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978-0-521-79353-7 - A Movable Feast: Ten Millennia of Food Globalization

Kenneth F. Kiple

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A Movable Feast

This book, based largely on *The Cambridge World History of Food*, provides a look at the globalization of food from the days of the hunter-gatherers to present-day genetically modified plants and animals. The establishment of agriculture and the domestication of animals in Eurasia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas are all treated in some detail along with the subsequent diffusion of farming cultures through the activities of monks, missionaries, migrants, imperialists, explorers, traders, and raiders.

Much attention is given to the “Columbian Exchange” of plants and animals that brought revolutionary demographic change to every corner of the planet and led ultimately to the European occupation of Australia and New Zealand as well as the rest of Oceania.

Final chapters deal with the impact of industrialization on food production, processing, and distribution, and modern-day food-related problems ranging from famine to obesity to genetically modified food to fast food.

Kenneth F. Kiple did his undergraduate work at the University of South Florida, and earned a PhD in Latin American History and a PhD certificate in Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. He has taught at Bowling Green State University since 1970 and became a Distinguished University Professor in 1994. His research interests have included biological history applied to the slave trade and slavery, the history of disease, and more recently, food and nutrition. He is the author of approximately fifty articles and chapters, and three monographs, and the editor of five volumes including *The Cambridge World History of Disease* and (with K. C. Ornelas) *The Cambridge World History of Food*, in two volumes.

Professor Kiple has been a Guggenheim Fellow and has received numerous other grants and fellowships from organizations such as the National Institutes of Health, the National Library of Medicine, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Tools Division (and two other National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowships), the Earhart Foundation, the Milbank Memorial Fund, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Rockefeller Archives, the American Philosophical Society, the Social Sciences Research Council, and the Fulbright-Hays Foundation.

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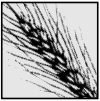
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A MOVABLE FEAST

*Ten Millennia
of
Food Globalization*

Kenneth F. Kiple

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

Preface xiii

Acknowledgments xv

INTRODUCTION: FROM FORAGING TO FARMING 1

Ch. 1: LAST HUNTERS, FIRST FARMERS 7

Ch. 2: BUILDING THE BARNYARD 14

Dog 15

Sheep and Goats 16

Pig 16

Cattle 17

Horse 18

Camel 19

Water Buffalo 20

Yak 21

Caribou 22

Pigeon 22

Chicken 23

Duck 24

Goose 24

Ch. 3: PROMISCUOUS PLANTS OF THE NORTHERN FERTILE CRESCENT	25
Wheat	26
Barley	28
Rye	29
Oat	29
Legumes	30
Other Vegetable Foods	32
Dietary Supplements	34
Food and Northern Fertile Crescent Technology	35
Ch. 4: PERIPATETIC PLANTS OF EASTERN ASIA	36
Tropical Tuck of Southeast Asia	36
<i>Banana and Plantain</i>	36
<i>Taro</i>	38
<i>Yam</i>	39
<i>Rice</i>	39
<i>Other Fruits and Vegetables of Southeast Asia</i>	41
China's Chief Comestibles	41
<i>Rice</i>	41
<i>Millet and Cereal Imports</i>	42
<i>Culinary Competition</i>	42
<i>Vegetables and Fruits</i>	43
<i>Agricultural Revolution</i>	44
<i>Soybean</i>	45
<i>Beverages</i>	46
<i>Fish</i>	46
South Asian Aliments	46
Later East Asian Agriculture	48
Ch. 5: FECUND FRINGES OF THE NORTHERN FERTILE CRESCENT	51
African Viands	51
<i>Egypt and North Africa</i>	51
<i>South of the Sahara</i>	54



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-79353-7 - A Movable Feast: Ten Millennia of Food Globalization

Kenneth F. Kiple

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

European Edibles	59
<i>Ch. 6: CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEOLITHIC</i>	61
Social and Cultural Consequences	61
Ecological Consequences	64
Health and Demographic Consequences.	64
Food Processing and Preservation	66
<i>Ch. 7: ENTERPRISE AND EMPIRES</i>	70
Pre-Roman Times	70
The Roman Empire.	74
<i>Ch. 8: FAITH AND FOODSTUFFS</i>	83
Islam	83
Christianity	86
Buddhism	89
<i>Ch. 9: EMPIRES IN THE RUBBLE OF ROME</i>	91
<i>Ch. 10: MEDIEVAL PROGRESS AND POVERTY</i>	97
<i>Ch. 11: SPAIN'S NEW WORLD, THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE</i>	105
Mesoamerica and North America	108
<i>Ch. 12: NEW WORLD, NEW FOODS</i>	113
<i>Ch. 13: NEW FOODS IN THE SOUTHERN NEW WORLD</i>	127
<i>Ch. 14: THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE AND THE OLD WORLDS</i>	135
Europe	135
Africa and the East	144
<i>Africa</i>	144
<i>Asia</i>	145
<i>Ch. 15: THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE AND NEW WORLDS</i>	150
Oceania.	150
The Americas	156



<i>Ch. 16:</i> SUGAR AND NEW BEVERAGES	163
Sugar	163
Cacao	166
Coffee	166
Tea	170
Soft Drinks	178
Alcoholic Beverages	181
<i>Ch. 17:</i> KITCHEN HISPANIZATION	184
The ABC Countries	185
The Andean Region	187
Mesoamerica	188
The Caribbean and the Spanish Main	189
<i>Ch. 18:</i> PRODUCING PLENTY IN PARADISE	191
Colonial Times in North America	192
The New Nation	197
<i>Ch. 19:</i> THE FRONTIERS OF FOREIGN FOODS	202
Tsap Sui: Chinese Influences	203
Spaghetti and Red Wine: Italian Influences	203
Chillies and Garbanzos: Hispanic Influences	204
Creole and Cajun: French and African Influences	206
Grits, Greens, and Beans: African Influences Again	207
Bratwurst and Beer: Germanic Influences	208
Tea and Boiled Pudding: English Influences	211
<i>Ch. 20:</i> CAPITALISM, COLONIALISM, AND CUISINE	214
<i>Ch. 21:</i> HOMEMADE FOOD HOMOGENEITY	226
Restaurants	230
Prepared Foods, Frozen Foods, Fast Foods, and Supermarkets	233
<i>Ch. 22:</i> NOTIONS OF NUTRIENTS AND NUTRIMENTS	238
Thiamine and Beriberi	242
Vitamin C and Scurvy	243



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-79353-7 - A Movable Feast: Ten Millennia of Food Globalization

Kenneth F. Kiple

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Niacin and Pellagra	245
Vitamin D, Rickets, and Other Bone Maladies	246
Iodine and Goiter	249
Other Vitamins, Minerals, and Conditions.	251
<i>Ch. 23: THE PERILS OF PLENTY</i>	253
<i>Ch. 24: THE GLOBALIZATION OF PLENTY</i>	267
<i>Ch. 25: FAST FOOD, A HYMN TO CELLULITE</i>	274
<i>Ch. 26: PARLOUS PLENTY INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY</i>	285
<i>Ch. 27: PEOPLE AND PLENTY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY</i>	295
<i>Notes</i>	307
<i>Index</i>	353



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-79353-7 - A Movable Feast: Ten Millennia of Food Globalization

Kenneth F. Kiple

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

An ungainly term, globalization often suggests a troubling determinism, a juggernaut that destroys rain forests, while multinational agribusinesses plow under family farms and capitalism forces peasants to move into cities and work for wages, thereby eroding social relations, undermining local customs, and subverting taste in culture and food.

Raymond Grew (1999)¹

Friday I tasted life. It was a vast morsel.

Emily Dickinson

Who riseth from a feast

With that keen appetite that he sits down?

Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice II, vi, 8.*

“GLOBALIZATION” is a hot topic, at the center of the greatest issues of our time, and one that has roused economic, political, and cultural historians to grapple with the big question – is it a good thing or a bad thing? Book and article titles like *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*,² *The End of History and the Last Man*,³ or *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy*⁴ take a gloomy Hobbesian view of the process; others radiate the optimism of Voltaire’s Dr. Pangloss such as *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization*.⁵

Similar passion is evident wherever Western activists, the youth of Islam, and other dissidents gather to protest that synergistic interaction of technological revolution and global capitalism that we have come to call globalization. Notable recent examples include the more than 50,000 protestors at the World Trade Organization that turned downtown Seattle upside down

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Kenneth F. Kiple

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

and the 2001 protestors at the Group of Seven meeting in Genoa, Italy, who slugged it out with the police. Most protesters view globalization as bristling with threats to the environment; many also feel that it is a menace to cultural integrity, even to state sovereignty, and some express the concern that globalization will promote even greater inequality among the world's peoples. Their opponents point out that a global community is preferable to the nationalism (and some of its component parts such as ethnocentrism and racism) that has occupied the world's stage (often disastrously) throughout the past half millennium and that poor countries, which have changed their policies to exploit globalization, have benefited most from it.⁶

Many of globalization's perplexities are evident in the history of foods and food ways. Some are obvious. Culture, for example, always a tough opponent of globalization, is defended whenever people defend their cuisine. On a biological level the people of developing countries require an adequate supply of the right kinds of foods for the creation and maintenance of healthy and productive populations. But in between these cultural and biological poles lies the murky political and economic question of what happens to those who resist the forces of globalization.

In the case of food, can or will a global community make enough food available to those holdouts who, for cultural or biological reasons, do not buy into the existing technologies? Today, for example, we have starving countries that refuse aid because that aid is in the form of genetically modified (GM) foods. And they refuse to sidestep future crises by planting genetically modified rice or maize or millets even though such GM crops not only deliver substantially higher yields than unmodified counterparts but are resistant to pests, weeds, and droughts, and consequently to famine.

Other big questions are "when did globalization begin" and "where and how will it end?"⁷ In terms of food globalization, our answers are thankfully simple. It began with the invention of agriculture some ten thousand years ago in at least seven independent centers of plant and animal domestication. Throughout the ensuing ten millennia the agricultural fruits of all of these centers became so dispersed that today, in the West at least, diets are no longer tied to regional food production and, consequently, regional cuisines are fast disappearing. For the rest of the world such food homogenization means that for the first time in human history, political will alone can eliminate global inequalities in the kinds and quantities of food available. The next big question is whether the phenomenon of greater food availability will be canceled out by swelling numbers of food consumers.⁸



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK is based on *The Cambridge World History of Food* published by the New York branch of Cambridge University Press in 2000 and edited by myself and Kriemhild C. Ornelas. Indeed, the contributions of every author in that two-volume work have been utilized and are cited in this one. I am very grateful to all of them; to the board members of that project who recommended contributors and read their essays for accuracy; and to Steve Beck and his squad of graduate assistants who nudged the project toward completion. I will be eternally grateful to Rachael Graham, whose efforts on an earlier project helped us to establish rules and regulations for this effort.

Readers will notice that I have employed a number of other sources in addition to those of Cambridge contributors. This was not because of incompleteness or sloppiness on their part. On the contrary, their contributions constitute the very finest scholarship in the fields of food and nutrition. The additional sources have been used to bridge gaps and with the hope that new scholarship will add fresh insights to the narrative. Freedom to do this reading and research came from funding supplied by the National Institutes of Health in the form of a National Library of Medicine Grant for the years 1998–99; the Institute for the Study of Culture and Society, where I spent the spring semester of 2001 as a Scholar in Residence; and a Bowling Green State University Faculty Research Leave during the autumn of that year.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This book has also benefited from another project – our ongoing encyclopedic effort to provide historical entries for every important food on the planet. While I was writing this book, that work has proceeded under the direction of Kriemhild Coneè Ornelas with the help of Steve Beck, who spent a summer researching and writing animal and fish entries. I am grateful to Coneè as well for the countless hours that she labored on this effort, catching errors, making corrections, and offering suggestions. She refused co-authorship, so the least I can do is dedicate the book to her. Finally the students in my Globalization of Food Seminar have been assiduous, if not relentless, in locating new data and shaping new perspectives.

Publicity to introduce *The Cambridge World History of Food* began in the fall of 2000 in New York with a reception and press conference hosted by *Gourmet* magazine. A nomination for the Kitchen Aid Best Book and a Writing and Reference Award from the James Beard Foundation followed; the books were listed as one of the “Outstanding Reference Sources for Small and Medium-Sized Libraries,” and named one of the top 100 food events of the year 2000 by *Saveur* magazine. At Bowling Green State University, Teri Sharp, Director of Public Relations, was instrumental in working with Cambridge to arrange these events, along with scheduling (what seemed to be) scores of telephone and television interviews. We are grateful as well to Kathie Smith, Food Editor of the *Toledo Blade*, for a lovely spread on the culinary possibilities of the project and how the books came to be.

Vivian (Vicky) Patra, director of the Institute for the Study of Culture and Society arranged forums for the discussion of our research, and Georgia and John Folkins, Provost of Bowling Green State University, who supported us, put their money where their mouths were when they bought one of the first sets of *The Cambridge World History of Food*. My debt to Frank Smith was made even more enormous when, despite his heavy duties as Publishing Director at Cambridge University Press, he found the time to read this manuscript and offer many splendid suggestions. And lastly I want to thank Graduate Assistants Stephen Pedlar and Teresa Pangle for their sharp eyes in scrutinizing the footnotes and scientific names in the text; Mary Madigan-Cassidy for her splendid copyediting of the manuscript, and Cathy Felgar of Cambridge and Peter W. Katsirubas of Aptara, Inc., for their joint efforts in that magical process which transforms a manuscript into a book.

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