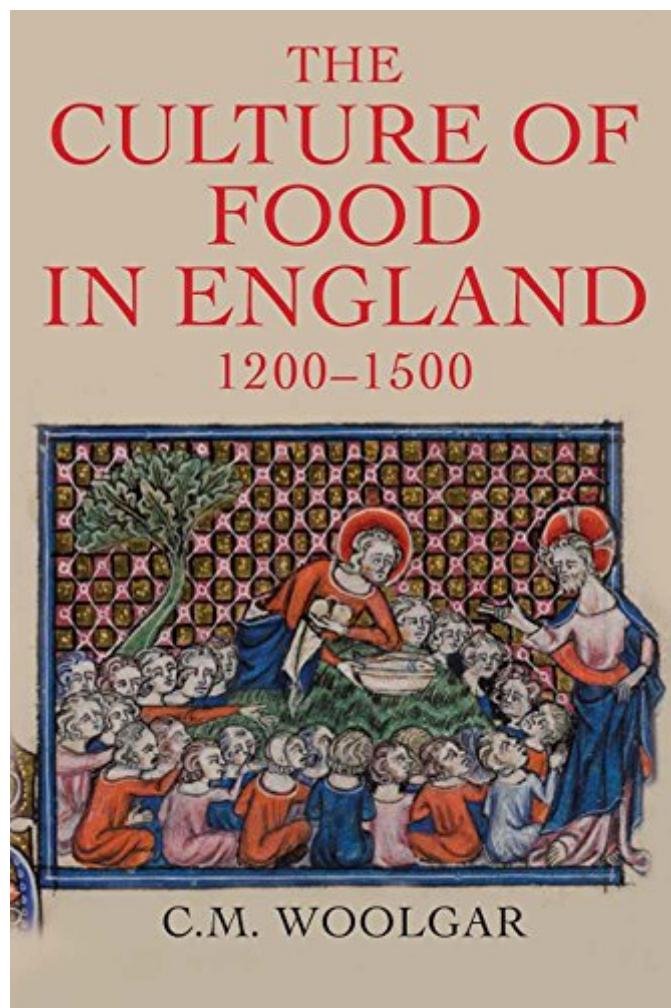


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The Culture Of Food In England, 1200-1500



Synopsis

In this revelatory work of social history, C. M. Woolgar shows that food in late-medieval England was far more complex, varied, and more culturally significant than we imagine today. Drawing on a vast range of sources, he charts how emerging technologies as well as an influx of new flavors and trends from abroad had an impact on eating habits across the social spectrum. From the pauper's bowl to elite tables, from early fad diets to the perceived moral superiority of certain foods, and from regional folk remedies to luxuries such as lampreys, Woolgar illuminates desire, necessity, daily rituals, and pleasure across four centuries.

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Customer Reviews

A scholarly book of interest to culinary historians, and also probably to people with a serious interest in the social history of medieval England. Not, I think, for the general reader/

Obsession with food is evidently part of the human condition. Today in our civilization of abundance we have cooking networks, stores devoted to the tools of food preparation, and, of course,

businesses that prepare and serve food of nearly every imaginable variety. During the Middle Ages, however, that obsession had a different focus, with the relative scarcity of food and the more limited resources for preparation leading to more of a focus on questions of availability and distinctions based more clearly upon class. Chris Woolgar's book is a study of that different culture. Drawing upon a range of resources, he describes the variety of foods available for the medieval English palette and how they prepared them. As he notes at the start, food was central to the lives of people in ways that often were obscured by their ubiquity, even to the point where it was central to the common religious ritual of the mass. Their cuisine was more limited than is the case today, with grains more central to the diet and meat uncommon to all but the elite table. Yet it is a misconception to regard the diet as dull, as herbs, spices, and sweeteners often enlivened the taste of the foods available to them, often in the form of sauces and other supplements to their food preparation. Encompassing everything from hunger to tastes Woolgar's book is an impressively broad study of its subject. By approaching the medieval English through their food he makes them accessible in a way few studies have before his, thanks to an approach that is never less than interesting in its insights and conclusions. Thanks to it we have a window into the lives of the English that shows both how different their lives were and yet how relatable they are to us today.

Fascinating social history, but written in a terse, economical style that sometimes devolves into mere lists.

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