

The Evolution of the Food Culture

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The recorded evolution of Nutrition dates back some 14,000 years and quite a lot is known about agriculture, use of food, preservation of food, staple food and feasts in ancient times. We know that in Mesopotamia (what is now Iraq) as early as 2,300 B.C., and in Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs the variety of foods was astonishing, so were their culinary refinements. How do we know? The Mesopotamians delivered cooking recipes from as early as the second millennium B.C. The Egyptians didn't leave any recipes behind, but food was important enough to be served to the diseased for afterlife, now discovered in wall paintings in their tombs of the pyramids. The Babylonians used barley, wheat and millet; chick peas, lentils and beans; onions, garlic and leeks; cucumbers, cress, carrots and radishes; beets and turnips; mustard and fresh green lettuce. At least at the palaces they served delicacies such as Truffles, Onions, cucumbers, many varieties of fish, freshly grilled goat, mutton and pork (not yet taboo in the Near East) were traded in food markets and cooked with herbs and spices like coriander, cress, and cumin; fennel, fenugreek, and leek; marjoram, mint, and mustard; rosemary and rue; saffron and thyme. Birds, ducks, geese were used for their eggs and for the meat. The abundance of fruits included apples, apricots, cherries, dates, figs, melons, mulberries, peaches, pears, plums, pomegranates, and quinces. Bakery items included bread, sometimes enriched with animal and vegetable fat; milk, butter, and cheese; fruit and fruit juice; honey and sesame seeds.

Handbook of Life in Ancient Mesopotamia, Stephen Bertman [Facts on File:New York NY] 2003 (p. 291-293).

Food in the Ancient World From A-Z, Andrew Dalby [Routledge: London] 2003 (p. 216)

Food: A Culinary History, Jean-Louis Flandrin & Massimo Montanari [Columbia University Press: New York] 1999 (p. 16-17)

The early Egyptians liked their food; there is evidence of the existence of at least 40 different breads and pastries in around 3,000 B.C.

Food in History, Reay Tannahill [Three Rivers Press: New York] 1988 (p. 53-4)

The feast given by King Mereptah in his eighth year for the Festival of Opet served these items: fish (filleted and salted), oxen, ducks (spit roasted), oryx, gazelle (basted in honey), beans, sweet oils (for sauces), celery, parsley, leeks, lettuce, bread, pomegranates, grapes, jujubes, honey cakes, heads of garlic, figs, beer and wine.

Ancient Lives: Daily Life in Egypt of the Pharaohs, John Romer [Holt, Rinehart Winston: New York] 1984 (p. 51-3)

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