



# **The Expert Cook in Enlightenment France (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science)**

*Sean Takats*

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In the eighteenth-century French household, the servant cook held a special place of importance, providing daily meals and managing the kitchen and its finances. In this scrupulously researched and witty history, Sean Takats examines the lives of these cooks as they sought to improve their position in society and reinvent themselves as expert, skilled professionals.

Much has been written about the cuisine of the period, but Takats takes readers down into the kitchen and introduces them to the men and women behind the food. It is only in that way, Takats argues, that we can fully recover the scientific and cultural significance of the meals they created, and, more important, the contributions of ordinary workers to eighteenth-century intellectual life. He shows how cooks, along with decorators, architects, and fashion merchants, drove France's consumer revolution, and how cooks' knowledge about a healthy diet and the medicinal properties of food advanced their professional status by capitalizing on the Enlightenment's new concern for bodily and material happiness.

*The Expert Cook in Enlightenment France* explores a unique intersection of cultural history, labor history, and the history of science and medicine. Relying on an unprecedented range of sources, from printed cookbooks and medical texts to building plans and commercial advertisements, Takats reconstructs the evolving role of the cook in Enlightenment France.

Academics and students alike will enjoy this fascinating study of the invention of the professional chef, of how ordinary workers influenced emerging trends of scientific knowledge, culture-creation, and taste in eighteenth-century France.

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