[Review of] Word Mysteries & Histories: From Quiche to Humble Pie

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Word Mysteries & Histories: from quiche to humble pie by American Heritage Dictionaries Eds.

This entertainment-oriented etymo-
logical dictionary is an uneven hodgepodge of 500 paragraph-length entries. Dictionary readers' curiosity is the only revealed selection criterion. The words and phrases included range from the ostensible uninterestingly (cat, bed) to the current (latchkey child) to the technical (niobium). Some entries simply give a wordy rendition of the standard dictionary etymology, but others provide interesting narrative backgrounds in an often waggish, pun-riddled prose. Like Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins (LJ 10/1/77), which provides over 3000 entries, Word Mysteries and Histories is designed for browsing.—Robert Aken, Univ. of Kentucky Libs., Lexington