Walking into a grocery store today, it is common to see all kinds of food from around the globe that have been made available year-round. Specifically in New York City, the history of how seafood from near and far became accessible owes to both the environmental context of New York as an archipelago and the historic Fulton Fish Market.

\textit{The Fulton Fish Market: A History} by Jonathan H. Rees is the latest in the series Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives on Culinary History published by Columbia University Press. In fourteen chapters plus an introduction and conclusion, Rees details the two-hundred-year history of the Fulton Fish Market from its founding in 1822 in Manhattan to its relocation to the Bronx in 2005 and up to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rees writes a lively history of the market through processes of (over)fishing, commodification, urban development, technological and environmental change, labor unions, worker sabotage, and mafia extortion, together with material considerations of ice, blood, guts, and shells.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the environmental and economic context of the Fulton Fish Market. As Rees describes, “There was a market for fish in New York City long before there was a physical market in New York City devoted to fish” (p. 3). In its early days as a one-story building on South Street, the Fulton Fish Market began as a retail market where sellers and fishermen sold directly to consumers. However, for those in the fishing business, fish are quick to rot, and no one wants to be stuck with the excess of a perishable commodity. Fishermen therefore had strong incentives to sell their catch, and the problem of excess inventory allowed middlemen—wholesalers—to intervene in the provision process. Shifting from retail to wholesale of seafood at the market, wholesalers leveraged new opportunities for profit and market control.

Chapter 3 tells the history of how techniques in icing, drying, and salting fish, alongside the expansion of railroads during the nineteenth century, made possible new market opportunities to procure and sell fish from far away. New York City
became for seafood what Chicago was for meat, and the Fulton Fish Market was a vital locus for the distribution of seafood throughout the United States. Chapter 4 focuses on oysters, which were very common, very cheap, and very tasty. Oysters grew in the surrounding waters of New York and were locally consumed at the market as a popular street food.

Chapter 5 elaborates on the shift to wholesale at the Fulton Fish Market. Throughout the twentieth century, the market shifted from a retail to an exclusively wholesale market that sold fish back to smaller retailers across the city. With an increase in fish vendors, it became difficult for consumers to know who to trust. Fish fraud, where fish are deceptively labeled and unfairly priced, became a real problem between sellers, restaurants, and consumers. Interpersonal relationships based on existing social bonds and ethnic propinquities became a vital part of the fish economy.

Chapter 6 explores changes in fishing practices that both supported and responded to the growing but increasingly dispersed demand for seafood across the United States. Fishing by trawling—attaching a large net to moving boats and indiscriminately catching every kind of sea life, often tilling the seabed—was particularly destructive. One of the first fish caught by trawling was the menhaden, a small fish that was not consumed but used for fertilizer and fish bait for mackerel. While overfishing was already a problem in New England before the Fulton Fish Market, Rees argues that industrial fishing practices such as trawling would not have become a dominant mode of fishing until places such as the Fulton Fish Market provided an outlet to sell their catch.

Chapter 7 examines the processing (killing, bleeding, and gutting) and consumption of now illegal delicacy in America: turtle and terrapin. Terrapin, a kind of amphibious turtle that is distinct from the mostly aquatic sea turtle, was a common dish in African American food culture. By the late nineteenth century, terrapin stew, once a food for the enslaved, became a delicacy for White millionaires.

One of the most important chapters in Rees’s book is chapter 8 on the history of refrigeration and cold storage, or rather the lack thereof, at the Fulton Fish Market. A key concept is the “cold chain,” or the line of refrigeration techniques and infrastructures that keep food fresh from its places of production to place of consumption (p. 111). For seafood, a complete cold chain requires different kinds of refrigeration at different stages of transport and storage, and different seafood also differs in ideal temperatures for preservation. Counterproductively, a defining feature of the Fulton Fish Market was “the failure of the wholesalers to build enough cold storage or freezing facilities” which affected both the visual display of fish as well as the general smell of the market (p. 104). Yet, inefficient did not mean unprofitable, as wholesalers leveraged an advantage over fishermen who had even less access to cold storage. The preference for “fresh” fish at the market granted wholesalers a bargaining chip, where fishermen were forced to sell their catch per the prices offered by wholesalers, or else risk making no profit at all if their fish went bad.

Chapter 9 zooms out to the surrounding neighborhood of the Fulton Fish Market and examines changes in real estate, businesses, communities, and the environment. Chapter 10 narrates the crash of the US fishing and oyster industries at the turn of the twentieth century. While an increase in pollution from sewage runoffs actually increased oyster growths, the taste of the oysters declined as a reflection of the water in which they grew. Moreover, with new scientific research that connected typhoid to polluted waters, public associations between disease and oyster consumption led to the collapse of the oyster industry.

Chapters 11 and 12 delve into the people and culture at the Fulton Fish Market. Drawing on many news accounts of the market, Rees describes how families involved in organized crime were
able to parasitize on the wholesale market structure of the Fulton Fish Market. In addition to cornering the shrimp, mackerel, and squid markets, crime families also controlled the loading and unloading of fish. By paying the unions that represented fish packers, wholesalers were coerced to give up a share of their profits, otherwise their fish would be left to rot on the streets.

Chapters 13 and 14 attend to stories of decline and the final relocation of the Fulton Fish Market to the Bronx in 2005. Up to the late twentieth century, those who visited the market often complained about the putrid smell, which was “disgusting in the extreme” and benefited no one except wholesalers who profited from lack of sufficient refrigeration (p. 179). With urban development plans to build a museum (the South Street Seaport Museum) and shopping malls in the surrounding area, none of the original building of the Fulton Fish Market now remains. Against the old adage at the Fulton Fish Market that the market is never changing, its relocation in 2005 to the Bronx introduced new facilities that transformed the Fulton Fish Market into a sanitized refrigerator.

As a monograph, Rees's *Fulton Fish Market* elaborates on a much larger history than the institutional history of the market itself. Essential to the development of the Fulton Fish Market is the forging of commodity chains that gather aquatic life from the sea onto dining tables and into our stomachs. Taking the reader through a long history of the market, Rees's book should interest readers engaged in histories of food, commodification, technology, and labor.

Specifically for environmental historians, *The Fulton Fish Market* offers a historically situated account for understanding the mechanisms of food provision and global fishing industries that have led to local ecosystem collapse. Indeed, the provision of food from everywhere all the time goes against how most plants and animals grow and reproduce. And while food supply chains have become ubiquitous and global in scale, they are seldom visible to consumers. Rees's history of the Fulton Fish Market brings these invisible processes to the fore, altogether animated by the diverse lives of fishermen, fishmongers, fish eaters, and even the seafood mafia.