



Milk: A Local and Global History

By Deborah Valenze

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How did an animal product that spoils easily, carries disease, and causes digestive trouble for many of its consumers become a near-universal symbol of modern nutrition? In the first cultural history of milk, historian Deborah Valenze traces the rituals and beliefs that have governed milk production and consumption since its use in the earliest societies.

Covering the long span of human history, *Milk* reveals how developments in technology, public health, and nutritional science made this once-rare elixir a modern-day staple. The book looks at the religious meanings of milk, along with its association with pastoral life, which made it an object of mystery and suspicion during medieval times and the Renaissance. As early modern societies refined agricultural techniques, cow's milk became crucial to improving diets and economies, launching milk production and consumption into a more modern phase. Yet as business and science transformed the product in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, commercial milk became not only a common and widely available commodity but also a source of uncertainty when used in place of human breast milk for infant feeding. Valenze also examines the dairy culture of the developing world, looking at the example of India, currently the world's largest milk producer.

Ultimately, milk's surprising history teaches us how to think about our relationship to food in the present, as well as in the past. It reveals that although milk is a product of nature, it has always been an artifact of culture.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[A] serious work of history with great illustrations."—Marion Nestle, *The Atlantic*

(Marion Nestle *The Atlantic.com*)

"[A] stimulating cultural history."—Nick Rennison, *The Sunday Times*

(Nick Rennison *The Sunday Times* 2011-07-31)

"[A] fascinating history."—Alex Renton, *The Observer* (Alex Renton *The Observer* 2011-07-31)

"Valenze's book is an engagingly written and well-researched foray into a huge territory, pulling a mass of material into sharp focus and revealing milk as both strange and familiar."—Nicola Humber, *Times Higher Education*

(Nicola Humber *Times Higher Education* 2011-09-29)

"[Valenze's] documentation of milk's transformation into the modern product that underpins today's hugely diverse dairy products industry offers some insights and precedents useful in helping address current food supply concerns."—Mark Knoblauch, *Booklist*

(Mark Knoblauch *Booklist*)

"[C]omprehensive... covers everything from milk's role in mythology to its effects on animal husbandry to its transformation into cheese."—Catherine Price, *Slate*

(Catherine Price *Slate*)

"An exceptionally well-crafted and intriguing history of milk's career in human societies over the last three thousand years." —Frank Trentmann, author of *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain*

(Frank Trentmann 2010-09-14)

"A well-written, engaging, wry history of milk. No other book covers the territory in quite the same way."—<?xml:namespace prefix = st1 ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:smarts" />Amy Bentley, New York University<?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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