

Chapter 1

Food and the City

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This book is about food in the city in all its manifestations from the production, processing, marketing and consumption of food to the impact of urbanization upon diets and food systems. The International Commission for Research into European Food History (ICREFH) has given thought to cities and towns before, but has never concentrated on the larger urban aggregations, often with multiple centres, that grew up in Europe in the late nineteenth century, and which were characterized by Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) – the Scottish biologist – as ‘conurbations’.¹ By 1900, Europe contained several large urban agglomerations, notably London, Paris, Berlin, followed in size by Moscow and Vienna.² Their size meant that the supply and distribution of foodstuffs was especially complex: after collection and transportation to markets, food might be stale on arrival, in which case wholesalers and retailers alike sought to delay the deterioration of perishable items. Although London, Berlin and Paris were outstanding as centres of population, the metropolitan effect of a large primary town was also felt in smaller countries, like Belgium, as the stages in the food chain between farm gate and consumers’ kitchens grew, and in post-World War II Czechoslovakia to meet the regime’s showcase requirements.

In essence, food history has been a constituent part of modernization and food has shaped European urban life just as much as cities have influenced the systems of supply and the shifting currents of consumption. There are many ways of testing this assertion and we here choose a framework of four themes, each of which is addressed by four or five papers. The authors were all participants in ICREFH’s Berlin Symposium in September 2005 and come from ten countries and a number of different disciplines. The Symposium resided, appropriately, in Harnack House, named after Adolf Harnack, President of the *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft (KWG)*, which, from its opening, was a conference centre symbolizing German scientific thought and discussion.

¹ See Welter, 2002.

² Urban-industrial areas such as the Ruhr or industrial areas of northern England were not considered by the Symposium. Sutcliffe, 1984, includes essays on the growth of the principal European cities.

Our focus is upon Europe in the last 200 years but we note that at the present the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other development organizations are investing a great deal in studying similar structures and processes in present-day third-world cities. A sense of how fundamental the link with food remains in the process of urbanization can be gained from FAO's 'Feeding the Cities' programme. On a global scale they argue that:

'One of the main challenges ... will be to achieve an efficient distribution of nutritional and inexpensive foodstuffs to urban inhabitants. Failure to meet this challenge could lead to a repeat of the widespread political unrest and rising social instability already well-documented in cities throughout the world when sharp rises in food prices have been precipitated by the need to cut food subsidies...Creation and expansion of markets has often lagged behind the growth in urban populations and merchandise flows...'.³

We suggest that learning from the past is important and many historians have contributed understandings of the relationship between urban growth and the raw materials that feed it. The work of Campbell *et al.*, and Galloway on medieval London is notable, as is the classic work of Fisher on early modern London.⁴ For Paris, Kaplan and Abbad have published detailed studies of provisioning under the Ancien Régime and there are many other European studies.⁵

Despite the sophistication of their food-supply systems, very large European cities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not escape food crises. Expansionary policies of aggrandisement, for instance colonialism, were costly in manpower and communications, and caused Europe's rulers to be concerned about food supply. In particular, policymakers were unimpressed by the physique of the urban males of military age they saw around them; and lamented their undernourishment or 'irrational nutrition'. Although famines were essentially a rural experience linked to harvest failure, no metropolitan centre in Europe could avoid food crises in the twentieth century. Varying in intensity, food shortages ranged from queues at shops and food rationing to periods of near starvation during the times when European cities were at the centre of two world wars. Europe's last peacetime famine

³ FAO, 1999, 1. There is now a large literature in this area, with helpful commentaries on websites entitled 'Food for the Cities', and 'Food into Cities'. The emphasis is upon improving urban food supply systems in the developing world, especially in Africa. See: <http://www.fao.org/fcit/doc.asp>; <http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC8851.htm>.

⁴ Fisher, 1935; Galloway and Murphy, 1991; Campbell *et al.*, 1993.

⁵ Kaplan, 1984; Clark and Lepetit, 1996; Abad, 2002.

was in Russia in 1891/2 but armed conflict and totalitarian political regimes caused major disruptions to urban food supplies up to the middle of the twentieth century.⁶ Even Germany, which had done so much to create the science of nutrition, failed to utilize it rationally in World War I.

Although food habits might be used to generate nationalism, as in Norway, no political regime successfully incorporated nutritional science into food policy or planning, as the examples from Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia discussed in section C indicate. Indeed, famine in the USSR in the 1930s was due to collectivization of agriculture rather than crop failure, while in Czechoslovakia under post World War II communism, planning the socialist diet failed due to supply limitations. Modern examples of urban food habits, such as fast-food consumption, or the increase in body weights leading towards obesity, fall outside the scope of this book, since its contributors have placed emphasis on European cities from the 1850s to the Second World War. However, previous ICREFH symposia, such as ICREFH VII, which dealt with eating out in Europe, noted in some detail the dramatic changes in urban food habits in the second-half of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s; readers should consult that volume for current trends.⁷

A. Feeding the Multitude

The burgeoning urban markets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presented food producers with new opportunities. An issue here is scale and intensity because one would expect a different functional response at the lower end of the urban hierarchy from that in the largest of cities, so recognizing regional difference is an important element in ICREFH's deliberations, as is the identification of temporal disjuncture in the pace of change between cities and between nations. As conurbations and urban-industrial fields developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was often integrated hierarchies of marketing potential that mattered more rather than single settlements and their consumers. The theme of feeding cities is of course familiar in food history but there is room in the literature for two developments.

⁶ Portal, 1965, 778.

⁷ Jacobs and Scholliers, 2003.

First, we are in need of the type of overview paper written here by Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg. He sets the scene in general terms for the rest of this book with the German-speaking part of middle Europe in mind, and his overview explains how the web of modern production, processing, and retailing systems gradually replaced the traditional guild restrictions on commerce. It is interesting to note that urban food systems here evolved structurally at a rather different pace to, say, the United Kingdom. Although German scientists and food technologists were in the forefront of nutritional theory and manufacturing processes, the food retailing environment seems to have been constrained in its development before the mid-nineteenth century and was therefore slow to modernize.

Peter Atkins suggests that one answer to the question of regional disparities may be to engage with the comparative history of superficially similar metropolises, such as London and Paris, in order to tease out the factors that were in common and the divergent paths that followed. The mid-nineteenth century was a hinge point in the urban experience of both countries, with powerful forces bearing upon their ability to make available sufficient food of a reasonable quality in their capital cities. Some variations of context are revealed on both the supply and demand sides, with the result that these two world cities went into the second half of the nineteenth century with subtly different strategies for 'feeding modernity'.

The contribution by Corinna Treitel reviews the career and ideas of the German physiologist, Max Rubner. Although less well-known than Leibig and Voit, he nevertheless contributed to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century debate about the diet of the urban working class. Professor Treitel argues that Rubner had a lasting impact upon consumers' understanding of their diet, for instance through the standard value of the calorie. Building on the work of Liebig and Voit, he saw nutrition as a social question and suggested that the foodways of the urban working class were dangerously irrational, to the point of mass chronic undernutrition. However, Rubner could not persuade the Imperial German government to reduce the high protein allowance, conventionally regarded as essential for adult males, in favour of more emphasis on the energy available from cereals. In consequence, during World War I, all of the combatant nations maintained high-energy, high-protein rations for their armed services and looked to their civilians to limit their food consumption.⁸ It

⁸ For Italy, see Dentoni, 1994 and 2003.

has been claimed that Britain's Corn Production Act, 1917, by encouraging cereal production from grasslands and permanent pasture, achieved a change in nutrition policy that Germany failed to make: shortages and food queues in London in the winter of 1917-18 did not lead to the collapse of morale that occurred in Berlin and other German and Austrian cities.⁹

Second, there is a need for more research on the links between food supply and the changing diets of urban dwellers. This addresses the issue of prime cause: the respective weight in food habits between food culture, on the one hand, as filtered through demand and influenced by consumers' relative priorities in expenditure, and, on the other hand, the profile of goods presented in the market, as an expression of the relative competitiveness of commodity *filières*, determined by organizational factors and regional agro-ecology. Both are implicated simultaneously, along with other influences such as food politics and international trade, but the balance in each city is different. Roser Nicolau-Nos and Josep Pujol-Andreu, by looking at the inter-relationship between urbanization and dietary change in Barcelona raise issues about the standard of living that have broader implications for the economic history of Spain. While the changes that they reveal are broadly in line with European trends at this time, consumer income was not the driving force that might have been expected in the early twentieth century.

European history also yields many examples of the fragility of urban food systems in the face of wars, civil disruption, terrorism and natural hazards. Jürgen Schmidt provides one case study in his paper on the food supply problems of postwar Berlin. He writes about what happens 'when networked urbanism goes wrong'.¹⁰ The topic is rarely tackled in food history but this approach to the food shortages in postwar Berlin is relevant to many cities in the aftermath of a civil emergency, such as an earthquake or fire, or the disruption caused by epidemic disease. Important elements here are the responses of the regulatory authorities and also of the general public, along with the moral dilemmas of emergency conditions.

⁹ Signs of malnutrition appeared amongst children in German towns as early as 1915. See Eltzbacher, cited in Corinna Treitel's chapter.

¹⁰ Graham and Marvin, 2001.

Readers may wish to consult previous ICREFH volumes for further commentary on ‘feeding the multitude’.¹¹ In particular, ICREFH VI, on the food relationship of town and country, is helpful on urban meat and vegetable supplies (papers by Koolmees, Teuteberg, den Hartog and Godina-Golija), and on the ‘urban-rural interface’ (papers by Burnett, Oddy, de Knecht-van Eekelen, and Atkins).¹²

B. Food Regulation

One of the recent strengths of food history has been a concern with state policy and regulation. There has been a recognition, particularly within the literature on the emergence of agreed norms on quality, of a need to look at the implementation of standards.¹³ In this section we are interested in the inspection and laboratory analysis undertaken by the local state and by private individuals in four European countries.

First, Peter Scholliers uncovers the early history of the response by the Brussels city authorities to the problem of food adulteration. This was a very common problem around Europe and it seems that Brussels was one of the first cities to establish a laboratory in the hope that organic chemistry might provide a solution. Derek Oddy then looks at the equivalent system of expertise in London, starting at a somewhat later date. The central argument of his paper is that investigations were hampered by a struggle between local authority analysts and chemists employed by the government, for scientific and regulatory ascendancy. The strength of this historical approach is that it recognizes the importance of debate and networked influence in policy-making and implementation.

Alessandro Stanziani also deals with a municipal laboratory in the late nineteenth century, this time in Paris. He puts the need for counter-measures on falsification into a context of economic theory and shows, rather like in London, that institutional struggle and controversy were never far away. The key to this paper is that both legislation and regulation were compromises between mutually-incompatible interests: between consumers and the food industry and among the various parties in the food chain.

¹¹ See list in Preface.

¹² Hietala and Vahtikari, 2003.

¹³ See French and Phillips.

Finally, Vera Hierholzer looks at the early years of the united Germany and finds that citizens' self-help associations were important in developing ideas about the quality of food and drink. Although short-lived, they acted as a surrogate local state in establishing analytical laboratories and prosecuting traders who sold adulterated food, until their facilities were eventually absorbed by local authorities.

C. Food Innovations – the Product Perspective

European cities have been powerful engines of innovation and change in food habits and in the development of new products. This section investigates three aspects of these phenomena, product innovation, retail systems and the entry of foreign foods into metropolitan markets. Food products have received attention before in ICREFH symposia, for instance, in ICREFH IV, which was an exploration of food and material culture.¹⁴ The emphasis in Berlin, however, was less on the physical form of food and its associated technology than on the role of cities in the innovation process.

First, Adel den Hartog looks at tinned sweetened condensed skim milk, which was manufactured in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century as a by-product of the dairy industry and then exported to poor consumers in urban Britain. He shows that new is not always good, in the sense of being healthy. The account of the introduction of condensed skim milk is one of commercial rivalry and nutritional misunderstanding. The tins were profitable for the Dutch dairy industry to produce and cheap and convenient for consumers. However, when fed to babies as a substitute for breast milk, skim milk is unfortunately lacking in vitamins A and D and, in the absence of complementary feeding, led to malnutrition. Considerable commercial friction was generated by this trade, with British farming interests trying to prevent imports that appeared to threaten their markets. At the political level, there was also activity, with calls for tariff barriers. The paper shows that there were misunderstandings on both sides of the debate, not least on the Dutch side, where the milk processors were in denial about the lack of vitamin content of their product. As a result, there was malnutrition among infants in working-class families in large industrial cities in Britain.

¹⁴ Schärer and Fenton, 1998.

Second, Jukka Gronow deals with the emergence of Soviet food culture in first-class restaurants and gastronomic food shops in the 1930s. Consumerism at this time might be associated with shortages but a full account of communist food retailing must also take into account its surprising attachment to luxuries. The paper charts the rise of the chain stores, *Gastronom* and *Bakaleya*, which were supposedly showcases of socialist abundance and prosperity; the reality was that they served only a privileged minority, as did the small number of ‘first-class’ restaurants. The point here, rather like that in Martin Franc’s paper which follows, is that socialist food planning in reality was very far from the innovative and egalitarian ideals it espoused. Martin Franc deals with food retailing in Prague under the communist regime, but his argument could equally well apply to the inefficiencies of supermarket location planning in west European ‘advanced’ economies which has created ‘food deserts’ in many poor inner-city neighbourhoods.¹⁵ Communist Czechoslovakia was not in physical ruins like Berlin but all food items that people may have wished to buy, beyond the basics, were in short supply, an urban problem beyond the solutions available to dysfunctional bureaucracies. Again the paper is of greater significance than a history of Prague because it reminds us that our complacent familiarity with free market and mixed food economies under conditions of surplus is only part of the European story. An interesting conclusion is that socialist policies about shop hierarchies were quite varied in their attempts to match supply with demand but were linked to shifting ideologies of town planning.

Peter Lummel analyzes product innovation in Berlin in the second half of the twentieth century by using trade journals, to trace the introduction of self-service, particularly the scaling-up of outlets to supermarkets. Not only was ‘everything under one roof’ but a wider variety of food lines was carried, and new technologies were employed such as refrigeration, cook-chill, and advanced packaging. There were also significant shifts in the relationship between retailers and their suppliers, which caused a ripple effect of change throughout the food chain. This story of Berlin might be told, with variations, in every European city since World War II.

Thirdly, to end this section, two contributors discuss the acceptance of foreign influence in major cities. Anneke van Otterloo investigates the coming of ‘exotic’ food to Amsterdam and its progress to become deeply embedded in the local economy

¹⁵ Wrigley, 2002.

and culture. The city's geographical position and the colonial heritage of the Netherlands encouraged this broadening of the diet, but Amsterdam's cosmopolitan culture has also been a facilitating factor. Panikos Panayi's chapter deals with another global city, London. He also narrates a history of immigrant impact, over the longer period since 1850. This shows that immigrants have played a major role in the evolution of the dietary patterns of Londoners, from street sellers or high-class chefs in the Victorian period to take-away restaurants more recently.

D. Eating Fashions – the Consumer Perspective

Our eating habits are influenced by intellectual fashions and cultural change, although it is notoriously difficult to measure any specific impact. Only one chapter in this final section has any institutional context or any association with metropolitan society: the other three reflect how ideas about food find expression in dietary fashions. Generally, these chapters are based on the rejection of the values of urban society.

Ulrike Thom's study of German scientists shows how they accepted bourgeois standards of eating as a demonstration of their new-found status and importance in metropolitan society. Initially, scientists valued asceticism, indicating that their working and celebratory meals were of lower priority than scientific discussions and social networking. These values gave way eventually to more visually impressive fare as scientists came to realize that their meals were an important means of communicating the status of their profession to the general public.

The remaining chapters discuss consumers outside the main stream of urban-industrial life. Alain Drouard takes a wider view of dietary reform at the end of the nineteenth century. He draws upon case studies of the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Switzerland, and concludes that, although the diagnosis of the failings of contemporary diets was quite similar, the solutions were not. The degeneracy and decline that was universally attributed to modernity could be cured, according to campaigners as varied as Bircher Benner, Carton and Steiner, through the adoption of dietary restrictions (vegetarian or vegan), new foods (muesli), a new philosophical outlook (theosophy, anthroposophy), or a new attitude to the body (exercise, nudism). Although cities were seen as problematic concentrations of dietary and social shortcomings, at the same time they were intellectual catalysts – the breeding ground

of social movements – where campaigners developed their ideas and found the most fertile ground for recruiting followers.

Virginie Amilien finds that Norwegian food habits, right down to the present day, have been influenced by a debate that took place in the romantic period of nationalism in the nineteenth century on what could be said to be authentic national dishes. In Norway, the struggle for independence, first from Denmark and then Sweden, has left an indelible imprint upon consumers' notions of the good diet. Because the former ruling elites were foreigners associated with cities, nationalists sought truly Norwegian foods and recipes in the countryside. Only relatively recently has this simple dietary been embellished through the popularity of cookery books and exotic ingredients.

In France, the role and influence of direct selling in a regional primary city, Bordeaux, from the 1960s to the present day is explored by Isabelle Téhoueyres. She describes the changing fortunes of different types of marketing experience, emphasizing the recent rise of open-air retailing, associated with *produits de terroir* and farmers' markets, and she also recreates a sense of what it is like to be a consumer there.

Finally, the editors hope that this selection of papers from the ninth ICREFH symposium in Berlin will offer readers a coherent and structured view of changes in food marketing and regulation, eating habits and nutrition in Europe's largest cities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It begins, appropriately, with an overview of changes in German-speaking Europe by ICREFH's Founding President and organizer of the first symposium in Münster, in 1989, Professor Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg.

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