



Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food

By Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

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In *Near a Thousand Tables*, acclaimed food historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto tells the fascinating story of food as cultural as well as culinary history -- a window on the history of mankind.

In this "appetizingly provocative" (*Los Angeles Times*) book, he guides readers through the eight great revolutions in the world history of food: the origins of cooking, which set humankind on a course apart from other species; the ritualization of eating, which brought magic and meaning into people's relationship with what they ate; the inception of herding and the invention of agriculture, perhaps the two greatest revolutions of all; the rise of inequality, which led to the development of haute cuisine; the long-range trade in food which, practically alone, broke down cultural barriers; the ecological exchanges, which revolutionized the global distribution of plants and livestock; and, finally, the industrialization and globalization of mass-produced food.

From prehistoric snail "herding" to Roman banquets to Big Macs to genetically modified tomatoes, *Near a Thousand Tables* is a full-course meal of extraordinary narrative, brilliant insight, and fascinating explorations that will satisfy the hungriest of readers.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

How best to grasp food's place in history? Historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto's *Near a Thousand Tables* places its beginnings in cooking, a social act that forges culture (and is perhaps responsible for it), then pursues it as a series of "revolutions"--from the inception of cooking, herding, and agriculture to food industrialization and, finally, modern globalization. Informatively dense yet spry and aphoristic, the book explores food as rite and magic (it "binds those who believe, brands those who don't"); the domestication of animals (snails are the world's oldest "cattle"); farming and food's use as an index of rank ("greatness goes with greatness of girth"--or at least it did); food's role in trade and cultural exchange (Tex-Mex cooking as a form of colonial miscegenation); and as a force in and for industrialization (canning as the cooking of the Industrial Revolution). In the end, we are brought to "the loneliness of the fast food eater" and the "desocializing" effect of microwave cooking and other forms of modern food manipulation that alienate us from the communal act that "made" culture. "Food gives pleasure," Fernández-Armesto writes, and "can change the eater for better or worse." He concludes, "the role of the next revolution will be to subvert the last."

This is a fascinating book that shows us ourselves: like the cannibal, who eats his enemy to appropriate his power, we believe in food's transformative effect, which through devotion to vegetarianism and other special diets will make us "better." It paints a picture both sweeping and precise. --*Arthur Boehm*

From Publishers Weekly

For sheer volume of fascinating facts, this survey of gastronomic lore can't be beat. Fernández-Armesto (Millennium), a Professional Fellow at the University of London and member of the modern history faculty at Oxford, debunks popular myths, such as the idea that spices were needed in medieval times to disguise tainted meat and fish (in fact, fresh foods in the middle ages were fresher than today and healthier as well). He shows why the cultivation of rye, barley and wheat is one of the most spectacular achievements of humankind and informs readers that the whole grain cracker invented by Sylvester Graham was intended to impede sexual desire and promote abstinence. But the book is more than a litany of quirky tidbits; Fernández-Armesto charts how the evolution of human culture is directly connected to the way food is obtained. The logistics of agriculture and hunting have shaped notions of gender and community; food is often integral to concepts of the sacred in a society; and the loneliness of the fast food eater aided by such inventions as the microwave has become emblematic of contemporary society's fragmentation. Fernández-Armesto writes lucidly and conveys his enormous enthusiasm for his subject. While he draws upon the work of many historians and theorists including Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ferdinand Braudel his erudite analysis always engaging and accessible.

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From Library Journal

Noted historian Fernández-Armesto (*Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years*) has undertaken to provide us with a brief alternative to volumes like Alan Davidson's *The Oxford Companion to Food* and *The Cambridge World History of Food*. He proposes to "treat food history as a theme of world history to trace connections, at every stage, between the food of the past and the way we eat today." To cover this vast topic in a brief volume, the author has divided the subject into eight revolutions that range from the invention of cooking to industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries. This approach works well within each chapter but makes it difficult for the reader to put the events from different "revolutions" in order. Throughout the book,

Fern ndez-Armesto makes no secret of his opinions and presents several surprising but well-supported arguments, such as microwave ovens are returning us to a presocial phase of evolution and "cannibals turn out to have a lot in common with vegans." His well-written, thought-provoking overview of food history is recommended for academic or special libraries where there is interest in food history. Mary Russell, New Hampshire State Lib., Concord
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Donald Kelley:

The particular book Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food has a lot associated with on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of profit. The book was written by the very famous author. The author makes some research previous to write this book. That book very easy to read you can obtain the point easily after scanning this book.

Errol Garvin:

Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but delivering the information. The article writer giving his/her effort to place every word into delight arrangement in writing Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food but doesn't forget the main level, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource data that maybe you can be among it. This great information may drawn you into fresh stage of crucial thinking.

Margaret Velasquez:

The book untitled Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food contain a lot of information on that. The writer explains the girl idea with easy approach. The language is very clear to see all the people, so do not necessarily worry, you can easy to read it. The book was written by famous author. The author brings you in the new age of literary works. You can read this book because you can please read on your smart phone, or device, so you can read the book in anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can available their official web-site and order it. Have a nice read.

Johnny Abel:

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