



Meat, in all human cultures, has been and still is a sensitive subject. Highly valued or prohibited, symbolically always very powerful, it has often been at the core of all food lore.

There are all sorts of animal foods. Possibilities range from insects and reptiles to fish, fowl and all other warm blooded animals. Every human society, culturally, has selected and established the animals it considers edible, and this may vary from snails to beef, bugs to fish, rabbit to reindeer. It is not inconceivable that humankind at some point or other has tasted all living creatures.

From a nutritional point of view, animal flesh is not absolutely essential to the human diet. Proteins of animal origin can be absorbed through milk and milk products, as well as eggs. Thus we have several cultures, such as Buddhists and Hindu groups, who, for philosophical or religious reasons, have abstained from the flesh of animals and maintained an excellent level of health. But groups abstaining from all animal products whatsoever have been few and far between. In the post-Pythagorean Western world, these have never established structured societies, and even today, if such groups develop they are small and not really representative; and the very exacting effort they have to make to achieve a diet that provides all necessary types of protein, relegate them rather to the sphere of philosophical or religious peculiarities.

However, one of the most important topics discussed and researched by food anthropologists and primatologists has been the original condition of humanoids: were they vegetarian or meat eaters? It is indeed a major topic still today, possibly because it carries strong philosophical interpretations of the "true" nature of Man. And this remains so even if the general consensus is that our ancestors were, like most primates, occasional meat eaters.

This book is an attempt to understand some aspects of the complicated relationship between Man and Meat.



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