, more than 340 in black and white and ten in colour, comprising maps, photographs, and line-drawings. There is a large bibliography and a good index.

The book will prove to be a remarkable source of information for those working in the fields of Egyptology, nutrition, the history of medicine, sociology, and anthropology, amongst others. As far as nutritionists are concerned, they have already awarded the work the Nutrition Foundations' award for 1977. Regarding the history of medicine, it seems unnecessary to have included the therapeutic use of foodstuffs. It is also curious that certain animals are included, as for example the elephant, which were of no significant importance as a source of food.

The plethora of detail is of great value, but of equal interest is the transmission of food habits and attitudes to later ancient peoples, such as the Hebrews, Christians, and Arabs, some of which persist to the present day.

The authors took fifteen years carrying out the research for their book, and apart from relatively minor defects their labours have been fully justified.

MARK NATHAN COHEN, *The food crisis in prehistory. Overpopulation and the origins of agriculture*, New Haven, Conn., and London, Yale University Press, 1977, 8vo, pp. x, 341, £10.80.

The author, an archaeologist/anthropologist, puts forward the argument that the events leading up to the emergence of agriculture in various parts of the world can be shown to have a great deal in common. Comparable local factors played a part in different regions, and they are linked with the underlying general causation, population pressure. The author is thus concerned with a broad synthesis of archaeological data gathered from various world regions, rather than with regional events, and by viewing them at a distance he claims to achieve a different appearance and a more accurate interpretation in the establishment of his hypothesis.

As prehistoric human populations increased, agriculture, as an adjustment, was forced upon them, and a wealth of evidence is produced to substantiate this claim. Professor Cohen also provides an extensive bibliography keyed to the text, although there are no textual notes as such. His book is a provocative addition to our knowledge of prehistory and will incite criticism as well as praise.

JOHN D. POST, *The last great subsistence crisis in the Western world*, Baltimore, Md., and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, 8vo, pp. xv, 240, £9.70.

In the post-Napoleonic period (1816–1819) there were violent repercussions, in

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Western Europe particularly, characterized mainly by economic instability with food shortages leading to distress and unrest. But in addition 1816 experienced abnormally cold weather, and from 1811 to 1818 there was extraordinary volcanic activity. The chief result of all these events was an acute subsistence crisis, with high cereal prices, drop in incomes, and general social disruption. Famine was widespread with its attendant typhus, plague, and unemployed beggars.

The author is the first to analyse in a scholarly study this complex situation, involving social, economic, and political factors in about twelve countries, together with data derived from meteorology, demography, economics, and epidemiology in particular. The result is an excellent survey of a vitally important era in the development of medicine, especially in France. It should, therefore, be studied carefully by all concerned with early nineteenth-century medicine or science. A closer examination of the medical implications seems called for.

ALEXIS SOYER, *The Pantropheon or a history of food and its preparation in ancient times*, New York and London, Paddington Press, 1977, 8vo, pp. xvi, 470, illus., £6.95.

Soyer (1809–1859) was an outstanding French chef who served French and English notables, and establishments such as the Reform Club (1837–1851). He also gave his services in the Irish Famine and in the Crimean War, where he collaborated with Florence Nightingale. In 1847 he published *The gastronomic regenerator*, and in it he called for a history of food and cookery. As this was not forthcoming he wrote one himself, *The Pantropheon*, which appeared in 1853 and is now reprinted in facsimile with a very brief introduction. It deals with ancient foodstuffs and their preparation for the table, concentrating mainly on Classical Antiquity. Soyer was able to incorporate an amazing amount of scholarly information into his book, much of which is documented. It is, moreover, written in an engaging style and is well illustrated; in an appendix he records accounts of memorable banquets of his own time. There are also chapters on water, beverages, drinking cups, wine, repasts, the dining-room, the table, the servants, etc.

The reappearance of this classic in the history of cookery is most welcome and the book will find a wide audience, especially as the price is modest in relationship to size and content.

PHILIP E. JONES, *The Butchers of London. A history of the Worshipful Company of Butchers of the City of London*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1976, 8vo, pp. x, 246, illus., £9.75.

The author, at one time Deputy Keeper of the Records of the Corporation of London, is an outstanding authority on the history of the City. His latest book is a scholarly survey of one of the oldest livery companies, which, along with the others, have for centuries figured importantly in the maintenance of the City's trade, wealth, and government. Mr. Jones surveys these wider spheres of activity as well as the details of the Company's activities. He deals with problems such as price controls and supply regulations, and with their central aim of providing the City with a plentiful supply of healthy meat. The medical aspects of their affairs are obvious and the health