think it is reasonable to point out that this collection does contain one important omission: poems treating the popular eating houses (popinae) that were such an important part of Roman popular culture. Roman aristocrats, for whom eating in public was, as we have seen, frowned upon, would have had nothing to do with such places. A famous poem by no less a figure than the emperor Hadrian states he does not want to be like Florus and wander around the taverns and eating houses. And Horace, in one of his finest Epistles, attacks his bailiff for longing for the city and finding beauty in aspects of the urban world that the poet hates, including brothels, the “greasy eating house,” and the neighborhood tavern. The popinae served a crucial function in Roman food consumption. And, during the Empire, they proved to be a source of deep concern for the Roman elite, which, on several occasions, passed legislation banning popinae from selling cooked meats or baked foods, with Nero, for example, allowing such establishments to sell only beans and peas. The most likely reason for this prohibition was a desire to make these places less attractive locations for the urban populace to gather (such gatherings were always associated with potentially seditious activity), and the success of this legislation can be seen in the archaeological record, with surviving food counters in eating houses at Ostia lacking the counters with built-in food jars we see in the inns and cafés from an earlier period at Pompeii and Herculaneum. Two poems would have thrown light on this world of eating houses and bars. Above all, Juvenal in his eighth satire offers an extraordinarily interesting account of a popina frequented by the shameless noble Lateranus. But it would also be useful to have an easily accessible translation of the poem in the Virgilian appendix known as the Copa (“Barmaid”), a poem in which the hostess of the inn ironically uses the conventions of aristocratic poetry and philosophy to tempt the reader inside to take part in the pleasures from which the Roman upper classes, in their desire to display their superiority over the rest of the city, had debarred themselves.

I should say, however, Elliot is by no means blind to nonelite dining and food consumption, although the nature of Latin literature inevitably means most of the material here deals with the upper classes. For instance, there is the welcome inclusion of some graffiti from Pompeii (which may or may not be lower class), although it must be said that the delightful warning to the “dung-producers” to keep their distance is only indirectly related to the topic at hand. Another treat is the welcome complete translation of the so-called Moretum from the Virgilian appendix, an important text for elite representations of poverty and labor.

In short, those who are enthusiastic about food and interested in or intrigued by Latin poetry will find much to entertain and interest them in this volume. But I suspect the general reader would take more away from these poems if the notes were fuller and written with more sympathy for those without a background in classics.

—Peter O’Neill, University of Exeter

Food in the Ancient World, from A to Z.
Andrew Dalby
London: Routledge, 2003
xvi + 408 pp. Illustrations. $88.95 (cloth)

“His uncomb’d, hoary locks, wild-staring, thatch’d / A head for thought profound and clear unmatch’d,” wrote Scottish poet Robert Burns of his good friend William Smellie, “compiler” of the first edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica—a fitting description for the son of a stonemason who spent six years (1765–1771) composing the 2,391 pages of the editio princeps with a “pair of scissors” [sic] in hand (or so the legend goes).

Legends and truth aside, it takes great courage—and a dash of folly—to embark on any encyclopedic adventure. Fortunately, Andrew Dalby willingly undertakes the voyage in Food in the Ancient World, from A to Z. As a linguist, historian, foodie, and classicist, equally conversant in ancient history and gastronomy, he deserves our greatest praise for mustering his experience and expertise in a wide range of disciplines to deliver this fine book.

Dalby, a polymath and author of numerous works on antiquity and food, has produced a surprisingly readable trésor of ancient gastronomy. Over four hundred pages long, his encyclopedia contains entries on an expansive gamut of subjects: the great food writers and chroniclers of antiquity; the taxonomy of grape varietals and fishes in the ancient world; and a seemingly comprehensive survey of nuts, fruits, herbs, cereals, grains, and vegetables in ancient Greece and Rome and beyond.

Dalby rightly warns us we must approach classical texts and even their modern redactors with a highly critical—and often skeptical—eye. “Translators,” he writes, “take different views over all sorts of questions; sometimes they take a demonstrably wrong view. You have to try to be independent of them” (p.x). He also points out how easy it is to misinterpret the ancient writers unless you read them closely and with an analytical approach, keeping in mind sarcasm in the ancient texts is frequently misread.
by contemporary scholars. “It is often necessary,” he warns us, “to consider whether an ancient author may be making fun of the reader” (p.x).

Dalby’s caveat is valid—these writers were known to tease—but fortunately he never makes fun of his readers. He writes with true erudition combined with downright common sense. For example, he is not afraid to give us the cold truth about John Dory, a “sea fish of distinctive physiognomy—ugly would be another way to put it—and with fine-tasting flesh…” (p.186). When Dalby tackles garum, he warns us not to try the recipes at home because “the result may contain carcinogens” (p.157). Other interesting entries, such as those dealing with elements central to dining and feasting in antiquity, for example, trièlinium, are sure to become classic references in future works on ancient food and culinary science in general. Dalby even does justice to ubiquitous foodstuffs like the oyster.

Although I joyfully devoured the excellent bibliography, relished the wonderful illustrations (including maps and sketches from Greek vases), and savored the rich indices of classical Latin and Greek names, I wished Dalby (and his editor) had cooked up some sort of cross-referenced index of all the entries. The section on wine and grapes, for example, would be far more useful if there were a straightforward list of all the wines mentioned and their corresponding varietals. In his postscript to the book, Dalby notes in future works he intends to transliterate proper names directly from Greek instead of Latinizing them, as he does in Food in the Ancient World. He regrets not doing so in this work, especially since this is a new trend in classical scholarship. Do his comments augur more works on food in the ancient world? Only the Sibyl knows for sure. We can only hope Dalby is mad enough to keep at it.

—Jeremy Parzen, New York, NY

Spice: The History of a Temptation
Jack Turner
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004
xxiv + 384 pp. Photographs. $26.95

The late 1400s saw an explosion of exploration—and a transformation of the world—as Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and other seafaring entrepreneurs sought new routes to India’s Malabar Coast and the Indonesian archipelago. The object of their efforts? Spice—namely, pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, and a few other buds and seeds. In the ensuing years, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the English, and the Dutch would all seek to dominate the spice trade, using astonishing bloodshed and brutality to achieve their aims, undermined only by pirates who would occasionally plunder spice boats of their precious cargo.

But why all the fuss about spice? “In an age that pours its commercial energies into such unpoetical ends as arms, oil, [and] ore,” notes author Jack Turner, the drive to obtain “anything quite so quaintly insignificant as spice must strike us as mystifying indeed” (p.xii). While historians often point to medieval Europe’s problems with rancid meat, along with the mind-numbing repetitiveness of its diet, as the source of spice’s early popularity, Turner argues its appeal came down to one simple thing: mystery. “[Spices] were, in a sense, magical if not divine,” he writes, “arriving by unknown means from the vast blank spaces on the map, spaces populated by dragons, gods, and monsters. From mystery grew mystique” (p.231).

It’s a seductive premise. And Turner, employing an entertaining, showy style, just manages to pull it off, getting his arms around an ungainly topic and barely keeping the story out in front of the tongue-twisting prose. He starts by examining the rise of Europe’s economy after the first millennium and the subsequent demand for Eastern luxuries. Ginger, mace, and other exotic ingredients quickly became status symbols among noblemen—not unlike furs or jewels—as well as staples in upper-class kitchens, with nearly every dish drenched in seasonings, to the point where the medieval appetite for spice looked “less like a taste than an addiction” (p.107). It was also believed that ingesting spices was a way to improve one’s health and that they could cure everything from gangrene and paralysis to constipation and lung disease.

Then there’s sex. Spice has long been associated with eroticism, including recent examples like the pop-music sex kittens the Spice Girls and the Spice soft-porn cable TV station. (“I first took it for a cooking channel,” says Turner [p.xii].) In the Middle Ages—when noblemen’s fear of