FOOD IN TIME AND PLACE : THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION COMPANION TO FOOD HISTORY PDF, EPUB, EBOOK

Paul Freedman | 424 pages | 15 Jan 2015 | University of California Press | 9780520283589 | English | Berkerley, United States

Food in time and place: the American Historical Association companion to food history.

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Back to top. Edit annotation. Cancel Edit annotation. Add annotation. Cancel Add annotation. Print citation. Cancel Print. Email citation. Please enter a valid email address. Cancel Send. Export citation list. Huge latifundia using slave labor produced grain, which was then ground in great quantities to feed both armies and growing cities. As Juvenal quipped, bread and circuses i. In one, Juvenal berates his friend for accepting an invitation to a dinner where the host eats fine delicacies and drinks excellent wine while the friend is given scrappy leftovers. Presumably the insult was intentional, to demean the guests. In another satire, Juvenal invites his friend to his country house to eat homegrown natural and rustic foods of the finest quality.

This is a type of gastronomy that devalues the extravagant and elite, in favor of true good taste. The feast of Trimalchio in Petronius's Satyricon is among the most fascinating sources in all of food history. Dormice dipped in honey and sprinkled with poppy seeds are served, among other culinary perversities. Petronius was himself a wealthy patrician and the arbiter of taste under Nero, and this story appears to be a warning to the newly rich not to try to pretend to have taste, which mere money cannot buy.

On the other hand, some of Trimalchio's dishes bear a close resemblance to the recipes found in Apicius. There are also simpler dishes, but it is difficult to determine to what extent these recipes reflect common Roman taste of the time when the historical figure Apicius lived, the first century C. After all, thanks to this cookbook, Apicius's name became a byword for extravagant luxury in the ancient world. Food references run throughout the comedies of Plautus and are found in the letters of Seneca and the epigrams of Martial-it is fairly safe to say that eating was one of the major preoccupations of the Romans, including the emperors themselves. Although it is certainly written with an ideological bent and intended as a negative lesson, the biography of Heliogabalus attributed to Aelius Lampridius is remarkably detailed about that emperor's deranged customs.

The account is probably not strictly true, but it makes for an excellent exercise in interpreting historical sources. Not surprisingly, the history of the early Church was well documented by early historians and theologians beginning in the New Testament and extending to the present. Food was of central concern, first in distinguishing Christians from Jews by their abandonment of kosher food regulations , and eventually in defining Christian food practices such as fasting.

Saint Basil and Saint Jerome are excellent sources for this topic. Medieval theologians commented on food practices extensively, and the entire system of fasting for Lent was reassessed during the Reformation, essentially as a result of historical criticism, since Protestants emphasized the Bible as having greater authority than tradition. Ulrich Zwingli is the best example of reinterpreting the meaning of the Eucharist and fasting by reference to practice in the scriptures.

Modern scholarship is also rich in regards to the food practices of Jews at the time of Jesus and thereafter, as well as to the transition to

Christianity. Any discussion of the food history of the early Church must naturally take account of Jewish food rituals and observances, in particular the sacrifice of animals to atone for sins, the complex Levitical laws defining clean and unclean meats, and the role of fasting as an act of penitence both on special holy days like Yom Kippur and for emergencies like impending battle.

The early followers of Jesus did not cast these food practices aside entirely-often, they reinterpreted them. Though Christians proclaimed that the Age of Grace had superseded the Age of Law, they believed that food laws continued to be necessary, though in a different form. Avoidance of unclean animals, most notably pork, was abrogated. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was said to replace temple sacrifice, for the expiation of sins. But the case of fasting was a little more complex, since like Old Testament figures like Moses and David, Jesus and the apostles fasted. The question was whether communal fasting was required on a regular basis or only during special occasions to appease God's wrath.

Eventually the Christian church adopted set dates for fasting, most notably Lent, Saturdays, and the vigils of saints' days, and defined fasting as eating just one meal per say, and abstaining from meat and animal products, rather than complete abstention from food. The original logic was primarily medical in origin. Since meat was believed to be the most nourishing substance, it was understood to be most readily transformed into flesh, blood, and ultimately sperm, in both men and women both of whom were believed to have sperm. This, they felt, stimulated the libido and inclined people toward sin.

Therefore a humorally colder and drier diet, composed of vegetables and bread, was better suited for atonement. There was not, as might be supposed, any real concern for animal welfare in these injunctions. Fasting was also a particular concern for clergymen and ascetics, who intended to stay celibate year round. Neither the Church nor individual orders within it could forbid meat since many passages in the New Testament insist that all food is good, yet severely limiting it became an ideal. Some ascetics undertook extraordinary feats of self-abnegation, not only bringing themselves to the brink of starvation, but going without sleep and other physical comforts. Benedict offers a glimpse of the practical compromises made in the feeding practices of a working monastery, including allowing wine for the monks. Of course not all concerns in these centuries were holy minded.

These were also extraordinarily tumultuous years that witnessed invasions of Germanic tribes, the disintegration of the Empire in the west, and serious famines. Massimo Montanari has also described a profound cultural shift from the neat, well-manicured wheat fields of the Romans to the Germanic love for forests themselves as well as hunting and the gathering of wild food. This general dearth is perhaps reflected in Charlemagne's Capitularies, which ordered regions throughout his empire to grow specific foods so his army would have something to eat when they passed through. Intellectually this era has also usually been characterized as relatively barren, and certainly as regards food writing, dietary, agricultural, and botanical knowledge it is fairly bereft. One exception is the work of a Greek physician in the classical tradition, Anthimus, who visited the court of the Franks in the sixth century and composed a little book about the properties of foodstuffs.

He made great concessions to local customs including eating raw bacon and drinking beer, but otherwise the bulk of classical learning regarding food was lost. Compared to other subfields in the history of food, the Middle Ages have enjoyed a long and sustained record of scholarship. Deep interest began in tandem with the formation of nation-states, when scholars sought to learn the history of their native folk customs and elevate them as worthy of equal reverence beside classical civilizations. This meant publishing new editions of medieval cookbooks and studying food from the antiquarian's perspective, not always very sympathetically.

In the words of one historian, "These spices played, alas! This trend continued among Annales School historians who not only wanted to get a better sense of ordinary people's lives over long periods of time, but also approached the topic scientifically, preferring to bolster their arguments with statistical analysis. The so-called high and later Middle Ages , offer an excellent opportunity to introduce the topic of climatic change and demographics across a long period. In a nutshell, Europe grew warmer from the year until the fourteenth century. The longer growing season and expanded arable space to the north stimulated greater production of food, which in turn led to population growth.

Quite simply, when opportunities are positive, people get married and set up households earlier, which expands the fertile years for childbearing, while better nutrition lowers the infant mortality rate. All these phenomena are ultimately connected to food, as are technological innovations such as improved plows that could cut through the heavier soils of Northern Europe; the horse collar, which made the horse a viable plow animal; and crop rotation systems, which require less fallow and provide fodder for animals and fertilizer in the form of manure.

Improved waterwheel and windmill technology made possible the grinding of greater quantities of grain, which in turn supported greater populations and the growth of cities. Of course this general pattern is oversimplified here, but it places food at the center of the narrative. The most prevalent system of exploiting the land was serfdom, at root a system of land tenure whereby a village farmed scattered plots collectively and paid a landlord to whom they were personally subordinate. This payment could take the form of labor service several days of the week devoted to working the agricultural property, or demesne, of the lord of the manor , or fees paid in money to the lord in order to inherit land, to marry, and, sometimes, to use the mill.

Another way of extracting revenue from serfs was to take a portion of what they harvested. Whatever the form of tribute they paid, serfs were legally bound to the soil and could not leave at will. Their methods also tended to be traditional: since this was essentially subsistence farming, taking risks and failing could mean starvation. There were many different forms of serfdom throughout Europe. Its dominance was seriously challenged by the arrival of bubonic plague in The plague was so devastating that it reduced the European population by one third. This completely reversed the demand for labor: peasants could increasingly dictate terms since landlords were desperate to keep them on the land. The initial reaction of the nobility was to pass laws tightening their hold on peasants as well as on laborers in cities, and this prompted rebellions everywhere.

In the long run, feudalism changed, rents replaced services owed, and there was greater freedom of enterprise. Since labor was scarce in the years after the bubonic plague, wages were generally high, and so was the standard of living of survivors. The amount of household income spent on meat increased. In many respects this was the golden age of meat, and this is reflected in cookbooks that contain many recipes for preparing it. It is not that wealthy people did not eat vegetables, they most certainly did, but they could also afford more expensive meats and could prepare them

and dress them in ways that were aspirational, often in imitation of their superiors, which incorporated exotic spices and sugar.

While the Crusades were one impetus for the revival of the spice trade, growing wealth back in Europe also provided incentive for spices and luxury items to be imported from the East, carried primarily by Muslim merchants from Asia and Venetians and Genoese in the Mediterranean. Spices were used for several reasons. As quasi-medicinal drugs they could be used to correct foods and were incorporated in composite pharmaceuticals. Most importantly they were symbols of status, and as middling ranks of people began to take notice, the upper classes had to invent new recipes to maintain their distinction. This is a prime impetus for fashions to change. It is also the reason cookbooks began to proliferate, as a way to teach the latest culinary fashions to up-and-coming chefs. The most famous cookbook of this era was attributed to Guillaume Tirel, nicknamed Taillevent, who was chef to King Charles V of France. He was even ennobled for his services, with a coat of arms bearing stewpots.

Many of his recipes can also be found in earlier cookbooks, so the text of his cookbook, known as the Viandier, is not exactly original. This suggests that people down the social scale were indeed emulating their superiors and trying to recreate elegant meals, though perhaps without such great expense or in such enormous quantities. The late Middle Ages also witnessed a revival of classical learning, much of the material for which came via Arabic translations from Greek, which were in turn translated into Latin.

Aristotle was the most important text used in the new universities, but medical literature like Galen's work and Arabic texts based on it by authors such as Avicenna, Rhases, and Isaac Judaeus initiated the revival of ancient dietary medicine. Agricultural texts which revived many classical practices were also composed, among them Pietro Crescenzi's. Finally, the impact of religion on eating habits was no less profound than in other eras.

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