

## Foreword

When I began my studies of the history of milk 45 years ago it was a lonely occupation. There were only three or four of us and the numbers stayed in single figures for a couple of decades. Since then I have spent much of my career writing about food geographies and histories, and my book *Liquid Materialities* published in 2010 presented my own personal understanding of the genealogy of milk as a commodity. My project now is to write three more volumes on milk. The first, due out shortly, is entitled *A History of Uncertainty* and looks at the historical role of milk in spreading zoonotic disease. The second will be about the rise of artificial infant feeding, especially using cow's milk, and the implications for infant mortality at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The third will be a historical political ecology of dairying in the United Kingdom over the last three centuries. So, it seems that I have a busy retirement ahead.

The last 10-15 years have seen the flourishing of food history in general and I'm delighted to see that milk is at last taking its rightful place in this scholarship, as a commodity of central importance across the globe. The novelty of the recent trend is its broadening of intellectual perspectives and theoretical contexts. As the present volume confirms, milk is of interest to scholars from many different backgrounds.

But who are these people who want to discuss milk? To many it seems a trivial topic, hardly one for cutting edge research in the social sciences or humanities. In this narrow view milk is for dairy specialists with the technical or scientific skills of agronomists or processors. More broadly then should it be for historians, geographers, sociologists, anthropologists? Or in the post-disciplinary sense can we take it for granted that the crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the sharing of perspectives will create insights that are more than the sum of their constituent parts? An important lesson of the present volume is that many voices can lead to greater depths of understanding. The juxtapositions and oppositions create something fresh and new. Above all there is harmony in the ultimate message, that milk occupies a focal point in society. We all have to eat, and though we don't have to drink milk or consume butter and cheese, their presence or absence in a diet tells us a great deal about the individual consumer and her place in society.

After reading this collection it will be impossible to approach milk in quite the same way again. It is a mother's (human and non-human) contribution to young life that has been diverted and is therefore freighted, in the very same moment of consumption, with complex meanings of both nourishment and exploitation. While the contemplation of such complexities can be challenging, I would encourage readers to see this book as a whole. The chapters stand in their own right separately, of course, but it is the multivocal diversity that is the book's greatest strength.

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