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The Spice Route: A History (California Studies in Food and Culture)

John Keay

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The Spice Route is one of history's greatest anomalies: shrouded in mystery, it existed long before anyone knew of its extent or configuration. Spices came from lands unseen, possibly uninhabitable, and almost by definition unattainable; that was what made them so desirable. Yet more livelihoods depended on this pungent traffic, more nations participated in it, more wars were fought for it, and more discoveries resulted from it than from any other global exchange. Epic in scope, marvelously detailed, laced with drama, *The Spice Route* spans three millennia and circles the world to chronicle the history of the spice trade. With the aid of ancient geographies, travelers' accounts, mariners' handbooks, and ships' logs, John Keay tells of ancient Egyptians who pioneered maritime trade to fetch the incense of Arabia, Graeco-Roman navigators who found their way to India for pepper and ginger, Columbus who sailed west for spices, de Gama, who sailed east for them, and Magellan, who sailed across the Pacific on the exact same quest. A veritable spice race evolved as the west vied for control of the spice-producing islands, stripping them of their innocence and the spice trade of its mystique. This enthralling saga, progressing from the voyages of the ancients to the blue-water trade that came to prevail by the seventeenth century, transports us from the dawn of history to the ends of the earth.

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