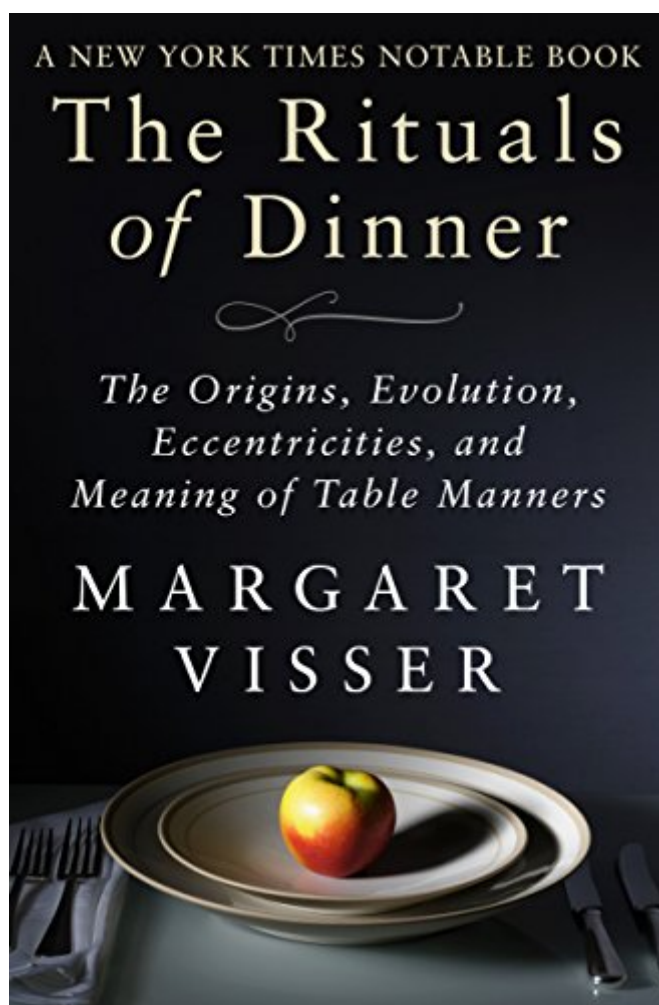


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# The Rituals Of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, And Meaning Of Table Manners



## Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book: A renowned scholar explores the way we eat across cultures and throughout history. From the wild parties of ancient Greece to the strictures of an Upper East Side meal to the ritualistic feasts of cannibals, Margaret Visser takes us on a fascinating journey through the diverse practices, customs, and taboos that define how and why we prepare and consume food the way we do. With keen insights into small details we take for granted, such as the origins of forks and chopsticks or why tablecloths exist, and examinations of broader issues like the economic implications of dining etiquette, Visser scrutinizes table manners across eras and oceans, offering an intimate new understanding of eating both as a biological necessity and a cultural phenomenon. Witty and impeccably researched, *The Rituals of Dinner* is a captivating blend of folklore, sociology, history, and humor. In the words of the New York Times Book Review, "Read it, because you'll never look at a table knife the same way again."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I saw this book advertised as one to give to "The person who has everything". I gave it to my parents and they loved it! I read it myself and had a ball learning all the tidbits and trivia surrounding some of our most basic rituals of everyday life. I love history and anthropology. Not having a formal background in this subject, I found this book a delight to read. It's like a PBS special in print! I strongly recommend this book. A former review objected to Ms. Vissar's connections between Judaism and Christianity. I think her interpretation is different from what Ms. Mead was conveying. The focus is not on the specific beliefs - but the anthropological connections that humankind share - more on HOW we celebrate (lying/leaning around the dinner table (forgive my wording) vs. sitting in upright chairs or cross-legged.) That's the fun part! Who would think???? OH!!!!A nice change of pace and wonderful book. Her other book "Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos of an Ordinary Meal" is another fun and eye-opening view of where some of our choices derive. Both books are like a scrumptious dessert at the end of a feast!

I purchased this book to replace the one I have been reading once a year, since it's been published! I'm a trivia buff but that is not the only reason. The excellent writing and depth of subject is spellbinding. A few more years of this and I'll have it memorized. The original volume was snatched up by a good friend who knows how much I love it. The product and the timely service are great!

It is always fun to explore customs, the totally invented ways of doing ordinary, and in this case, necessary daily activities. This book takes us on a world tour around the common table. It is entertaining and broadens our knowledge of the activities that comprise "human nature."

Interesting book. I learned a lot, connected the dots and even reviewed my own manners. This book even touches on cannibalize manners or protocol. I skimmed over those. Not a riveting book, but informative and interesting.

Look, I'm all for getting paid by the word - but this takes it to an extreme. In her book "Much Depends on Dinner" I rather enjoyed the long-winded descriptions and found her take on how various things fit together fascinating. Not so much this one, unfortunately. I started reading a few paragraphs in the introduction to my family on a road trip, and it took about two miles to wade through one. Admittedly, we were on the freeway... but the writing was nowhere near as clear as the previous book I read. As others have noted, this book is chock full of trivia... which may or may not

be accurate. The research is referenced, to be sure - close to 80 pages of references in the back. What struck me, though, was the chaotic writing style of this book. It was stream of consciousness taken to an extreme. Constant digressions were the norm, you'd be talking about table manners of an African tribe in one paragraph (and wanting to read more) and the next you were reading about something completely disconnected, yet she was attempting to show how they were related... usually failing in the attempt. Whoever edited this, if it WAS edited and this IS the result, must have had one heck of a job getting it as coherent as it is. (Which is really not saying terribly much...) I can't recommend this book, sorry. The two stars is because it really IS very diligently (if not carefully) researched. It is full of interesting material and factoids, but it's so badly presented and poorly organized that it's one of those books you keep in the bathroom. You can dip into it for a few minutes when you're otherwise preoccupied - and by the time the author changes the subject, you're done until next time. And somehow, I don't think it was her intent to create a specialized book like that...

I said it has a Eurocentric viewpoint, but it actually covers table manners from across the world...just viewed through a more European lens. It was actually incredibly interesting. Visser does a great job of detailing both the traditions (ancient, obsolete, recent, and modern) and the reasons behind them. She also describes how a culture influences or is influenced by their food and rituals around it and provides explanation for how the rituals (and utensils) evolved. All in all, it's really very interesting. A little slow, but dense with good material, so it's alright. For anyone interested in sociology or food history, or anything tangential, this is a pretty good read. Only complaint was that I already read "The Gift of Thanks". There was a lot of repetition between the anecdotes shared in the two books. It would have been nice to have all new material. I actually read this on a trip to Japan and left it at a hostel over there. Hope someone else enjoys it!

Perhaps I will continue to read it later but I was quite put off by the author's excessive description of cannibalism at the beginning of the book. Kinda' soiled my appetite for any more information from her.

Not what I expected. Without taking anything away from the scholarship behind this book, it was much too dry for my taste.

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