

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