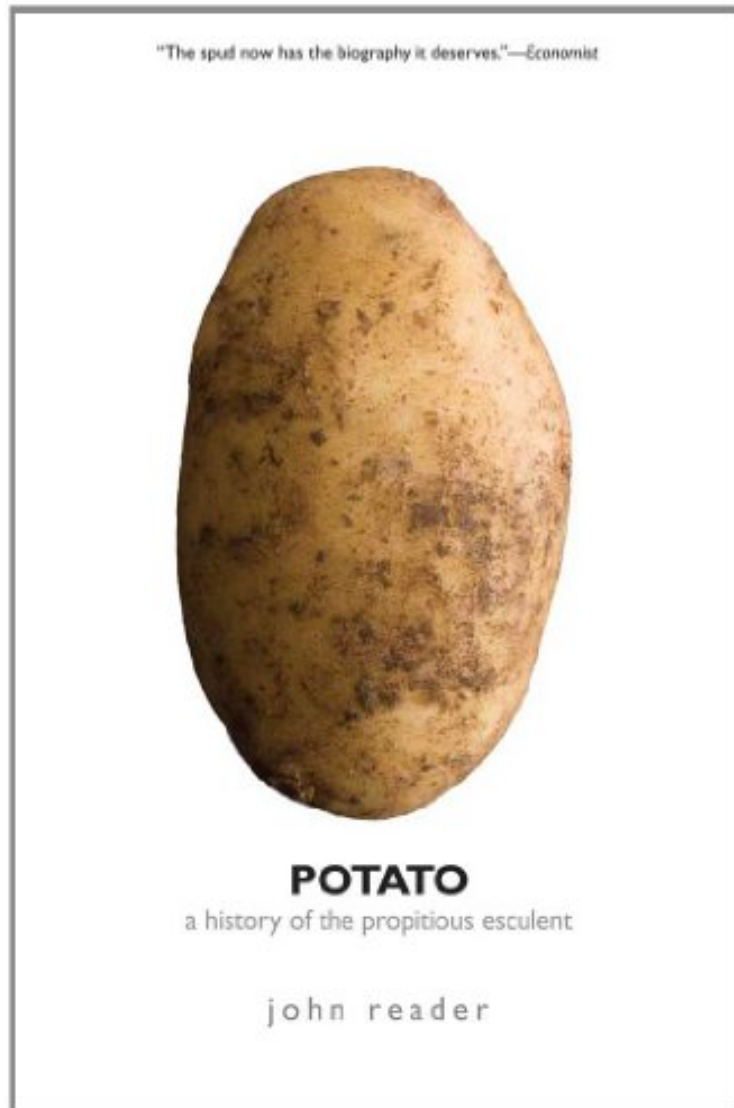


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## Potato: A History of the Propitious Esculent

*John Reader*

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**John Reader : Potato: A History of the Propitious Esculent** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Potato: A History of the Propitious Esculent:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. To Mars From The Andes?By john purcellMost of my consulting clients are food companies. When I took on project management for an Idaho based food company I wanted to get smart on tubers. After reading the aptly named Reader's book I was not only smarter but highly entertained. This is a delightful book that puts the last 10,000 years of human history into perspective. I think the best part was Reader starting the book with the NASA research on sustaining life in space following a potato diet before Matt Damon

figured it out in the Martian film. Reader takes us to colonial South America where we see early growers, agronomists, and scoundrels in action. Then potatoes come to Europe. Eventually they take over since they provide four times the calories per acre and are less likely to be disturbed by the marauding armies so prevalent in war-torn 18th century Europe. The impact of potatoes on social history is clear as the cheap calories swell the Irish population. Potatoes eventually go bad briefly in the 19th century leading to the Irish migration and the modernization of the English economy. And now today we have research under way on GM potatoes driven by claims of reducing potentially carcinogenic component levels.<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. Anecdotes about the Potato from Author's 3x5 card Index By Thomas Kiefer I guess I bought this because it was published by Yale Press, expecting a "scholarly" treatment and a serious book about the potato in history. It is not. The author is a professional pop science writer and that is what you get. But it is well done by the standards of the genre. It is a well written, often interesting, set of disconnected anecdotes and stories about all things potato. It begins with the origins in the Andes, spends a good bit of time on the Irish, and ends with pommes frites in China. There is a little bit on botany, a little bit of plant pathology, quite a lot on nasty Spaniards and Brits, and lots more. Was I bored? No. Did I have a sense that I had wasted my time. YES. Am I disappointed with Yale Press? You bet! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well written and informative By Customer These kinds of food history books can be hit or miss. Sometimes you get a super technical explanation that is very dry, if insightful. Other times, you get poorly researched stuff that makes you question whether anything you're reading is real. Reader's book strikes the perfect balance, taking you through an intriguing tour of the potato's history and how it has influenced civilizations from antiquity onward. Definitely one of the better food histories out there.

The potato humble, lumpy, bland, familiar is a decidedly unglamorous staple of the dinner table. Or is it? John Reader's narrative on the role of the potato in world history suggests we may be underestimating this remarkable tuber. From domestication in Peru 8,000 years ago to its status today as the world's fourth largest food crop, the potato has played a starring or at least supporting role in many chapters of human history. In this witty and engaging book, Reader opens our eyes to the power of the potato. Whether embraced as the solution to hunger or wielded as a weapon of exploitation, blamed for famine and death or recognized for spurring progress, the potato has often changed the course of human events. Reader focuses on sixteenth-century South America, where the indigenous potato enabled Spanish conquerors to feed thousands of conscripted native people; eighteenth-century Europe, where the nutrition-packed potato brought about a population explosion; and today's global world, where the potato is an essential food source but also the world's most chemically-dependent crop. Where potatoes have been adopted as a staple food, social change has always followed. It may be just a humble vegetable, John Reader shows, yet the history of the potato has been anything but dull.

From The New Yorker This enjoyably meandering history looks at the potato as a plant of paradox. It has been revered as an aphrodisiac and feared as a cause of leprosy. Populations rise dramatically wherever it is introduced, but reliance on it ensnares more people in poverty than it lifts out. Reader traces the evolution of the potato from poisonous Andean weed to global staple, offering adept disquisitions on whatever captures his attention: the mysterious origins of agriculture, the economic history of Peru, the domestic arrangements of the Irish. There are glimpses of the Reign of Terror, when the ornamental gardens of the Tuileries Palace were planted with potatoes, and the Great Potato Boom of 1903 and 1904, when an investment bubble grew as a result of false claims made for a potato strain known as Eldorado. This is a story of invisible systems and unintended consequences, concerned with how the New World transformed the Old. Copyright 2008 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker "[This] accessible account embraces the latest scholarship and addresses the failings of previous works on the subject. Indeed the book, like the tuber it describes, fills a void: the spud now has the biography it deserves." Economist "John Reader's superb history traces the potato's rise from mistaken identity to the basic food now cultivated in 149 countries." Robert Collins, Sunday Times "As a staple of the global diet, the potato is worth this digestible book . . ." Iain Finlayson, Times ". . . rarely has this kind of thing been done so well." Giles Foden, Conde Nast Traveller "A riveting new history . . ." Toby Morison, Sunday Telegraph Stella Supplement "A very thorough historical treatment of the tuber." Billy Heller, New York Post "Photojournalist Reader traces the humble potato from its roots in the Peruvian Andes to J.R. Simplot's multibillion-dollar-a-year French fry business. . . . Recommended for academic and large public libraries." Library Journal "Potato is more than a history of the spud. . . . [This] is a history of colonialization, industrialization, and globalization whose perspective is determined by the evolutions and adaptations of the 'propitious esculent.' . . . Highly recommended." A. B. Audant, Choice "[Potato is] the story of the power of a species of plant to influence and to shape the development of world cultures." James P. Hammersmith, Southern Humanities