



HAL
open science

Book review: A movable feast: ten millennia of food globalization. By Kenneth F. Kiple. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007. xvi + 364 pp. £15.99 hardback. ISBN 9780521793537

Lucius Hallett

► **To cite this version:**

Lucius Hallett. Book review: A movable feast: ten millennia of food globalization. By Kenneth F. Kiple. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007. xvi + 364 pp. £15.99 hardback. ISBN 9780521793537. *cultural geographies*, 2008, 15 (4), pp.520-521. 10.1177/14744740080150040703 . hal-00572036

HAL Id: hal-00572036

<https://hal.science/hal-00572036>

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

both the 'fleshly' and the immaterial implications of possessions for those who acquire, live with and dispose of them. She understands the domestic as a setting for the production and manifestation of social and cultural identities and sees household goods as a crux in the complex negotiations between people, their circumstances (including their gender, age, social status, wealth and location) and discourses of home.

This particular study is set among the middling sort in England between 1750 and 1850 because, Ponsonby argues, this is when, where, and for whom a particularly potent normative discourse of domesticity developed. She is impressed by the ethnographic approach of recent material culture studies but cannot observe or talk with her historical subjects. Instead, in a method more akin to the archaeological tradition of material culture studies in the United States, she minutely considers their household possessions, as evidenced in inventories, household accounts and personal papers. Ponsonby analyses combinations and arrangements of goods in a small number of specific houses, reading them in their social and cultural contexts to produce numerous new insights. For example, she follows a complicated trail of crockery and room names to delineate the gendered practices of genteel formal hospitality. And against the frequent assumption of the nationwide influence of London, she is able to retrieve a distinct elite provincial identity. It is, for the most part, the owners who are thus illuminated; the less privileged household members remain rather more in the shadows.

In the second part of the book, Ponsonby turns to a discussion of the differing interpretive strategies used in historic house displays. She argues that it is more revealing to focus on individual cases than to take a generic approach. This is her own methodology, which does yield enormously rich results, although it makes her generalizations less convincing.

This book's attention to the ordinary practices of everyday life brilliantly fractures the still-pervasive monolithic myth of Victorian domesticity. Ponsonby suggests that these 'different' homes were individual deviations from the ideals of the period; a larger study might allow us to consider whether such deviations might rather be seen as expressive, or even constitutive, of commonly held norms.

Queen Mary, University of London

LESLEY HOSKINS

A movable feast: ten millennia of food globalization. By Kenneth F. Kiple. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007. xvi + 364 pp. £15.99 hardback. ISBN 9780521793537.

Based largely upon the author's *The Cambridge world history of food* (2000), this book offers an overview of the interaction between the world and the foods we currently consume. Reviewing the history of domestication, sedentism, power over resources, and trade, 'the globalization of foodstuffs' suggests that our world has been integrated since the beginnings of the Neolithic. The story of our foods is one where all aspects of history can be examined. Perhaps the best example is the expansion of the Portuguese along the African coast and Columbus' voyages across the Atlantic: 'The New Worlds they reached to link with the Old brought food globalization on a cataclysmic scale' (p. 104). This led to what Thomas McKeown called the 'modern rise of population', because of the infusion of higher-caloric

foods into famine-stressed populations led to improved nutrition, increased infant and child life expectancy, and protection against the ravages of infectious diseases.

The author tackles a number of subjects that directly relate to the development of agriculture: chronic malnutrition, famine, globalization, and the homogenization of culture. Much is made of the loss of overall health as a consequence of the move towards settled agriculture and reliance upon mono-cropping. The author suggests that diseases such as rickets, scurvy, and incidences of anemia, dental caries, and knobby joints do not seem to be indicated in our hunter-gatherer ancestors but begin to appear in archival records from Greek and Roman sources writing about the known cultures of that era. Kiple states that our ancestors were significantly taller than the following agrarians; similarly, American Revolutionary soldiers were larger than their European opponents, indicating more protein in their diets.

This book joins with those of Charles Mann, *1491*, and Jarrod Diamond, *Guns, germs, and steel*, in examining the impacts of the new world upon the old. The author states that the 'Columbian Exchange,' touted as revolutionizing the world, did so by reversing the evolutionary trend to diversify: that it rather rearranged food around the world. This globalizing of our foods, fueled by immigration and the industrial revolution, 'ushered in the modern world' (p. 162).

Although food geographers may consider this book a primer reader best suited to an introductory course, the bibliography is extensive and well researched, the writing fluid, and the themes well expressed and thoroughly explored.

University of Wyoming

LUCIUS HALLETT

Culture, urbanism and planning. Edited by J. Monclús and M. Guàrdia. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2006. xix + 293 pp. £55.00 hardback. ISBN: 0754646238.

Culture, urbanism and planning is an edited book that reflects its roots in a collection of papers from an annual conference of the International Planning History Society. As expected from an IPHS conference, the majority of the 15 contributions are firmly rooted in the discipline of planning history, though most are concerned to link past, present and future, and some are predominantly about the contemporary city. The geographical focus is wide-ranging, including chapters on Latin America and South America as well as Europe and the US. Cultural geographers will no doubt be attracted by the intriguing title. They might, however, be disappointed by what they find inside the covers, especially as the combination of 'culture', 'urbanism' and 'planning' is used as a loose umbrella for disparate chapters rather than a starting point for analysis. The editors' introductory chapter has only a brief discussion of the three concepts, but it makes clear that their focus is planning for the cultural economy rather than the ways in which culture gets into planning. The presence of the terms 'urbanism' and 'planning' in the title is seen as little more than an attempt 'to delimit a more comprehensive and fluid area of problems, than that which each term evokes on its own' (p. xvi). Many of the chapters take a wider view of the culture–planning relationship, but the implications tend to be implicit rather than explicit. The chapters that rise to the challenge of linking culture and planning reflect the concern with planning for culture in its narrowest sense.