

Food: A Cultural Culinary History

Course Guidebook

Professor Ken Albala
University of the Pacific



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Professor Ken Albala is Professor of History at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, where he has been teaching food history and the history of early modern Europe for the past 20 years. In 2009, he won the Faye and Alex G. Spanos Distinguished Teaching Award at the University of the Pacific. He is also a Visiting Professor at Boston University, where he teaches an advanced food history course in the gastronomy program. He has a B.A. in European Studies from The George Washington University, an M.A. in History from Yale University, and a Ph.D. in History from Columbia University.

Professor Albala is the author or editor of 16 books on food, including *Eating Right in the Renaissance*; *Food in Early Modern Europe*; *Cooking in Europe, 1250–1650*; *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe*; *Beans: A History* (winner of the 2008 International Association of Culinary Professionals Jane Grigson Award); and *Pancake: A Global History*. He also has coedited *The Business of Food: Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries*, *Human Cuisine*, and two other collections: *Food and Faith in Christian Culture* and *A Cultural History of Food in the Renaissance*.

Professor Albala was editor of three food series for Greenwood Press with 30 volumes in print, and his four-volume *Food Cultures of the World Encyclopedia* was published in 2011. He is also coeditor of the journal *Food, Culture & Society* and general editor of the series AltaMira Studies in Food and Gastronomy, for which he has written a textbook entitled *Three World Cuisines: Italian, Mexican, Chinese*, which won the 2013 Gourmand World Cookbook Award for Best Foreign Cuisine Book in the World.

Professor Albala is currently researching a history of theological controversies surrounding fasting in the Reformation era. Recently, he

coauthored a cookbook, *The Lost Art of Real Cooking*, and its sequel, *The Lost Arts of Hearth and Home*, a handbook of kitchen and home projects. ■

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Food: A Cultural Culinary History

Scope:

This course explores the history of how humans have produced, cooked, and consumed food—from the earliest hunting-and-gathering societies to the present. This course examines how civilizations and their foodways have been shaped by geography, native flora and fauna, and technological innovations. Feeding people has always been the primary concern of our species, and more than any other factor, finding, growing, and trading food products has been the prime catalyst in human history. Think, for example, how the desire for spices in the Middle Ages led directly to the discovery of the New World.

The scope of this course is global, covering civilizations of Asia, America, Africa, and Europe and how cultures in each of these continents domesticated unique staples that literally enabled these civilizations to expand and flourish. The course also covers marginalized and colonized cultures that were dominated largely to feed or entice the palates of the great. A major theme of the course is the process of globalization, imperialism, and the growth of capitalist enterprise at the cost of indigenous cultures and traditional farming practices and how these processes were shaped by trade in food.

Beyond the larger economic and social issues, the course will also cover the culture of food, why humans made the food choices they have, and what their food practices tell us about them and their world. In other words, food practices will be used as a window for viewing culture as a whole—just as one might study painting or literature. Foodways reveal much more because not only must all humans eat, but they also all make conscious choices about food within a cultural milieu. These choices not only reveal who they are and where they fit in socially, but also often their political, religious, and philosophical bend. By exploring what humans have thought and written about food, you will hopefully be able to experience human history as it becomes alive and direct in a way that the stories of great kings and epic battles sometimes cannot.

This course will examine in detail cookbooks, culinary literature, and dietary and religious texts—all of which reveal the preoccupations and predilections of the past. The course will also examine why different people make different food choices, why they sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to find rare or exotic items while refusing to eat foods that are cheap and plentiful, why individuals from certain social classes will avoid or esteem particular foods, and in general how food is the most important factor of self-definition. In other words, food helps define who the individual is; where he or she fits in society; and how the culture, nationality, or ethnicity he or she espouses expresses itself through food and cuisine. Of course, what a particular food or dish may mean differs dramatically from place to place and time to time, from generation to generation, and even in the mind of one individual depending on the context. This course will help you see not only how and why other cultures shape what people eat, but also how your choices are ultimately determined by our culture and are often equally bizarre and arbitrary to outsiders, especially when it comes to food taboos.

Because this is a history course, it will examine the way that the interaction, destruction, transformation, and assimilation of cultures are all hastened by the human drive to feed and titillate the gullet. For example, the demand for sugar and spices in the late Middle Ages was not only the impetus for discovering the New World, but it also transformed the economy of both the Old World and the New World and involved massive migrations, the spread of human pathogens, and the biological interaction of flora, fauna, and humans among several continents. All of this changed the world—so that Europeans could have sugar in their tea.

The entire course is also accompanied by hands-on activities so that you can not only read about food in the past in the lecture guides, but you can also have some fun in the kitchen exploring the past and even tasting it if you so desire. The activities are designed to bring the lectures alive—not only by having you experience the physical act of cooking as it was done in the past, but also by having you understand directly the taste preferences of our forebears. Of course, using equipment that would have been used in the past helps you get much closer, as does using exactly the ingredients they would have used, but there is no reason not to try these activities in your modern kitchen as well. Some of these activities involve recipes that were

taken directly from historic cookbooks. Reconstructions are given when recipes were not available or have never been translated. Others are simply culinary exercises or tastings. They are all designed to expand your palate, to explore the past—just as you might a new, exotic cuisine you have recently discovered. All recipes have either been adapted from the original or are direct translations from the original languages. ■