cuisine, do not delve more into the history and evolution of Ghanaian cooking. The reader is provided an overview of Ghana and the different crops and animals consumed in the country that numbers only three pages.

The authors do try to make up for the brevity of their introduction by including helpful tips or interesting facts for each recipe, such as how the peanut, a native to South America, was introduced to West Africa by the Portuguese (p.104). While The Ghana Cookbook would have benefited from a more comprehensive introduction at the outset, this is a small quibble in an otherwise excellent book that fills a lacuna in a market that has published far too few cookbooks on a single African cuisine.

—Naa Baako Ako-Adjé, MA, Queen’s University

NOTE

The Oxford Companion to Food
Alan Davidson
Edited by Tom Jaine (revised and updated edition)
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014
922 pp. $65 (hardcover)

Sometimes you can’t help but be annoyed when a classic is revised and updated. Do I really need another copy to take up precious shelf space? Can I really bear to abandon this weathered friend whose pages I have meticulously and voraciously scoured over the years and scribbled in its margins? Well, the answer in short is yes. The field of food studies has grown so immensely that an update was absolutely required, and Tom Jaine, with the help of many great food writers, has done a superb job with it. Perhaps most impressively, the wit and wisdom of Alan Davidson that shone on every page has not been lost; one can still hear his voice clearly, and it is actually hard to discern what’s new without a careful comparison to the original.

There is a very good reason this work became a classic and better reason that it will continue to be. It is truly delightful to read, even cover to cover if you have the time to be so enriched. Of the many reference works that appeared nearly two decades ago, Scribner’s Encyclopaedia of Food and Culture, The Cambridge World History of Food, the revised Larousse Gastronomique, and several others in their wake, including my own Food Cultures of the World, this is the only one I keep within arm’s reach for first reference. Each of these serves a particular function, but I think the Oxford Companion is the only one you actually have fun reading, as one entry leads to another or as you randomly pick a letter and go all the way through.

If you are interested in food and don’t own a copy, buy it now. To prove a point, I randomly opened to the page with the heading “blood pudding.” Did you know Homer’s Odyssey refers to a stomach filled with blood and fat and roasted over a fire? Or that the Roman cookbook attributed to Apicius has a pudding with chopped hard-boiled egg yolks, pine kernels, onions, and leeks? Or that there is a fifteenth-century English recipe using the blood of a porpoise with oatmeal? Or that there are a range of modern French boudins noirs including herbs and brandy (from Lyon), apples (from Alsace), and spinach (from Poitou). The Flemish version with currants and raisins sounds the most interesting. But so too are the Spanish morella, Italian sanguinaccio, German Blutwurst, Hungarian kishka. And if you are wondering about other places in the world, just look at the earlier entry on “blood.” I must have been channeling the upcoming Oxford Symposium (which Alan co-founded) and whose theme is offal.

Let’s go back one entry earlier: “blini,” those Russian buckwheat crepes served with herring, chopped egg or caviar, and sour cream. Did you know they were eaten at funerals with boiled wheat and vodka, with a tipple poured directly into the grave for the benefit of the dead? Laura Mason wrote this entry and captured Davidson’s wry humor very nicely. And one entry earlier than “blini” is “blewit,” something I have never heard of, apparently a blueish-lilac edible mushroom, found in large fairy rings. On the previous page is “bleak,” a little freshwater fish which “when fried their skins are agreeable crisp and crunchy, while the inside remains succulent.” Not only edifying, but appetizing! This is exactly the way I encourage you to use this book. Just start, open a random page, set aside a few hours at least, abandon anything awaiting your attention, and eventually the book will become a good old friend, exactly as it has for me.

—Ken Albala, University of the Pacific

Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America
Yong Chen
New York: Columbia University Press, 2014
xvii + 292 pp. Illustrations. $30.00 (cloth)

When historian Yong Chen journeyed from China to study at Cornell University, he was struck unexpectedly with a longing for home and by the stark awareness of his Chineseeness.
Seeking Chinese food to tend the homesickness and existential confusion, he was surprised to discover many Chinese restaurants that could provide a fix. So Chen had found the starter for what would become Chop Suey, USA, an account of a quest to understand Chinese food’s ubiquity in his second home, and a critical reflection on the history of Chinese bodies and food in the ongoing story of US expansion.

Chen draws from a rich archive to argue that Chinese food became embedded in American culture because it satiated a national appetite for leisure and consumption. Chen understands this notion of “freedom to consume” to be a distinctive feature of American empire. In contrast to super-powers who employed blatantly colonial tactics, America from its inception expanded by building an image of freedom, and embodying this image by encouraging consumption domestically.

Chinese Americans, though perennially considered outsiders, helped democratize consumption, acting, as Chen argues, as “stewards of empire.” They did this by providing cheap services to support the idealized lifestyle of leisure. Many early immigrants worked as domestic servants; and later, after the 1882 Exclusion Act limited immigration and consolidated the Chinese population into urban Chinatowns, Americans paradoxically began consuming Chinese food as cheap entertainment. While the Chinese faced legislation limiting social and political freedoms, Chen emphasizes how they navigated through these dehumanizing factors by modifying and marketing their food to please a wide base of customers. To market Chinese food, the Chinese promoted Chinatown, catered to minoritized communities, and authored cookbooks. They circulated narratives of authenticity to popularize dishes like chop suey. By Chen’s account, the marketing was so successful that Chinese food could rival McDonald’s fare as the earliest symbol of democratic consumption.

The book’s framing of the Chinese as stewards of empire powerfully complicates what looks like a story of long-standing American interest in diversity. Chen makes explicit how Chinese bodies were managed and how Chinese food was contained (neither Chinese bodies nor Chinese food enjoyed status beyond, respectively, appreciated cheap labor or appreciated cheap food) to advance American empire, just as he highlights how the Chinese, acting within these conditions, altered American food culture.

To support his archival analysis, Chen integrates personal reflection on the conundrums of eating in both America and China, where expansion efforts influence culinary culture. As a Chinese with gustatory appreciation, he helps the reader unfamiliar with Chinese food culture to better understand immigrants’ choices. Introducing works by Qing dynasty food writer Yuan Mei, for instance, he explains how Chinese American authors adopted Chinese food-writing conventions and included in their cookbooks sections addressing health and Confucian philosophy. Also, Chen writes about himself as inheritor of the world he describes, demonstrating empire’s relevance to all eaters. Balancing academic rigor with candid reflection, the study is widely approachable.

A bit surprising, though not drastically so, is how the book’s narrative style seems to shift in the chapter discussing minority groups’ participation in making Chinese food popular and another discussing cookbooks. These sections read more speculatively than the historical accounts of previous chapters, and Chen invites additional work on some topics. He provides a useful launching point by noting that African Americas and Jewish Americans helped make Chinese food a mainstay, because enjoying Chinese food meant they could participate as equals in American culture. Describing each group’s consumption, Chen observes that despite Chinese food’s popularity in economically depressed Detroit, relations between black clients and Chinese restaurant owners remain tense. Here Chen provides a provocative lead-in to a consideration of how race relations are brokered in a racialized food space, but leaves the question open. In Jewish communities, Chen observes that Chinese food is enthusiastically, though quietly, consumed, suggesting uncertainty about whether eating Chinese food is acceptable. This chapter inspires questions regarding how empire operates at the fringes, such as, have the Chinese enabled consumption at the empowerment or disempowerment of other minorities? Considering how these groups struggle to integrate, the question of democratic consumption’s limits is worthy of elaboration.

In discussing Chinese American cookbooks, Chen argues that unlike restaurant owners who had to respond unfailingly to client expectations, cookbook authors were empowered to determine their work’s contents, oftentimes recounting memories and experiences. While it is plausible that authors enjoyed more latitude to educate readers, understanding them as “advancing Chinese food” (p.167) through self-expression perhaps romanticizes the publishing scene. It elides the fact that cookbooks were also subject to mediation by editors seeking to package Chinese food to maximize appeal to non-Chinese audiences. The question then becomes: How might we read empire’s influences in these texts?

Chen’s narrative contributes significantly to food studies by revealing the structural elements that help create a nation’s love of certain ethnic cuisines. He concludes by likening his journey to America to Odysseus’s landing among the lotus eaters—but unlike Odysseus, Chen has remained. He
wonders what it will mean to keep participating in American culture that continues to integrate Chinese food and bodies, while familiar foods at home in China give way to McDonald’s. The impossibility of returning home signifies the ever-routing world, and Chen mentions new forms of Chinese and Chinese American food appearing in both homes. Providing the story behind our culinary landscape, Chop Suey, USA prepares us to continue tracing the relation between Chinese food and global power.

—Stephanie H. Chan, University of California, Santa Cruz

Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal
Abigail Carroll
xvii + 304 pp. Illustrations. $27.99 (hardcover)

“Get your elbows off the table!”; “Don’t hold your fork that way!”; or, when I was young, “Eat like a real person!” Generations of American children have been raised on such reprimands. With Abigail Carroll’s new work, Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal, scolded children can now cogently argue that “real” people throughout American history have not observed such manners. In fact, the form of our meals, and the rituals enforced while consuming them, are sociocultural inventions of the last century. They have been shaped by our changing economy, efforts at class distinction, sociocultural inventions of the last century. They have been shaped by our changing economy, efforts at class distinction, transformed American diets. In every era, food values are shaped by a desire for distinction. Early American settlers distinguished their fixed mealtimes from Native Americans’ grazing. Middle- and upper-class Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries aped French and English customs, often with elaborate rules, to distinguish themselves from the lower classes. This was particularly important after the Industrial Revolution, when physical and social mobility made it more difficult to discern the class backgrounds of others. “Etiquette,” Carroll (pp.88–89) explains, “existed largely to demarcate social boundaries . . . [and] helped to distinguish the elegantly civilized from the folksy and unrefined.” Unlike other markers of class status, “the complexity and subtlety of social decorum became hard to counterfeit” and thus was a reliable tool for distinction.

Changing health ideologies have also accompanied shifts in the American diet. For example, as workers looked to lighter, faster breakfasts as they rushed out the door, nutritionists began calling for light, grain-based diets. Marketers quickly adopted health-based advertising strategies. Charles W. Post, of Post Foods fame, used “sensational testimonies . . . [of] medical conditions the cereal had allegedly improved or even cured” to sell Grape-Nuts, while Sylvester Graham famously preached vegetarianism and an all-around bland diet for health. When companies realized that providing a hot lunch could boost workers’ efficiency, ideologies of health laced the rationale: not only was a hot lunch better for efficiency, it was better for digestion. Throughout the book, Carroll’s storytelling reveals a complex interplay between economic changes, health concerns, and the desire for distinction that has shaped American meals.

The last two chapters of Three Squares shift dramatically in tone, away from the historical narrative to alarm about the contemporary American diet. Carroll warns that the decline in family dinners is harming our health and our children’s intellects. She seemingly forgets the lesson of the first seven sections of the book: that beliefs about the “right” way to eat are complex and ever-changing, and there is no single answer to the correct way to eat.

The final, forward-looking chapter paints a quixotic picture of how readers can actively create the future of the American meal—by shopping at farmers’ markets, for example. The first sections of the book showed that idealized meals are intimately bound up with social class, while derided eating habits are often those associated with minorities and lower social classes. Readers familiar with other scholarship on American dietary beliefs, such as the work of Charlotte Biltekoff and Julie Guthman, will likely note that Carroll’s own portrait of the ideal meal is highly raced and classed. While she may suggest a nutritionally and socially sound way to eat, it cannot be separated from contemporary class projects—just as Three Squares shows us that historical changes in American eating habits cannot be separated from the class projects and distinct ideologies of their respective eras.

In all, Three Squares offers an enjoyable history of American meals. It is a worthwhile read for food scholars and