HISTORY OF MILK IN AMERICA - SCRIPT

Picture 01 – A Retrospect.

Dairy got its start in what is now Turkey about 8,000 BCE, and for reasons of food safety in the days before refrigeration, the first milk from animals was turned into yogurt, cheese, and butter.

It took the domestication of cattle, following on the heels of sheep and goats, to put the ancient dairy industry into motion and a quirk of genetics to move it along.

As people and cattle migrated, they took this genetic mutation that mysteriously began to appear shortly after dairy products were developed—lactose tolerance.

Picture 02 – Humans and Lactose.

Humans, like all mammals, weren't built to digest lactose, milk's natural sugar, beyond childhood.

But around 6,000 BCE, the ability for some adult humans to tolerate lactose kicked in and was passed down through people in Europe as well as in parts of Africa and the Middle East.

From around 8000 BC to 63BC, Neolithic farmers in Britain and Northern Europe may have been among the first to begin milking cattle for human consumption.

Picture 03 - 8000 BC - Origins of the Domestic Cow

Aurochs were first domesticated 8,000 to 10,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent area of the Near East and evolved into two types of domestic cattle, the humped Zebu (Bos indicus) and the humpless European Highland cattle (Bos taurus).

Some scientists believe that domesticated cattle from the Fertile Crescent spread throughout Eurasia, while others believe that a separate domestication event took place in the area of India and Pakistan.

Accordingly, the ability to digest milk was slowly gained some time between 5000-4000 BC. by the spread of a genetic mutation called lactase persistence that allowed post-weaned humans to continue to digest milk.

Then by 4000 BC there is early evidence of Milking Cattle in Neolithic Britian and Northern Europe that may have been among the first to milk cattle for human consumption.

If that date is correct, it may pre-date the rise of other major dairying civilizations in the Near East, India, and North Africa.

It's possible adult humans already drank other mammals' milk because illness was better than death during famine, and infants always needed milk if a mother or wet nurse wasn't available.

That foundation stayed in place. Not much changed with milk in the ensuing millennia except more people came to value it for nutrition and flavour, including some of the first American colonists who brought cows across the Atlantic.

Picture 04 – Northwest Turkey.

Research has identified Northwest Turkey as a key region for the development of dairying in the seventh millennium BCE, yet little is known about how this practice began or evolved there.

This research studies Barcın Höyük, a site located in Bursa's Yenişehir Valley, which ranges chronologically from 6600 BCE, when the first evidence of settled life appears in the Marmara Region, to 6000 BCE, when Neolithic habitation at the site ceases.

The discovery of abundant milk residues even among the earliest ceramics indicates that the pioneer farmers arrived in the region already with the knowhow of dairying and milk processing.

Picture 05 – Neolithic Britain.

Then by 4000 BC there is early evidence of Milking Cattle in Neolithic Britian.

Scientists have discovered that Neolithic farmers in Britain and Northern Europe may have been among the first to begin milking cattle for human consumption.

It's possible adult humans already drank other mammals' milk because illness was better than death during famine, and infants always needed milk if a mother or wet nurse wasn't available.

That foundation stayed in place for quite some time. Not much changed with milk in the ensuing millennia except more people came to value it for nutrition and flavour, including some of the first American colonists who brought cows across the Atlantic.

Picture 06 - The women of the Kazakh nomad community In Western Mongolia

Their tongues click and arms wave as they chase their herds of goats and sheep into a pen. Hundreds of hooves dart this way and that, swirling and spinning, trying to avoid what's coming next.

On the whole, a Kazakh's diet consists of meat and dairy products. There's no agriculture to speak of. As nomads, they live hundreds of miles from the nearest town or grocery store.

Picture 07 - Why So Much Milking?

From start to finish this daily Kazakh tradition takes nearly two hours. Afterward, the herds are released and they run off into the hills to graze. In a matter of hours, it will happen all over again.

They slaughter their own livestock and practically everything else they make is derived from milk. They make their own bread, butter, and yogurt, plus a variety of hard cheeses they produce by the truckload and store for the winter.

Picture 08 – 3000 BC - Evidence of Dairy Cows Playing a Major Role in Ancient Sumerian Civilization.

Although there is evidence of cattle domestication in Mesopotamia as early as 8000 BC. the milking of dairy cows did not become a major part of Sumerian civilization until approximately 3000 BC.

Archaeological evidence shows that the Ancient Sumerians drank cow's milk and also made cow's milk into cheeses and butters.

Picture 09 - 3100 BC - The Domesticated Cow appears in Ancient Egyptian Civilization.

At least as early as 3100 BC. the domesticated cow had been introduced to, or had been separately domesticated in, Northern

Africa.

Attesting to its central role in Egyptian life, the cow was deified. The Egyptians "held the cow sacred and dedicated her to Isis, goddess of agriculture; but more than that, the cow was a goddess in her own right, named Hathor, who guarded the fertility of the land."

Picture 10 – The Cow and Water Buffalo.

Introduced and domesticated for milking around that same time of 3100BC.

As the animal with the greatest milk production in several countries, domestic water buffaloes (Bubalus bubalis) significantly contribute to the world's milk production.

Picture 11 – The Donkey and Cleopatra.

It is said that Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, maintained her beauty and the youth of her skin in baths of donkey milk. The daily care required a herd of about 700 donkeys. The Romans also used donkey milk for its therapeutic properties.

Here are some reasons why Cleopatra may have bathed in donkey milk:

Skin exfoliation

Sour milk contains lactic acid, which can help remove dead skin cells and reveal smoother skin. This is a chemical peeling process that was used in ancient Egyptian medicine.

Skin rejuvenation

Donkey milk contains vitamins and minerals that can help soothe and moisturize the skin and inhibit the oxidation of skin cells.

Skin aging

Donkey milk contains a bioactive enzyme with anti-bacterial and anti-allergen properties, which may help with psoriasis and eczema.

Donkey milk has been used for its therapeutic properties since ancient times. The Romans also used donkey milk, including Poppea, the wife of Emperor Nero, and Messalina, a Roman empress.

Picture 12 - 2000 BC - The Domesticated Cow Appears in Northern Indian Vedic Civilization.

By 2000 BC. the domesticated cow had appeared in Northern India, coinciding with the arrival of the Aryan nomads.

The Vedic civilization that ruled Northern India from about 1750 BC. to about 500 BC. relied heavily upon the cow and the dairy products that it provided.

The heavy dependence on the cow was reinforced by the Vedas (the religious epics of the Hindu religion) wherein the cow was considered a sacred animal.

Picture 13 – Bog Butter.

The practice of people depositing butter in bogs in Ireland dates from at least the Early Bronze Age (1750 BC) and may reflect a booming dairying industry at the time.

There is a lot of debate, however, on why people deposited butter in bogs, with there being ample evidence that supports theories on both the practical (peat bogs could have been a means of helping people preserve the butter for longer).

Also, the spiritual (butter may have been deposited in peat bogs as offerings to gods, goddesses, local spirits, or ancestors) and it is also quite possible that both reasons were true.

Picture 14 – Butter – 'Making the evil one'

There used to be many ancient superstitions surrounding butter in Ireland For example like this folklore from County Wexford:

If the butter were 'taken,' the milk would rise in froth all over the churn but there would be no butter.

Sometimes the cream would have an awful smell. The power was supposed to be got from the Evil One on May morning by skimming a well before the sun rose.

There was a rhyme to be recited whilst the skimming was going on. A piece of whitish fat or butter with milk dropping from it was supposed to be left at the door of the house where the butter was to be taken.

The people of the house would know then that they would have no butter when churning. The cure for this was to get the coulter out of the plough and put it in the fire and redden it in the devil's name.

Picture 15 – So, what is Bog Butter?

In 2013, a turf cutter in County Offaly found a 100-pound, 5,000-year-old chunk. Many examples of the butter are found in Irish museums, including the place dedicated to the golden spread, Cork's Butter Museum.

It's exactly what it sounds like—butter made from cow's milk, buried in a bog. What makes it special is its age.

After spending so much time in the cool, damp peat, it starts to take on the appearance and consistency of paraffin wax.

In a paper published in the Journal of Irish Archaeology, it was explained that bog butter is usually found in earthenware pots, wooden containers, animal skins, or wrapped in bark and takes on a pungent, cheesy odour, and concluded that early Celtic people sunk the butter in the bog simply to preserve it or protect from thieves.

The cool, low-oxygen, high acid environment of the bog made a perfect natural refrigerator. Seeing as butter was a valuable commodity and was used to pay taxes, saving it for times of drought, famine, or war would have been a good idea.

There are other theories about the butter as well. It could also have been buried in the bog as an offering to the gods or spirits.

Picture 16 - 1700-63 BC - Milk in Ancient Hebrew Civilization and the Bible

"The ancient Hebrews... held milk in high favour; the earliest Hebrew scriptures contain abundant evidence of the widespread use of milk from very early times.

The Old Testament refers to a 'land which floweth with milk and honey' some twenty times. The phrase describes Palestine as a land of extraordinary fertility, providing all the comforts and necessities of life.

Picture 17 - Nubia

Nubian worshippers are first attested in the temple inscriptions of Philae in the early Roman period.

Before this time only royalty and officials employed by the

Ptolemaic kings of Egypt inscribed prayers on the walls at Philae.

These Nubian inscriptions were frequently engraved near scenes of milk offerings at Philae and testify to the performance of a unique ritual enacted during the month of Khoiak, namely, pouring milk libations as part of the funerary rites performed for Osiris-Wennefer.

Nubian goats are known for their pendulous ears, Roman nose, and short coat, which can be solid, parti-coloured, or spotted.

They are thought to be native to Africa but have been common in India and the Middle East since ancient times.

In the 19th century, Nubian goats were often crossbred with English varieties to develop the Anglo-Nubian goat, which is also used for meat production.

Picture 18 – Roman Era.

Fresh milk was not very important in the Greek and Roman diet, for climatic reasons, and many people in southern Italy and Greece cannot digest lactose in milk.

The gene that gives Europeans lactose tolerance is only 5000 years old.

Picture 19 – End of Part One.

(1817 words)