



Pork: A Global History (Edible)

Katharine M. Rogers

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Pork is the most widely eaten meat in the world. It formed the high point of Roman feasts and was the mainstay of the traditional working class diet in Europe and North America for centuries. It is the most versatile of meats – ranging from the rich, delicate succulence of a roast loin to the dry, salty assertiveness of ham and bacon. Almost every part of a pig is edible, including its blood (black puddings) and tail (flavouring for soups and stews). Traditionally pig fat or lard was the most common fat for frying and for shortening pastry in northern Europe and North America. Salting, drying, and smoking – essential for preserving meat in the days before refrigeration – actually improve pork. After Roman times, pork became unfashionable among the rich and was no longer featured at aristocratic banquets and in high-end cookbooks, probably because it was associated with the lower and middle classes. Every prosperous peasant family kept a pig, and bacon and lard added much-needed flavour to bland diets. European settlers brought pork to the Americas, and it soon became the most popular meat. Barrel pork, kept submerged in a barrel of brine, was an essential staple for working class people in the United States, comparable to bacon in Britain though evidently less palatable. Germany, Denmark, Poland and Austria consume the most pork per person per year of all countries. China would head the list if its income level were higher and for the Chinese ‘meat’ means pork unless otherwise specified. Families there who can afford it serve pork at nearly every meal, typically shredded and stir-fried with vegetables and sauce. Pork offers a wealth of fascinating facts from around the world, as well as numerous pork recipes.

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