

Food in World History. Third Edition. Jeffrey M. Pilcher. New York: Routledge, 2023. 174 pp. \$46.95. Paperback ISBN: 9781032351490.

In the third edition of *Food in World History*, historian Jeffrey Pilcher escorts his readers on a global culinary journey. Pilcher's historical world food tour begins with the advent of agriculture roughly 12,000 years ago and concludes with the climate crisis's threat to the modern global food supply. In the millennia between these bookends, Pilcher eloquently demonstrates how food shaped human history.

Pilcher structures food's vital historical role around five critical themes. These themes include the connection between food and ecology, the global exchange of foodstuffs, the relationship between food and class, the links between food and gender, and the role of the state in producing and allocating food. Each of the book's thirteen chapters deftly weaves these themes together to succinctly convey the "influence of food in the global transition to modernity" (5).

The book's chapter on the Columbian Exchange (Chapter 2) is particularly adept at combining these five themes into a compelling narrative and lays important groundwork for subsequent chapters. Pilcher highlights the devastating ecological impacts caused by the introduction of new plants, animals, and diseases to the New World, while also highlighting the importance of cuisine in shaping the pre- and post-contact worlds. For example, pre-contact Mayan nobles' rich diet caused them to tower over 10 centimeters higher than commoners, a clear gastronomic class distinction. The laborious process of milling maize also fell to women and contributed to the development of an intense patriarchy in Mesoamerica. Lastly, the European state-sponsored colonial enterprises introduced chili peppers, potatoes, chocolate, and corn to the Old World. Once these crops spread, entirely new hybrid culinary traditions emerged, such as spicy Indian curry and Korean kimchi. Furthermore, these exchanges of goods set the stage for other world historical events discussed in the volume, such as the Irish Potato Famine of the nineteenth century (Chapter 5).

Food in World History draws from a wealth of studies examining global food history. Pilcher synthesizes and condenses an impressive array of scholarship into a three-part chronological narrative. Each chapter draws on leading scholarship to introduce readers to topics ranging from the Confucian ethics of ancient Chinese food distribution (Chapter 1) to the British adoption of Indian cuisine despite western rulers' frequent association of indigenous diets with racial and national inferiority (Chapter 8). Moreover, *Food in World History* utilizes a truly global scope, taking readers across the Global North and South with stops in the Ottoman Empire (Chapter 5), nineteenth-century African and Latin America (Chapters 7-8), and fast-food joints in modern-day North America, Europe, and Asia (Chapter 12).

One significant shortcoming to *Food in World History*'s globe-spanning approach, however, is the lack of visuals. Visual aids, like maps and timelines, would be a welcome addition since this book targets a broad audience, particularly students, and spans immense periods of time and space. Their inclusion would be particularly helpful for undergraduate students lacking familiarity with world history. The absence of images, however, does not detract from the author's rare

ability to integrate dozens of key works from the expansive fields of food history and studies into chapters that are thorough yet also engaging and brief.

The third edition of *Food in World History* places special emphasis on the intersection of food, ecology, and climate—issues vital to all those interested in both the past and future of food. In the book's final chapters (Chapters 11-13), Pilcher elaborates on the environmentally intensive business models of modern fast food and supermarkets (exemplified by McDonald's and Walmart) that stem from the input-intensive agricultural practices of the Cold War-era Green Revolution and its toolkit of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, irrigation, and hybrid seeds.

The post-World War II industrial food system has dire implications for planetary health. The globalized Western diet's insatiable demand for cheap food—particularly cheap meat and wheat—has resulted in chemical dependent monocrop agriculture and overcrowded animal feed lots. These methods have contributed to significant greenhouse gas emissions, acute biodiversity loss, soil depletion, the inhumane treatment of animals, and poor human health outcomes embodied by the global obesity crisis. The Holocene epoch's stable climate made this industrial food production system possible, yet as *Food in World History* demonstrates, industrial agriculture has also played a leading role in Earth's transition into the Anthropocene—an era of substantial human impact on global climate systems. The Anthropocene's climactic irregularity now threatens to upend global agriculture as we know it. As humanity wrestles with the new climactic and culinary reality, as Pilcher rightly insists in his closing pages, discussions of food and food equity must be front and center.

Food in World History will appeal to new students and well-seasoned scholars of food history alike. For newcomers, the book provides brief, yet very informative and approachable, introductions to major themes in global food history. Each chapter also provides helpful and current reading lists that will interest those looking to further savor a particular topic. Furthermore, food history and studies scholars will find this concise volume an asset in the classroom as an assigned reading for students or a helpful reference when crafting lectures. *Food in World History* is essential introductory reading for anyone interested in humanity's gastronomic past.

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