
Evolution of Food Culture Through Timeline

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Abstract

Eating is an indispensable human activity; the drive to obtain food has been a major catalyst across all of history, from prehistoric times to the present.

Culinary evolution and eating habits from prehistoric times to the present, provides insights into the social and agricultural practices, religious beliefs, and food eating habits through ages. Types of food eaten and food practices not only reveal human eating habits, but also reveals who they are and their social standing besides reflecting light on their political, religious, and philosophical bend. By exploring humans eating habits and food choices through the millennium and the pages of history one can experience human history in a way that the stories of great kings and epic battles sometimes cannot. Civilization itself began with the quest for food. Humanity's transition to agriculture was one of the greatest social revolutions in history. In every era, the unfolding of history has been intimately tied to the need for food, the production of food, and the culture of food. The quest for spices and exotic foodstuffs led to the European discovery of the New World. Most food historians refer to 18th and 19th century as the second major revolution in human eating habits in the history. The first eating revolution occurred about 10,000 years ago with the Neolithic Revolution, a time when humans migrated from being hunters and gatherers to farmers. The second revolution marked a shift from people growing food for a living for most people working in factories and food being provided by a small number of industrially organized food producers. This era also saw the evolution of the modern health-food movement, a food movement that encourages vegetarianism, along with scientific evidences of restricting one's diet to improve one's health and cure all sorts of new and fashionable lifestyle diseases that are caused by, ironically, eating too much. In the 20th century, new forms of energy foods and advances in food science have completely transformed the food we eat. The study of food, thus provides critical insight into the role of intercultural exchange in shaping world cultures and this review paper is an attempt to trace the evolution of food culture, and eating habits of the population through the folds of time.

Keywords: *Culinary, Food culture, Gastronomy, Neolithic, Millennium, Revolution.*

Introduction

Food plays an inextricable role in our daily lives. Food is not only fundamental to our survival but also a source of pleasure, comfort and security, a symbol of hospitality, social status, and religious significance. Food is a great unifier of culture and exploring the pages of history this proves to be true. Humanity's transition to agriculture is considered as one of the greatest social revolution in history.

For thousands of years the primitive human calorie source was predominantly came from fruits, leaves and grains as evident from the teeth of humanoid teeth fossils. In the early

Paleolithic period, hunting of large animals for meat was the dominant source of nourishment, with the climate getting warmer in the Mesolithic period man started hunting smaller animals, devoted more time to fishing and gathering. Further with the agricultural revolution of the Neolithic period rearing of livestock began and started farming cereals, thus moving towards a more diverse diet that was more balanced and fulfilling.⁽¹⁾

Second dietary revolution saw a diverse agriculture production, besides barley, spelt and wheat was, also cultivated, and this period also saw the invention of fire. Sometime between 1,400,000BC (Africa) or in 500,000BC (Asia), various historians' views differ on the exact date of fire invention and the appearance of the Neanderthals on the prehistoric scene, cooking was discovered. Fire's general use, which began about 40,000 to 50,000 years ago, according to both paleontological and archaeological records, extended to food preparation, thereby resulted in a great increase of plant food supply.⁽²⁾

Food has long been baked in coals or under heated rocks, steamed inside animal stomachs and leaves, boiled in rock pots by heated stones. Food historians generally agree the first cooking method was roasting over an open fire and boiling followed.⁽⁴⁾ Before the invention of cooking utensils pit cooking was the mode of boiling followed by boiling in reptile shells and molluscs. Bamboo was commonly used for cooking in Indonesia and other East Asian countries, while stone was used in Central America. Later pottery was invented, followed closely by utensils made of bronze and iron which are used even today as cooking utensils.⁽³⁾

Boiling or stewing was done in small pots placed near the fire or in cauldrons suspended over a fire by chains attached to a beam hung from a tripod poles joined at the apex. Meat was probably boiled first and the vegetables added later and from here the concept of food culture evolved which evolved differently in different ages and culture and today it is considered to be one of the unifying factors in making this world one big family.

Ancient Mesopotamian foods

The Mesopotamian diet mainly consisted of barley, wheat and millet; chick peas, lentils and beans; onions, garlic and leeks; cucumbers, cress, mustard and fresh green lettuce, and of fruits including apple, fig and grape; of honey and cheese; several culinary herbs, butter and vegetable oil.⁽⁶⁾ Sumerians drank beer often. Meats were salted; fruits were conserved in honey; various foods, including apples, were dried as evidence from archaeology and written records on cuneiform tablets. Sheep rearing for milk and meat was the main livestock and played an important role in the economy of that age. ^(5; 8)

Ancient Egyptian foods

Egyptian civilization probably began about 3100 B.C., during which time hunter-gatherers settled in agriculture and also started domesticating animals. Evidence from sites in the Fayum region, support this. Bread and beer were the two staples of Egyptian people. As the population began to establish agricultural communities, the wild pigs and wild cattle were domesticated. Hunting became more of a sport for wealthy than a means for obtaining food, although poorer people continued to hunt game and wild fowl, and to snare fish to supplement their cereal and leguminous diet. Agricultural communities grew grains as well

as legumes, and these became the major crops of the Nile valley. Grain was used as a currency, to barter, pay taxes and wages.

The Egyptians enjoyed their food. Nobles and priests were particularly well served, with at least forty different kinds of bread and pastries, with honey, milk and eggs. Other dietary intakes included barley porridge, quail, kidneys, pigeon stew, fish, ribs of beef, cakes, stewed figs, fresh berries, cheese as evident from tomb evacuation. The origin of salting as a preservation process is also believed to have evolved during this time. There is evidence that as early as 12,000 B.C., Egyptian tribes people on the lower Nile dried fish and poultry using the hot desert sun.

In Egypt banquets started in the early or middle afternoon, but few details are available about the eating of ordinary meals⁽⁷⁾. The basic Egyptian meal was beer, bread, and onions, which the peasants ate daily, probably as a morning meal before they left to work in the fields.

Greeks ate simple food their staple diet being bread and goats cheese. Meat was a luxury but fish and vegetables were plentiful. Diet included pulses, onions, garlic and olives, raisins, apricots, figs, apples, pears and pomegranates.⁽¹⁰⁾

Vikings diet (8th to 11th century)

The main staples in the Vikings' diet were whole meal, bread made from rye and oats, porridge containing oatmeal and barley, eggs, milk, cream, butter and cheese. The most commonly eaten vegetables were cabbages, wild greens, and onions. For fruit they had apples and all kinds of berries and nuts. They drank great quantities of milk, buttermilk and whey, as well as a weak beer brewed from barley and a much stronger mead made from fermented bone and water.. The Vikings enjoyed plain food and preferred boiled to roast or fried meat. Their food was sweetened with honey and flavored with pepper and many other spices, imported from the East.

Viking-age Scandinavians ate two meals a day, one in the morning and one in the evening. Some foods, such as porridge, soups, and stews, were served in wooden bowls and eaten with spoons of wood or antler. Ale and mead were drunk from the horns of cattle. ^(6: 4) Feasting was the most common social diversion in the Viking age. It provided respite from labor and opportunities for physical relaxation. The feasts included seasonal celebrations and commemorations of personal events. In origin both were associated with pagan sacrifices. ⁽⁶⁾

Food in the 16th century

Common foods in 16th century depended on their religious and ethnic heritage, place of inhabitation and the amount of money in their pockets. In general terms, the foodstuffs enjoyed in sixteenth-century England were almost identical to those of the medieval period. Roast and boiled meat, poultry, fish, pottages, bread, ale, wine and to a much lesser extent, fruit and vegetables, formed the basis of the diet of the upper classes.⁽⁹⁾

Italian Renaissance food

The culinary history of Italy during the Renaissance was one of innovation, economic thrust, and historic weaving. It was a complicated time of exotic food introductions, socio-economic stratification, and scientific advancement. Mushrooms, truffles, garlic, and less used vegetables found their way into the cooking pot. Some of them carved artistically - while pasta creations became filled and layered (lasagna, ravioli etc) Accompanied, with an expensive show of table finery, delicate and fine glassware, porcelain, and precious metals.

Modern food evolution

With the invent of industrialization and migration of peasants from villages to cities brought about a great shift in the dietary intake and food habits of the people world over, a period of globalization. Dramatic growth and diversification due to the Industrial Revolution as well as the social and economic changes brought about:

- New technologies, changes in technology since 1900 have played an important role in the changes in food preparation in modern society
- New foods
- New consumers have brought about an era of convenience foods and fast food.

Conclusion

Food though essential for human survival is also a great unifying object that has helped unite different cultures and bring the societies of the world together, in fact, to some extent food can be attributed as one of the factors contributing to globalization.

The unfolding of history is intimately tied to the need for food, the production of food, and the culture of food. The quest for spices and exotic foodstuffs led to the European discovery of the New World which later and subsequently helped in connecting the entire globe through trade. In the 1840s Ireland a single food – the potato – changed the course of history. Food plays a vital role in connecting the entire world through different food choices. A study of food history establishes that food has connected the entire humanity globally both socially and geographically by connecting nations through trade of different food varieties. The study of food history thus offers a deep insight into human history.

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