Introduction

BEAT KÜMIN

For the visit of a group of patricians in the mid-seventeenth century, the innkeeper of Jegenstorf (in the Swiss canton of Bern) received advance orders for a lavish banquet, involving the loan of luxury crockery and cutlery and even the hiring of additional cooks and *traiteurs*. The instructions specified three courses including: 1. Good soups with boiled and roast meat; 2. A range of fish-, chicken- and dove-pies; 3. Cakes and other baked dishes; olives; boiled and baked fish and crabs; boiled and roast poultry and doves; roast porkling; glazed roast pig; well-made sausages. Also salad and the like and finally confectionery appropriate for such "noble" company.[1]

During his journeys through the Bavarian countryside in the 1780s, travel writer Philipp Wilhelm Gercken found "nothing but Sauerkraut, cow's meat and pork or sausages. Who cannot face such fare, has to bring along some cold roast from the towns. Meat soups are available as early as 8 o'clock in the morning, they are not too bad…and good beer is always served. People with a healthy stomach find life here terrific."[2]

Visiting the village of Grindelwald in the Alps at about the same time, J.W.F. von Reinach was not impressed: "At last our host served the

> meal… The meat was prepared in a fashion which made it bearable only in an emergency, the drink was even worse (with the white wine having a foul smell and the red hardly an improvement). The only alternative was—fortunately good—fountain water. Dessert turned out a little better: cheese and cherries, which helped to fill our stomach. We soon left this miserable table."[3]

These three snapshots provide some initial impressions of the range and variety of food provision between the Renaissance and the modern age. Many of the dishes sound familiar to modern consumers, but dining contexts and preferences were naturally very distinct. The fourth volume of the series, *A Cultural History of Food,* sets out to examine alimentary practices and meanings in the period from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries. As indicated by the book's title, the main emphasis is on food, albeit with consideration of closely related topics such as drink, material culture, and socio-economic frameworks.

The chronological framework for this collection broadly corresponds to Europe's so-called early modernity. While there is much debate about boundaries (at both ends), defining features, and long-term legacies, most scholars accept the term as a pragmatic label for the time between the Reformation and French Revolution.[4] Some, particularly in the Anglophone world, tend to detach the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as a distinct entity, pointing to the latter's innovatory emphasis on reason, critical reflection, and cultural innovation, but there are equally good reasons—such as the resilience of feudal relationships and princely powers—to embed the 1700s in the early modern tradition.

To situate and connect the following contributions, the introductory remarks are structured in three parts: (1) a general historical overview, (2) ways in which early modern developments interacted with the culture of food, and (3) the themes and emphases of this volume. The argument concludes with (4) an outline of research perspectives and preliminary conclusions.

EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Similar to any other historical period, the early modern centuries were characterized by a complex blend of continuities and transformations.[5]

Legacies from the Middle Ages included the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of European society. Lineage and birth right still determined lifestyles and personal opportunities to a large extent, although the traditional division into three estates (those who fought, prayed, and worked) became inadequate for a growing and ever more differentiated population. Women were subject to men, regardless of the fact that many made essential contributions to their families' livelihoods. Politically, the vast majority of Europeans lived in monarchical regimes granting a disproportionate share of influence to members of the nobility. Republics such as those of the Dutch, Swiss, and Venetians were exceptions and were not immune to the oligarchic tendencies of the period. Religion played a towering role in all polities (including, until at least the late seventeenth century, international relations), with regular church attendance and adherence to Christian values expected from all subjects. Socio-economically, feudalism remained operational: peasants (who made up the vast majority of the population) owed various combinations of rents, dues, and services to their lords. Where serfdom had survived, as in Eastern Europe, nobles also exercised local jurisdiction and extensive control over their tenants' personal lives. At the same time, participation in urban, rural, and parochial communities provided the common people with some social and political powers of their own.[6]

Numerous dynamic forces, however, gave the early modern period a distinct profile. A cluster of transformations between 1450 and 1550 marked the emergence of a new era: the invention of print (and thus Europe's first instrument of mass communication), the beginnings of transatlantic expansion, the scientific revolution (including, most startlingly, the shift from a geo- to a heliocentric model of the universe), and the fragmentation of the Christian Church into rival confessions (Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed).[7] Politically, rulers embarked on the consolidation of their territories, aiming not only for the acquisition of new dominions, but also the greater penetration and subordination of existing possessions. This process of state formation involved increasing levels of legislation, administration, and taxation, culminating—in areas such as France, Brandenburg-Prussia, and Russia—into regimes of an absolutist nature, where previous checks on princely powers (by the Church, nobles, and representative assemblies) were eroded to a greater or lesser extent. This centralizing trend found

symbolic expression in the personality cult of monarchs and the rise of princely courts as nodal points of political life. Yet none of these regimes acquired total or even despotic powers, since they remained limited by natural or divine law, dependent on provincial brokers and threatened by popular resistance against excessive demands.[8]

Religious division, dynastic ambitions, and the struggle over colonial resources turned warfare into an almost permanent feature of early modern politics. Innovations in military tactics and weaponry (especially the growing reliance on gunpowder and artillery) boosted army sizes, creating an ensuing need for greater discipline, bureaucracy, and financial resources. This so-called military revolution—whose exact parameters remain contested—allowed longer and more ambitious campaigns, albeit at enormous financial and social cost. The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) in particular devastated many parts of Central Europe, causing population losses of over fifty per cent in some cases. While religion still mattered greatly in this conflict, the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) exemplified the increasingly global repercussions of European politics and the essential role of naval resources. By that point, both troop numbers and casualties could approach the one million mark—a far cry from the modest dimensions of late medieval encounters.[9]

Regional variety was a key feature of early modern experience. Overseas expansions benefitted, above all, areas and cities along the Atlantic seaboard, with Spain and Portugal at the forefront of trading activities in the sixteenth century, and the Dutch and British obtaining pre-eminence from the seventeenth century onward. North-western Europe was most heavily urbanized and differentiated, while agriculture—in numerous forms of arable husbandry and pastoral regimes—dominated most other areas of the continent. There were pockets of early industry (as in the mines of the Austrian Tyrol or the English Midlands), and manufacturing, too, could be increasingly co-ordinated, especially in the decentralized *putting out* system under which rural laborers produced textiles for marketing by urban merchants. After the harsh decades of the late 1500s, when population increases, climatic deterioration, and harvest failures caused serious hardship for the European poor, conditions mostly stabilized in the seventeenth century. Moderate levels of dispensable income allowed members of the middling sort to become consumers, purchasing goods in line with personal

tastes and changing fashions. This was most conspicuous in large cities such as London, Paris, Vienna, and Amsterdam, where colonial imports and new standards of (court-inspired) manners nurtured a civil society versed in the fine arts, critical reasoning, and polite sociability in salons and coffee houses, but even prosperous peasants invested in luxury items such as porcelain and plate with which to embellish their domestic environments.[10]

Culturally speaking, Europe moved from reliance on given authorities (especially scholastic theology and classical philosophy) towards individual education and observation—personified in astronomers such as Kepler, anatomists such as Vesalius, and physicists such as Newton. Personal merits and professional qualifications, most notably studies of law in one of the growing number of universities, provided new routes for social advancement, be it in the service of a prince or one of the established Churches. The Renaissance had fostered more critical attitudes to ancient texts and religious practices, the Confessional Age brought campaigns for greater social discipline (including clampdowns on traditional popular culture), and the Enlightenment set new priorities for human endeavors in all spheres of life—principally the pursuit of reason, social utility, and general happiness. There was no linear process of secularization in early modern Europe, but the devastation of religious wars and the experience of pragmatic coexistence promoted a grudging realization that Christian unity had been lost for good, and that there was little alternative in the acceptance of other faiths.[11] By around 1700, Europe was also in the midst of a communication revolution. The postal network, first developed for letters and diplomatic correspondence in the sixteenth century, had diversified into comprehensive transport services. Thanks to the introduction of regular and reliable stagecoach routes (and widespread investment in better public highways during the eighteenth century), long-distance mobility increased dramatically. The growth in pleasure trips—both mass pilgrimages in Catholic areas and early forms of tourism in the Alps—manifested itself in a flood of travel literature and practical guides.[12]

DEVELOPMENTS IN EARLY MODERN FOOD CULTURE

At the close of the Middle Ages, the European diet could already be rather impressive, at least on the level of elites. Cultural leadership was provided

by the Renaissance courts and cities of the Italian Peninsula, where celebrated cooks such as Bartolomeo Scappi (who worked for Rome's prelates and, in 1570, published a cookbook with over 1,000 recipes) acquired good reputations and where Humanists engaged in culinary debates.[13] Banquets had to be as opulent as possible, with a rich variety of dishes, large quantities of food, and extravagant use of spices—the latter obtained through the merchants' extensive trading networks with Asia. Further north and among the common people, of course, everyday fare was much more modest, cereal-based, and heavily dependent on location and season, but it is widely accepted that the golden age of European peasants and laborers (when low population levels following the Black Death resulted in relatively high wages and favorable terms of tenure) allowed even humble people to consume remarkable volumes of meat.[14] Excavations of late medieval inn locations, too, reveal that meals served on the premises featured a surprising range of victuals. At Villingen in South Germany, for example, archaeologists discovered a "wide range of animal bones" and beneath the drinking hall of Munich's town council, they found various types of fish (including Mediterranean seafood), nuts, as well as cherries, plums, peaches, apples, figs, and strawberries.[15]

Many of the general early modern trends outlined above affected European food culture very directly. According to Ken Albala's pioneering overview, change occurred, above all, in towns and among social elites, whose lifestyles were most likely to be affected by the growth of the market, colonial imports, and more refined dining cultures.[16] The latter included more civil table manners and an increasing preference for simpler, more elegant menus in the fashion of the French court, rather than the heavy and elaborate banquets which had characterized Renaissance tables of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[17]

The single most striking development, of course, was the enrichment of diets and the introduction of new crops through the Columbian exchange (addressed in chapter 10).[18] Yet immediate large-scale adoptions—as documented for maize in Northern Italy—were the exception rather than the rule. After a great deal of initial skepticism, the take-off of potato cultivation only occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Compared to the volume of petty, inner-continental trade, furthermore, the extent of overseas exchange with the New World remained relatively

modest well into the 1700s: "Indeed, overseas expansion was less spectacularly significant in reality than contemporary propagandists and some historians might lead us to expect."[19] European state building manifested itself at least as visibly, for instance by a growing volume of central police legislation on the production and marketing of victuals from the late Middle Ages, high indirect taxes levied on salt or alcohol in the age of absolutism, and official encouragement of higher-yield crops—especially potatoes—in the Age of Enlightenment.[20] The new print technology allowed a more extensive dissemination of cookery books and dietetic literature, with Platina's *De honesta voluptate* one of the most influential early publications (see Figure 0.1).[21] Religious change associated with the Reformation(s) led to the abolition of traditional fasting rules in Protestant areas of the continent, albeit in combination with intense campaigns against immoderate eating and drinking.[22] The growing purchasing power of the middling sort, in turn, boosted differentiation in agricultural production, exemplified by the rise of market gardening—cultivation of fruit and vegetables (alongside fashionable flowers such as tulips) for prosperous urban consumers—in the Dutch Republic and parts of France, as well as the rise of strong (brandy, gin) and hot beverages (tea, coffee, chocolate) over the course of the early modern centuries.[23]

Regional variation in climate, topography, socio-economic structures, and crops, emphasized throughout this volume, makes it difficult to speak of an *overall* European food culture. Travellers routinely commented on the differences in culinary regimes encountered on their journeys. With regard to the Swiss, Fynes Moryson commented in 1617: "For foode, they abound with Hony, Butter, and Milke, and haue plenty of Venson found in the wilde *Alpes,* and especially of excellent sorts of fish, by reason of their frequent lakes," while eighteenth-century Bavarian countryfolk, according to Johann Pezzl, "enjoy meat only on Sun- and feast days; during the week, they live on dishes made with flour, vegetables and cooked fruit."[24] Social status was another obvious factor affecting the availability or choice of food and drink. At the lowest end of the scale, harvest and distribution problems could lead to deprivation, and reactions ranging from begging via humble petitions, to frequent food riots (as in the case of the hard-pressed French peasantry of the Ancien Régime).[25] At the top of the hierarchy, quality wine imported from—depending on the political situation—France,

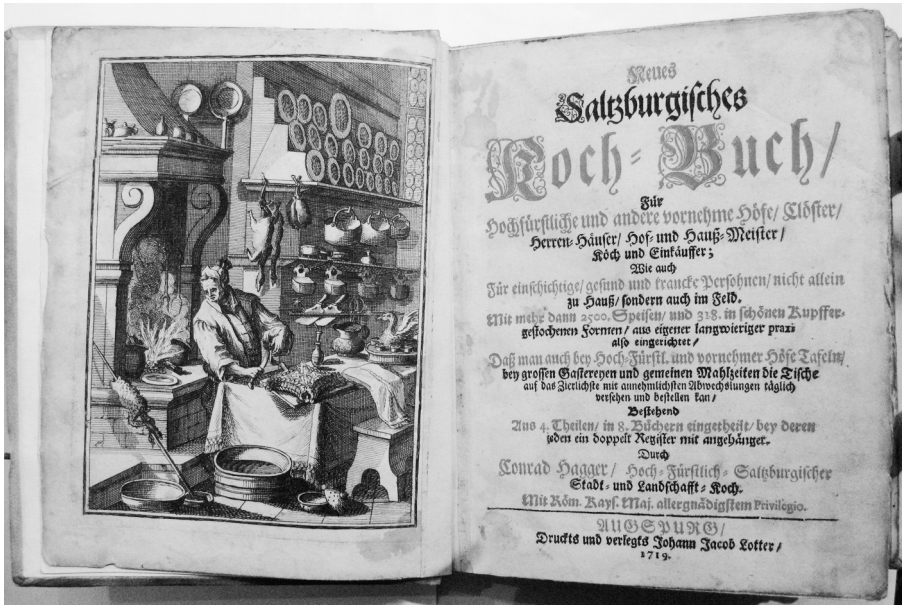

FIGURE 0.1: Print technology allowed unprecedented dissemination of culinary information in early modern Europe. This picture shows the "New Cook = Book from Salzburg / for princely and other noble households / monasteries / manor houses / court = and house = masters / cooks and purchasers . . . With over 2,500 dishes / and 318 beautiful copperplate illustrations / compiled from long-standing personal practice / so that one can most delicately provide the tables . . . for large banquets and common meals with the most pleasant varieties . . . / by Conrad Hagger / Cook of the Town and Land of the High = Princely territory of Salzburg. With gracious permission of his Roman Imperial Majesty. Augsburg / printed and distributed by Johann Jacob Lotter / 1719." Reproduced with kind permission of Ludwig Weiß sen., keeper of the archive of the "Hotel zur Post" at Fürstenfeldbruck in Bavaria.

Spain, or Portugal appeared on the tables of English elites as a matter of course, while poorer compatriots had to make do (at best) with beer brewed at home, or fetched from an alehouse.[26] Religious mentalities exercised influence, too: while Mediterranean Baroque Catholicism—in diets as well as other walks of life—celebrated ostentatious display and copious consumption, some pious women renounced food for long periods of time. Motivated by a quest for spiritual purity, but perhaps also by a desire for more worldly gains, their miraculous stories fascinated medics, and members of the public alike.[27] Conventional gender roles provided early modern Europeans with further points of reference: an ability to hold copious

amounts of drink enhanced male reputations, but was strongly frowned upon for women. According to medical theory, the female constitution was naturally weaker and thus less suited to cope with the effects of alcohol, but just as important was the patriarchal desire to keep women away from anything that might make them unruly, and prone to dissolute behavior.[28]

Among the continuities, in contrast, were the modest yields of agricultural crops, caused by a combination of traditional cultivation techniques and extra-economic constraints on the peasantry. With the exception of highly commercialized regions such as England and the Netherlands, dearth, and famine kept haunting the continent until the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century (see chapter 2). Even in years with satisfactory harvests, furthermore, most contemporaries experienced an idiosyncratic rhythm of want and plenty, depending on the seasons, religious feasts/fasts, and the rites of passage (baptisms, weddings, funerals) that punctuated early modern lives.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THIS VOLUME

In accordance with the general pattern of *A Cultural History of Food,* the volume opens with a survey of *production.* Govind Sreenivasan discusses a dazzling variety of landscapes and agricultural regimes. Grain remained the single, most important crop (the author, in fact, observes a further cerealization of European diets), but colonial imports, the so-called new husbandry and—at least in more commercialized regions such as England and the Low Countries—greater labor efficiency highlight the ways in which productivity ceilings could be expanded. The second essay addresses *systems of food distribution.* Anne Radeff emphasizes the predominance of petty exchange over bulk trade, and the significant role of the peripheral routes. Simple models of centrality fail to capture the complexity of early modern networks, where commercial routes could bypass major cities, and where petty traders were remarkably mobile, and entrepreneurial (for example, with regard to the marketing of their goods).

In most contexts, therefore, European peasants did not starve. As Pier Paolo Viazzo explains, mortality rates reflected epidemics rather than widespread famine (although *food crises* such as that of the 1590s brought extreme hardship). Variations in demographic development, degree of

commercialization, and government action account for significant regional differences.[29] *Food politics* in this period, according to Victor Magagna, cannot be understood as a mere function of power relations and economic priorities; the negotiation of interests between producers, distributors, consumers, and regulators—in forms ranging from paternal appeals to violent risings—reflected widely-shared cultural norms such as the dignity of customs, the preservation of livelihoods, and the operation of a moral market.

Economic differentiation and growing spatial mobility enhanced the frequency of *eating out* in this period. Large sections of the laboring population depended on catering at work or access to ready-made meals, while elite travelers and the emerging leisure industry boosted the range, and sophistication of services in early modern dining establishments. In the field of *professional cooking,* guild restrictions loosened and—in an intriguing contrast to other occupational fields such as brewing—female participation increased. Prominent chefs acquired celebrity status, while others specialized in new areas such as the preparation of desserts. Sara Pennell generally stresses the impact of cultural innovations such as the advent of print and changing food tastes. Within the *domestic sphere,* kitchens (or rather spaces used for food-preparation activities) served as household hubs, and the smooth provision of meals was of fundamental importance for the state of marital, and family relations. Over the course of the early modern period, Pennell notes greater attention to sociable dining, increased access to new victuals, and a multiplication of food service goods.

Charting the evolving relationship between *body and soul,* David Gentilcore detects an almost circular journey from (partly religiously motivated) moderation via Baroque elaboration towards a new kind of natural simplicity. Medical and dietetic literature reveals a gradual superseding of Galenic theories with contemporary mathematical and chemical ideas. Artistic *representations* continued to carry moral and symbolic messages, but Brian Cowan finds growing interest in food per se (for example, in new genres such as still-life work and the emerging culinary discourse). In contrast to the appreciation of large volumes and strong flavors in the Italian Renaissance, early modern tastes put much greater emphasis on elegance and lightness *à la française*.

The volume concludes with a sketch of *global developments*. Fabio Parasecoli stresses the role of commodities such as sugar, coffee, and spices

in the rise of the Western European empires, and the emergence of hybrid colonial cuisines in India, as well as in the Americas. The early modern period, however, was equally characterized by fierce power struggles, the cultural resilience of China and Japan, and the ruthless exploitation of human labor in the transatlantic slave trade.

OUTLOOK

Food history has come a long way over the last few decades. Calls to supplement the long-standing concentration on production and distribution with wider cultural approaches have certainly been heeded.[30] And yet, much remains to be discovered (if not permanently evasive), particularly for the relatively scarcely documented pre-modern period. When we move from general trends to personal experience, the sheer diversity of individuals, contexts, and factors confronts historians with almost impossible challenges. While official early modern discourse was heavily biased toward greater discipline, moderation, and rational behavior, there is certainly evidence for Bacchanalian excess, intoxication, and food- (or deprivation-) induced hallucination.[31] The symbolic meaning of victuals—exemplified by the striking religious connotations of bread and wine—forms another fascinating topic awaiting further scrutiny. Why exactly did early modern people choose certain foods or drinks for specific occasions and what did this signal to those who shared in these meals? Protestants who served Catholics meat on fast days might have been ignorant or negligent, but the possibility of a deliberate confessional provocation should not be discounted. No less demanding is the task to reconstruct developments in individual and collective taste over the *longue durée*. How can we explain that white or wheat beer became enormously popular in seventeenth-century Bavaria, but very difficult to sell only a few decades later?[32] Last but not least: while food and drink consumption was a physiological necessity and a cultural practice invested with multiple meanings (including—as the oyster eater on the cover suggests—sensual pleasure[33]), it could simply be a source of enjoyment, too.

Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Expansion, lightness, elegance, refinement, and innovation—many themes and findings within this volume—reinforce the ongoing reassessment of the centuries under

investigation. Following recent work on aspects as diverse as human rights, communication structures, leisure pursuits, material culture, and consumer demand,[34] the dynamic, and innovatory potential of the early modern period appears in much sharper focus. Europe in general—and people's diet in particular—became more differentiated, commercialized, and globally embedded.[35] Yet, even in 1800 neither was modern, of course, as dramatic transformations such as mechanization, refrigeration, rail, and air transport, international-aid programs, and genetically modified crops (to name just a few) still lay in the future. It is this kind of enhanced awareness of the distinct profile of each era that the long-term comparative series, *A Cultural History of Food,* hopes to facilitate.

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