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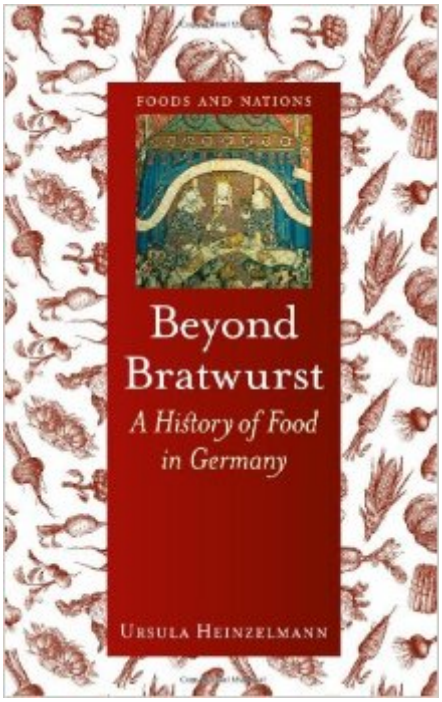
Beyond Bratwurst: A History Of Food In Germany (Foods And Nations)



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Synopsis

Thanks to Oktoberfest and the popularity of beer gardens, our thoughts on German food are usually relegated to beer, sausage, pretzels, and limburger cheese. But the inhabitants of modern-day Germany do not live exclusively on bratwurst. Defying popular perception of the meat and potatoes diet, Ursula Heinzelmannâ ™sÂ Beyond BratwurstÂ delves into the history of German cuisine and reveals the countryâ ™s long history of culinary innovation. Â Surveying the many traditions that make up German food today, Heinzelmann shows that regional variations of the countryâ ™s food have not only been marked by geographic and climatic differences between north and south, but also by Germanyâ ™s political, cultural, and socioeconomic history. She explores the nineteenth centuryâ ™s back-to-the-land movement, which called for people to grow food on their own land for themselves and others, as well as the development of modern mass-market products, rationing and shortages under the Nazis, postwar hunger, and divisions between the East and West. Throughout, she illustrates how Germans have been receptive to influences from the countries around them and frequently reinvented their cuisine, developing a food culture with remarkable flexibility. Â Telling the story of beer, stollen, rye bread, lebkuchen, and other German favorites, the recipe-packedÂ Beyond BratwurstÂ will find a place on the shelves of food historians, chefs, and spÃ¤tzle lovers alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reviewed by Sharon Hudgins, culinary historian, Food Columnist for GERMAN LIFE magazines (USA)Ursula Heinzelmann's new book is an important contribution to the literature on the history of German food. In 345 pages of well-written text, she sets out to answer the question, "What is German about the way Germans eat, what they eat, and why," by looking at the evolution of German food from ancient times to the present. Throughout this work of social history, she emphasizes that German foods and foodways have been strongly influenced by geography, climate, and culture, as well as Germans' openness to changes, innovations, and foreign inputs, all of which have shaped their cuisine over the centuries. The book is organized chronologically into twelve chapters, from the Neolithic era to the contemporary period after German reunification in 1990. Each chapter contains a wealth of information not only about specific foods (acquired from hunting, gathering, agriculture, animal husbandry, conquest, and trade), but also about cooking utensils and methods, and the social, political, economic, religious, and technological factors that influenced the ways Germans have eaten during different periods in their history. Some topics run throughout many chapters, such as the social role of women in food preparation; the effects of poverty and affluence, of war and hunger; and Germans' attitudes toward specific foods at particular points in time. The author also includes interesting descriptions of German cookbooks from the Middle Ages to the modern era. My only critique is that sometimes, especially in the early chapters, she assumes the reader has more knowledge of German history and economics than many non-German readers probably do.

Having read another book on this series, I decided to read this one, and I'm glad I did. I have long had an interest in German history of any kind (possibly because most of my ancestry is German, off the boats long enough ago so that no identifiable German traditions remained in my family. This book is close to a must for anyone with such an interest. While centered on food, the background offers some historical context that is clear, objective and as good as or better than I have read in more formal historical analysis--particularly good on the later 1800s, the Nazi era and since, including cultural differences between the two Germanys before reunification. There is a great deal of information presented, so the reviewer who said note cards may be needed does have a point.The core idea is easily enough stated: there is no German equivalent of French cuisine, no dominant form or dish identifiable as German. In a sense Germany is a collection of regions and there is a great deal of current interest in regional German foods, dishes and cooking. Germany is open to influences from the outside (with a historic influence of French cuisine and more recent influence from the large number of migrant laborers coming after the war, Turkish, Greek, Italian

and Balkan).There are some "boxes", asides on several restaurants and food venues, and some interesting photos, although the book could use more of them. There are some maps, but in a form I did not find particularly useful. The chapters are chronological, although the neat chronology of chapter titles is perhaps necessarily less precise in the material.

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