PPC 99 (2013) 118-120
https://doi.org/10.1558/ppc.28456

Petits Propos Culinaires (print) ISSN 0142-7857
Petits Propos Culinaires (online) ISSN 3029-0651

Her latest contribution to the literature of food history is this time in book form: painstakingly researched and compellingly presented. This comprehensive exploration of the construction of empires throughout the history of the world and the role food played within such empires, as well as how it spread, developed and changed from one locality and one people to another, contains a wealth of historical detail. Laudan begins with the most fundamental, ancient and basic foodstuff which continues to form an integral part of the human diet: grain. This opening chapter; 'Mastering Grain Cookery 20,000–300 BCE' describes a significant factor in man's evolution into *Homo erectus*. This extends into a long contemplation on the origins of cooking and its role in brain enlargement, the development of the pleasure principle and the sense of taste, as well as how we coped with grain both in the field and on the stove – with a ramble down the lanes to the mill en route. In seven subsequent chapters she tells the tale of cookery around the world: the barley-wheat cuisines of the ancient empires; Buddhist cuisines; Islamic cuisines of central and west Asia; Christian cuisines in Europe and the Americas (to 1650); what she calls 'the prelude' to modern cuisines in northern Europe (to 1840); modern cuisines, which she epitomizes as 'middling cuisines' (1810–1920); and modern cuisines in the globalized world (1920–2000). As might be expected, the longest chapter is that discussing the Western style of cooking as it spread through a world both informed by and informing the imperial project in the nineteenth century. The *va et vient* of foods between subject peoples, colonists and home populations is a constant of each section and Laudan shows herself an inveterate internationalist. This is the sort of book that comes up at dinner parties: 'Have you read...?' Or it's part of the e-mail chatter of people interested in food around the world. It will be source and sauce for many conversations in the future.

Jon Stobart: *Sugar & Spice. Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650–1830*: Oxford University Press, 2013: 304 pp., hardback, £62.00.
At this price, most readers will not be rushing to their corner bookstore, but they may well put in a request at their library. No aspect of social history is currently more popular than consumer studies. We even have a book discussing shopping in ancient Rome. The consumer is seen both as actor (provoking historical change) and one acted upon (reacting to that change), and we can all see how the desire to consume may drive progress

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just as potently as the offer of more goods induces a change in habits. In the matter of food it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between agent and patient, a chicken and egg situation. Does an old biddy drinking tea in Ipswich provoke and encourage the imperial venture, or is she the consequence of that venture? The book under review has an awful lot on the imperial venture in general (because so many of the grocer's goods came from far away). It is a trope I wish historians would let lie for a while.

The study of grocers and their wares is likely to be based on inventories, the tradesmen's own financial accounts, sometimes precious survivals of memoirs or other sources in prose (for example Thomas Turner's diaries or William Stout's autobiography), and financial records in the archives of the customers themselves. The author has been diligent in his research in all sectors (and his bibliography is really useful for the secondary literature) although perhaps less wide-ranging in his interrogation of customers' archives than he might have been and fairly restricted in his reading among books of cookery and household management (to discover what actually happened to the groceries). There are, however, some really useful facts adduced about grocers' furnishings, the use of grocery shops by the public, and the sorts of groceries sold over the long 18th century. On facts, then, he is good. On speculation and comment, he is less inspiriting. Most historians should stick to facts and let theory go hang. Their observations are often either impenetrable or redundant. In the case of this book, it reads like a civil service or local government report.

Professor Stobart did provoke me to one very happy day's reading. I devoured William Stout's autobiography in a single gluttonous mouthful (*The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster, 1665–1752*, ed. J.D. Marshall, Manchester University Press, 1967: this is no longer available, but there are print-on-demand versions of a text, without editorial apparatus, extant on Amazon and elsewhere). Stout was an ironmonger and grocer as well as a Quaker. At times he dabbled, never successfully, in foreign trade, usually with the West Indies and America. His memoir is gripping stuff, astonishingly readable even while his life was hardly adventurous. A lifelong bachelor admitting to but a single episode of courtship, he was cared for by a devoted mother and a sister (who spent most of her life on the verge of extinction but battled on regardless). What impresses the modern reader is a peculiar religious tolerance which is none the less combined with an eagerness to criticize any backsliding in personal conduct among his friends and relations. None of the younger generation, in his eyes, ever comported himself as befitted a sober and resolute man (or woman) of business. All of them consorted with company too liberal and pleasure-loving for their own good. What this meant, according to his witness at least, was that most small businesses of his acquaintance were frail, fugitive affairs. He did not reckon much on doctors and apothecaries but relied instead on the beneficial effects of long walks in the early mornings and daily sojourns in his garden after working hours. And he gloried in plain food (and local food): 'was content with simple and plaine meat and drinke, such as was the product of our own country, without any sauces, even potatos without butter.' He got up early (4 a.m. in the summer), discounting the efficacy of one niece's housekeeping because she never rose before 8 o'clock. His domestic arrangements reveal that all the important domestic functions were undertaken, in his house at least, by the family, not by servants. Maids were employed to do the heavy work, the brewing and the cleaning but not, it seems, the cooking and the purchasing. He laid great stress on his female relatives' housekeeping abilities. This may have some relevance to our own ideas of who it was who bought books of receipts, even if Stout himself did not hold with sauces. Recommended.

Jeanne E. Arnold, Anthony P. Graesch, Enzo Ragazzini, Elinor Ochs: *Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century – 32 Families Open their Doors*: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, UCLA, 2012: 172 pp., colour photography, hardback, £22.50.

A voyeur's paradise, this book of modern ethnoarchaeology and material cultures dissects and records the interiors and backyards of 32 middle-class, two-income family homes (each with at least two children, of which one had to be under seven years-old – they mostly have a mother and a father too, but two of the households have two fathers instead). The result at least offers me *post hoc facto* justification for publishing a book called *Messy Cook*. In the main, the study confirms our prejudices with regard to the minimal time spent cooking and eating together in 21st-century America (with not a hint of recreational cooking in these homes either), and the crushing dominance of frozen and processed foods. It is also source of the great fact that a meal cooked from scratch only takes 12 minutes longer (38 minutes) to prepare than a meal composed of processed foods. The time saved is in the planning and shopping, not the preparation. It also