

# The Food of History

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# 1. Introduction: Food history and globalisation

## 1.1. The questions, the methods, the sources

I have no quarrel with the student of history who brings to his work a touchingly childish, innocent faith in the power of our minds and our methods to order reality; but first and foremost he must respect the incomprehensible truth, reality, and uniqueness of events. Studying history, my friend, is no joke and no irresponsible game. To study history one must know in advance that one is attempting something fundamentally impossible, yet necessary and highly important. To study history means submitting to chaos and nevertheless retaining faith in order and meaning. It is a very serious task, young man, and possibly a tragic one.

Herman Hesse (2002/1943). *The Glass Bead Game*. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Picador (pp. 168-69).

Reading the quote from Herman Hesse's novel *The Glass Bead Game* that opens this module, it would be legitimate to ask oneself what is the point in studying history, if we are dealing with pure chaos devoid of order and meaning. The impression that many have when they start studying history is that they are facing a dizzying array of apparently unconnected events, names, and places that require lots of memorisation and little reflection. One of the goals of this module is to actually prove how history can shed light on aspects of food systems that would be invisible to other disciplines and how the effort to find meaning and causality in historical phenomena is a rewarding and stimulating endeavour that can help us achieve a better understanding of our contemporary realities.

Contemporary food systems at the local, regional, and global level can be analysed from a synchronic point of view, focusing on their various components and on the way they connect with each other and with the system as a whole in the present. However, it can be useful to consider issues with a diachronic approach, aiming at achieving a better understanding of their origin and their changes over time. This second possibility informs this module. Indeed, the goal is to look at food and food systems from a historical point of view in order to add further depth to the examination of the present-day issues that might constitute your specific interest. At the end of this module, you will have acquired a set of analytical tools in terms of concept and methodologies that you will be able to apply to your specific field of research or to your professional activity. This course will mostly focus on examples taken from the food history of Western Europe and the Americas, not because they are intrinsically more interesting or more important than events and phenomena that took place in other parts of the world, but because more written bibliographical material is available in English, the language of this programme.

Before presenting the module content, it is necessary to address a few preliminary questions.

- How do we frame historical questions related to food and food systems?
- How do we take into account the multiple ways of approaching food history that are available to us?
- How do we define what makes research on food history rigorous?
- How do we develop a language for communicating our research so that what we have to say can have a large impact, somehow speaking to everyone?

To answer the first question, it is possible to identify the impact of food on historical events and phenomena in the short-, medium- and long-term, each offering a very different frame of reference in terms of the length of the period that constitutes the object of analysis. This is an important conceptual distinction that has a noticeable impact on the way historical research is organised and on what sources are used. Events can be studied in the short run, examining the most immediate causes and their development over a short period of time. However, concentrating only on the proximate effects, causes, and dynamics can at times keep us from identifying deeper transformations and trends that develop over long periods of time and that might or might not culminate in visible and specific events. To overcome this limitation, it can be useful to adopt the medium- and long-term as our scope of analysis. This approach, formulated in the 1930s by a group of historians working around the French journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (now called *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*), positioned history closer to other social sciences such as sociology and economics. The *Annales* historians, among whom were Marc Bloch, Lucien Lefebvre, Fernand Braudel and Jacques Le Goff, took all aspects of society into consideration and emphasised material life, cultural practices and mentalities over purely political or diplomatic themes, facilitating the ensuing expansion of quantitative studies. It is not surprising that this approach often took aspects of food production, distribution and consumption as its subject matters, together with more immaterial aspects regarding reflection and writing about food.

Since the analysis of food systems (production, distribution, marketing, consumption, and disposal) from a historical point of view can cover a very wide and varied array of events and phenomena, it is not surprising that there are several approaches to the topic that at times can provide us with interesting material and useful insights. This will provide answers to our second preliminary question. Researchers have been interested in the actual history of particular foodstuffs: Sidney Mintz's groundbreaking study on sugar, Mark Kurlanski's books on cod and salt, Andy Smith's work on specific products like peanuts or tomatoes exemplify just one among the many different methodologies to frame the vast material historians encounter when they start dealing with food. Another approach looks at culinary history (from the Latin word *culina*, meaning kitchen), which analyses the development

of dishes, cooking techniques, and the roles and skills of cooks and chefs. Historians have also focused specifically on the history of dining, of how, where, in what occasion and with whom people ate, which is of particular interest from the social point of view. This line of research also has led to the study of social spaces of food consumption, from the street stall to the most refined restaurant, and to the historical analysis of diets in terms of components, nutrients and calories. And when people eat, they also think about what they eat. History can look at the development of ideas about food from the social, cultural and nutritional point of view: what is right to eat according to various religions and upbringings? How does food reflect social status? And what is considered best for health in different cultures? Food history can also be examined from very specific points of view such as economics, demographics and other approaches borrowed from social sciences. Biology, ecology, zoology and botany can provide us with invaluable information about foodstuffs and their availability to humans, while geography and environmental sciences can help us understand how different communities have dealt with food in different places.

The richness and diversity of approaches to food history bring us to our third preliminary question about what sources are available, useful and rigorous. First of all, it is necessary to make a distinction between primary and secondary sources. When talking of secondary sources, historians refer to the work of other experts and researchers, which include articles, books, websites, film and radio segments that can be used as references in their investigation to support or explain their own arguments. However, these sources are inherently influenced by their authors' biases, culture, upbringing and political views, which need to be critically taken into consideration. For this reason, historians prefer to found their research on documents, objects and various kind of material traces from the past that bring direct evidence of events, phenomena and developments. For centuries, the only sources deemed credible were written documents, as it seemed absurd to trust oral traditions, myths or even actual objects. This choice of sources inevitably leads to more or less voluntary misrepresentations not only of the cultural worlds of the protagonists of the events examined, but often of the events themselves. First of all, written documents are easily modifiable and subject to falsification. Moreover, they can be destroyed, which means that only winners made history, imposing their points of view and keeping silent on everything else that could prove detrimental to their power and their image. This has happened many times throughout history and, at times, if we now know something about certain events or topics, we owe it only to intrepid spirits who, at their own peril, retained some of that memory. When the Emperor Qinshi Huangdi managed to unify China in 221 BC, he ordered to destroy the texts from the Confucian philosophical school, which supported the need for a ruler who reigned supreme because of its virtues and not through force and coercion. Some copies, written on strips of bamboo, were saved only because some scholars, risking their lives, hid them inside walls. It took centuries for them to return to light. The Catholic Church in the early Middle Ages

gave the same treatment to the many texts from pagan authors that were supposed to pose a threat to Christian morality. As a result, today we can access directly only a small part of all Greek and Roman classical literary production. The preference for written documents also meant denying a historic past to many cultures that handed down their traditions orally. Historians have always relied on archaeology for information, but also in this field, in the past, scholars showed a clear preference for objects and structures that could be considered as expression of arts and "high culture". So paintings and vases had priority over grain grinders, grand architectural structures were deemed more interesting than the humble food pantry or other productive facilities.

Today archaeologists focus their attention not only on remains of such tools and all kind of objects for daily use, but they also analyse the dirt from the digging sites to find fossil pollen and any other traces of material culture. Primary sources for more recent events can include a multiplicity of elements, including iconography, recordings of oral segments, photographs and movies. Written documents outside official sources, such as diaries, letters, accountant books, cookbooks, shopping lists and menus have also acquired particular relevance in food history.

This leads us to our fourth preliminary question. Since the growing scope of historic research makes the discipline more complex and requires skills in specific techniques of analysis of primary and secondary sources, how can we avoid that the results of this research remain limited to a small group of experts? How can we make historical research about food relevant and useful for the public at large and to practitioners in policy and administration? A large part of the problem is a question of language. The topics of historical research and its conclusions can definitely offer interesting reflections and suggestions to achieve a better understanding of contemporary issues, as long as they are conveyed in clear and understandable terms, avoiding jargon and clarifying the most complex theoretical concepts. This module aims precisely at that goal, in order to offer historical material of interest to present-day professionals.

### **Further readings**

**Braudel, Fernand** (1960). "History and the Social Sciences: The Long Duration". *American Behavioral Scientist* 3(6): 3-13.

**Fernández-Armesto, Felipe** (2002). *Near a Thousand Tables*. New York: The Free Press.

**Flandrin, Jean-Louis and Massimo Montanari** (ed.) (1999). *Food: A Culinary History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

**Kurlanski, Marc** (1997). *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World*. New York: Walker Publishing.

**Kurlanski, Marc** (2002). *Salt: A World History*. New York: Walker Publishing.

**Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel** (1981). *The Mind and Method of the Historian*. Trans. Sian and Ben Reynolds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Pilcher, Jeffrey M.** (2006). *Food in World History*. New York: Routledge.



Smith, Andrew (2002). *Peanuts: The Illustrious History of the Goober Pea*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

## 1.2. Is food globalisation a new phenomenon? The speed of change

We will start applying this approach to one of the most contentious and debated issues regarding food: globalisation. We are all to witness the rapid change of food systems, often framed in terms of loss of traditions, local identity and cultural heritage both from the production point of view, with the worldwide diffusion of the same seeds and plants varieties, the dislocation of production for international companies and the standardisation of agricultural processes that followed the spread of the Green Revolution in the 1960s. In terms of consumption, we immediately think of fast food restaurant chains, mass-produced items and the growing uniformity of worldwide consumer culture, determined by transnational industry, powerful marketing machines and international trade. Some negative consequences of these epochal transformations, such as the shift of nutritional models from grain-based to meat and dairy intensive diets, the diffusion of sugar and fat heavy foods and the obesity epidemics affect not only Western countries, but also developing countries and the most remote corners of the planet.

These changes in food systems are part of a larger phenomenon often referred to as globalisation, usually indicating the increasingly (and apparently) unfettered mobility of ideas, information, goods, money and people from one corner of the world to another. The demands of food corporations, which often invest directly in developing countries, play an enormous role in determining the agricultural choices as well as the planting, picking and packing techniques adopted by rural communities worldwide, while determining what foods will be available and promoted worldwide.

Food as a commodity has become the objection of international trade negotiations, especially with the establishment of the World Trade Organisation, which from 1995 has determined the principles and the modalities of food-related global markets through specific agreements dealing with aspects as varied as tariffs, subsidies and intellectual property.

Nonetheless, the historical developments underpinning globalisation are more complex than the trends we just discussed. Many worldwide corporations seem to operate in a dimension that has been called "glocal," where the global and the local are intermingled to promote localities within the framework of transnationalism, which on the other hand would seem to indicate an ongoing reduction of the administrative and legal relevance of nation states. McDonald's, for instance, relies on local products to assemble dishes that are the same all over the planet.

### Bibliographical reference

Phillips, Lynne (2006). "Food and Globalization". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35:37-57.

Furthermore, as Watson and Caldwell state, globalisation does not indicate exclusively the diffusion of mass-produced food or the popularity of fast food all over the world.

It also refers to the diffusion of cuisines from one country to another, especially in urban environments where immigrant communities are more numerous. "Ethnic" restaurants have become a fixture in urban landscapes all over the world, with Italian, French, Japanese, Chinese, Indian and Mexican at the forefront, with Thai, Ethiopian, Moroccan and Lebanese following right behind, each of them occupying various segments of a local food scene in terms of prestige and price.

Looking at these transformations of food systems from a historical point of view, however, we need not only to understand their origins and their development over time, but also if they are actually new phenomena, exclusive to our times. In fact, looking at history, we can see how exchanges and transfers of ingredients, materials, techniques, ideas, values and practices related to food and eating have been common since the origins of the human communities. Differences in geographical environments, culture and technology have always stimulated different productions in different areas, which in turn are at the base of exchanges and trade.

As anthropologist Richard Wilk states:

There is no way to fit history into a simple evolutionary story from the simple to the complex. We have not moved in a long trajectory from a world of simple self-sufficient farmers to a global food system where all food is industrialized and nobody grows what they eat, or eats what they grow. The real course of events zigs and zags. Globalization appears in different forms in different places in each period of time.

Richard R. Wilk (2006a). *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*. Lamham, MD: AltaMira Press (pp. 1-26).

This approach leads Wilk to underline the need to identify different stages of globalisation in different areas. In the Caribbean, for instance, he identifies various periods defined as "pirate globalisation" (up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century), connected to the presence of the first Europeans in the area; "slave globalisation" (18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century), following the arrival of slaves, uprooted from Africa to work in the local plantations; "high colonial globalisation" (mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century), marked by the transformation of the plantation system following the abolition of the slavery; "late colonial globalisation" (most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of decolonisation); and "cultural globalisation" of our present days.

### Bibliographical reference

Watson, James L. and Melissa L. Caldwell (2005). *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

### Bibliographical reference

Issenberg, Sasha (2007). *The Sushi Economy: Globalization and the Making of a Modern Delicacy*. New York: Gotham Books.

Are there no differences between these forms of globalisation? We can identify the speed and intensity of change, heralded by increasingly rapid technological changes in food production, transportation and communication, as the main trait of contemporary phenomena of globalisation. As historian Jeffrey Pilcher points out:

The emergence of a 'global palate' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century represented not a radical departure from the past but rather the intensification of existing cross-cultural connections.

Jeffrey M. Pilcher (2006). *Food in World History*. New York: Routledge (p. 87).

In the following section of the course, we will explore some of the common elements that have underpinned the diffusion of food and food-related ideas, values, and behaviours in human history, in terms of long-term phenomena like migrations and commerce, and recurrent formations like empires.

#### **Further readings**

**Caldwell, Melissa** (2004). "Domesticating the French Fry: McDonald's and Consumerism in Moscow". *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4(1): 5-26.

**Watson, James** (1997). *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

**Wilk, Richard** (2006b). *Home Cooking in the Global Village: Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecotourists*. Oxford: Berg.

### **1.3. Plant domestication and diffusion**

As we have mentioned in the introduction to this section of the course, differences in natural resources, cultural adaptations to the environment and socio-cultural structures have caused human communities in different areas to produce different foods in different ways. Also climatic changes over history have allowed the domestication of certain plants in specific places and at specific times, and then their diffusion all over the world. Today we have somehow lost the sense of how plants originally came from specific places, precisely because we are witness to the results of millennia of various forms of "globalisation".

When humans began to shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture around 10,000 years ago, a long-term phenomena that lasted millennia and was only probably in part planned and organised, different plants were domesticated according to what wild varieties were available and how these varieties adapted and responded to cultivation through very specific interactions between environments and structures of production that included specialised tools and techniques, and cultures, in a definite period in time.

A few common elements can be observed throughout the Neolithic revolution, the process of domestication of plants and animals that led to agriculture as we know it and sustained the sedentarisation of human communities all over the world:

- In the areas where domestication led to agriculture practiced by sedentary communities, it seems that the new crops constituted a diverse food package including both grains and pulses, sources respectively of carbohydrates and proteins, often together with textile plants.
- When the package lacked some elements, the domestication did not lead to sedentary settlements, but the new crops tended rather to be integrated in a nomadic lifestyle.
- Also the presence of large mammals that were good candidates for domestication increased the chances of sedentarisation.

However, each agricultural system was the result of dynamics that depended on different environments and socio-cultural structures. Some processes of domestication were quite limited in extension, while others expanded and influenced wide territories, especially in case of similar environmental conditions. According to Jared Diamond, this would explain why crops were adopted faster along the east-west axis (similar day lengths, seasonal variations, temperatures and habitats) than along the north-south axis, where plants had to adapt to quite different conditions. Moreover, when agricultural techniques developed in specific places were adopted by communities that inhabited environments with different plants and animals, sometimes they gave origin to secondary centres of domestication.

It seems the first area of domestication can be located, between 10,000 and 9,000 years ago, in the so-called Fertile Crescent, spanning from today's Iraq through south-eastern Turkey all the way to Syria, Israel and Lebanon. Among the first crops in this area, we can mention the predecessors of wheat –emmer (triticum dicoccum) and einkorn (triticum monococcum), rye, barley– and pulses, like peas, lentils, bitter vetch and chickpeas. The textile that completed the set of domesticated plants was flax (the source of linen).

Spreading south towards Africa, agriculturalists entered in contact with local wild plants, giving origin to secondary areas of domestication located north of the Equator. However, many scholars consider these areas in the Sahel and tropical West Africa as cradles of independent domestication.

#### Bibliographical reference

Diamond, Jared (1997). *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

#### Bibliographical reference

Diamond, Jared (1997). *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Probably the most important contributions of these areas to global agriculture are the different varieties of sorghum. Among other relevant crops, we can mention oil palms, okra, yams (*Dioscorea cayenensis* and *rotundata*, different from the Asian plants), pearl millet, fonio, bambara groundnut, black-eye peas, kola, ackee, watermelons and African rice (*oryza glaberrima*), which until recently was believed to be a local adaptation of Asian rice.

The area also saw the domestication of the guinea fowl. Ethiopia saw the first use of the grain teff, finer millet, Levant cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*), which expanded through Southern Arabia, Persia and Central Asia to China, where it arrived around 600 AD, and coffee of the arabica variety, which then spread to Yemen and southern Arabia. In fact, it is likely that coffee of the robusta variety was domesticated in Western and Central Africa.

The Fertile Crescent agricultural revolution also spread east, towards Persia, Central Asia and India. Central Asia seems to boast limited domestications, like onion, garlic, camel and yak in the Himalayas.

On the other hand, the canalisation of the abundant water of the Indus River allowed the blossoming of urban cultures in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, located in today's India, around 3200 BC. They show strong prevalence of barley and wheat (varieties of *Triticum aestivum*, with traces of cultivation dating back to 6000 BC); in fact, some of the most noticeable remains are sophisticated and imposing grain warehouses. Archaeological findings also point to the presence of farming communities starting from 4,000 years ago also in South India, with cultivations of small millets, sesame, the pulses mung bean and horsegram, tree cotton (*Gossypium Arboreum*) as textile plant and other plants including cucumbers and eggplants.

In its expansion east, the Middle-Eastern agricultural complex met the techniques and the cultivations of Chinese origin in Central Asia. This explains the presence of barley and wheat in China around the second millennium BC, when Chinese culture had expanded to areas with winter rainfalls and a certain level of moisture all year round. These environments were quite different from what many scholars consider the cradle of Chinese agriculture. The first traces of plant domestication, dating to 8,500 years ago, are in fact found in Northern China, more specifically in the loess terraces along the middle Yellow River, with crops such as foxtail millet and panic millet, vegetables like cabbages and the textile plant hemp. Between 8,000 and 6,000 years ago the expansion of the agricultural revolution towards the northeast gave origin to the domestication of soybean and probably buckwheat, while the southeast diffusion towards the area of the Yangtze River saw the beginning of rice production. However, other researchers developed the hypothesis that rice was domesticated independently.

#### Bibliographical reference

Carney, Judith (2001). *Black Rice*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

#### Bibliographical reference

Kiple, Kenneth K. (2007). *A Movable Feast*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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Harlan, J.R. (1992). *Crops and Man*. Madison WI: American Society of Agronomy.

Farther east, New Guinea was probably the centre of an agricultural revolution that starting 9,000 years ago gave origin to the domestication of plants such as lychee, banana, sugarcane, greater and lesser yams (*Dioscorea alata* and *esculenta*) and taro. The cultivation of these plants spread westwards, reaching South East Asia, where they were integrated with agricultural systems of Chinese origin, originating local domestications such as mango, jackfruit and probably lemons and limes, although some argue the latter two were domesticated in China.

Two very important centres for agricultural domestication were located in the Americas: the oldest one is probably the area that stretches from the Pacific to the western limits of the Amazon basin, in today's Peru and Ecuador. Coastal cultures domesticated squash, beans, the camote tuber (a variety of sweet potato), the fruits lùcuma, guava, pacay and avocado, and long fibre cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*), whose production was stimulated by the demand of fibre for waving nets from the coastal fishermen. In the high altitude plateaus and the irrigated valleys of the Andes, farmers developed crops such as peanuts, potatoes, ocas (a small starchy tuber) and the quinoa pseudocereal (a chenopodium related to the North American goosefoot). On the eastern side of the mountains, in the Amazon basin and all the way to the Orinoco river and the lowlands of Central America –it is uncertain if under the influence of the Andean agriculture– crops like coca, pineapple, papaya, cacao and vanilla (probably transferred to Mexico via the Caribbean), manioc, a variety of yam (*Dioscorea trifida*) and sweet potato were domesticated. The other major domestication area was located further north. Between 9,000 and 4,000 years ago, Southern Mexico saw the domestication of crops like chili peppers, tomatoes, tomatillos, avocado, maize (it is debated whether it derived from the annual *teosinte zea parviglumis* or from the *zea diploperennis*), various species of beans and squashes, amaranth, the jicama tuber, the sapote fruit and a local variety of cotton, the *Gossypium hirsutum*, which nowadays constitutes the majority of the cotton grown all over the world.

Less important and relevant only locally, at least until more recent times, were other domestication areas such as the Middle Mississippi (between 4,000 and 800 years ago). In the area between the Appalachians and the Great Prairies, sunflower (with its relative topinambur, also known as Jerusalem artichoke from the Italian name *girasole*), wild rice, sumpweed and goosefoot were domesticated to integrate the nutritional needs of populations that still lived a semi-nomadic life based on gathering, hunting and fishing.

#### 1.4. The impact of migrations

While some of these domestications expanded to other areas through diffusion and adoption by nearby communities, at times plants and animals, but also agricultural methods, cooking techniques, dishes and food-related customs travelled when a whole community moved to a new place or was displaced. We have already mentioned the role that nomadic populations play in interfacing with sedentary groups. However, at times, mass migrations have brought sudden and traumatic changes. For example, starting from around 1700 BC, the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa cultures in today's India slid into decadence, allowing the penetration of nomadic tribes from the northwest, known as Aryans. These populations, whose religious beliefs were transmitted in sacred texts such as the Rig-Veda, traditionally consumed meat and milk products, from curds to butter and ghee. As mentioned by Achaya, they cultivated barley, while wheat started carrying a stigma as the grain favoured by the defeated Harappans. Aryans also adopted rice as they migrated south and east on the Ganges plain, deforesting and ploughing large areas with the iron tools that they had learnt to use around 1000 BC. The change in the ritual value of cows might be connected to these population movements.

In other cases, a displaced population was not able to move all together to a new place, but gave origin to diasporas, that is to say the dispersion in small communities that settle in host environments and civilisations. Many civilisations that engaged in trade or specific types of business often created very well organised networks of expatriates that facilitated business and often functioned as banks for the members of their communities. Among these populations, we can mention the Turkish Uyghurs in Central Asia between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century, whose services as administrators and merchants were so appreciated that the Mongol Empire adopted the Uyghur script as its own. The Armenians in the Mediterranean and the Chinese in Southeast Asia played a similar role. Diasporas can play a relevant role in diffusing ingredients, dishes and traditions into new communities and territories. That was the case for the black slaves from Africa that were forced to steal in the Americas to work in the plantations; despite their condition, they managed to introduce cooking techniques and ingredients into their masters' diets, at times creating very specific culinary traditions, like in the case of the Bahia in Brazil and the Gullah communities on the coast of Georgia, USA.

Also, the Chinese brought their food with them wherever they created displaced communities, from Asia to the Americas and the Caribbean; while they maintained the traditions when they produced food for the members of the communities, when they entered the restaurant business they often created domesticated versions of their cuisine in order to make it more palatable and marketable to the host culture.

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Achaya. K.T. (1994). *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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Mintz, Sidney (2008). "Food and Diaspora". *Food, Culture & Society* 11(4): 509-523.

##### Bibliographical reference

Wu, David Y.H. and Sidney C.H. Cheung (2002). *The Globalization of Chinese Food*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

The Jewish civilisation, with its complex and often dramatic history of displacement, constitutes a particular case in this kind of dynamics. While small communities were already present all over the Mediterranean before the Roman Empire, with the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem and the following turbulence, many Jews decided to move to new places, becoming tightly integrated in many Mediterranean cultures, also under the Muslim domination. While Judaism enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity in the Muslim territories, in Central Europe, Jews were increasingly subject to persecution, in particular during the Crusades. They started moving East toward today's Poland, Ukraine and Russia, bringing with them many food traditions like their taste for soups and substantial food, dumplings and dark breads, freshwater fish, pickles and also spices, dried fruits and nuts, whose use they had learnt through their contacts with their Mediterranean brethren. In Eastern Europe they settled in countryside villages known as *shtetl* where they developed dishes that would become mainstays in Ashkenazi cuisine, such as bagels, bialy and blinis. The Ottoman Empire and some states in the Italian peninsula became the main destination for the Jews that were forced to leave Spain and then Portugal due to religious persecutions at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Even when some of them converted, their distaste for pork meat, the use of olive oil and the practice of long-cooking stews (such as *adafina*) to avoid food preparation on Sabbath were all used to accuse them of crypto-Judaism. Many preferred to escape to large cities like Aleppo, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Morocco, Istanbul and especially Salonika, which for a period hosted the largest Jewish community in the Ottoman territory. Their cuisine, later known as Sephardic, under the influence of the hosting culinary cultures became very diverse and rich in spices and flavours.

Both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews moved in more recent times towards a new destination, the United States, which offer a great example of a culinary culture that developed in constant dialogue with successive waves of migrants. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Irish, Jewish and Italian immigrants moved in great numbers to industrial urban centres such as Chicago, New York and Philadelphia, while the Chinese settled on the West Coast. Each of these immigrant groups brought their own traditions and interacted in different ways with the new environment. If at first they provided their traditional food only to members of their own communities, over time some of their specialties were embraced by the population at large, like Jewish bagels or Italian pizza. At the same time, their foodways adapted and mutated through the contact with different food cultures, so that for instance Italian-American cuisine has become quite different from any Italian cuisine in Italy. At times, however, the food of immigrants was disparaged, expressing the xenophobic feelings of the host population. An example of this aspect of food migration is the contempt for the food of Japanese immigrants working in rural California in the United States during War World II.

#### Further readings

**Diner, Hasia** (2001). *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

**Roden, Claudia** (1998). *The Book of Jewish Food*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.



## 1.5. Commercial and Cultural Exchanges

We have mentioned how differences have often stimulated exchanges of goods, technologies and know-how among communities. In the Neolithic era, for instance, we have clear traces of diffusion of objects such as millstones and grindstones in the Fertile Crescent and the Mediterranean.

Over the centuries, these connections developed into more stable commercial routes that tended to flourish in periods of peace, also when they were under the political and military control of a strong state formation or of an extended empire.

At times, the short-distance routes got linked to each other, forming long-distance connections that permitted the movement of goods across very diverse and far-flung territories. Although the main object of this kind of commerce, due to the high risks and the expenses involved, mostly focused on luxury items, it was inevitable that foods, techniques and customs also travelled along the same routes. However, some rare foods were considered valuable enough to become part of these flows of merchandise. In cultures without very strong social stratification, luxury foods coming from afar were often consumed in communal events to establish or reinforce social connections. Instead, Veen says that where status differentiation was more evident, these rare foods became the object of both private and public conspicuous consumption aimed at the display of social and economic disparities. McGovern states that wine sales in the ancient Mediterranean world offers a good example of this sort of dynamics: large wine jars travelled for instance from Greece to pre-Roman Celtic France in order to be consumed by local elites in vessels of foreign origin.

In the Middle Ages, the use of spices in wealthy households turned into a mark of refinement, nobility and affluence; many spices were used in the same dish, often in noticeable quantities, to the point that the resultant combinations of flavours would be quite unpalatable by contemporary standards. Moreover, spices were considered to be medicinal substances that could influence the bodily humours and contribute to cure of ailments.

In China, between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, almonds, figs and yellow peaches were imported from Samarkand in Central Asia for the exclusive use of the imperial court, among other luxury products that show the love for the exotic, common during the Tang dynasty.

A theoretical approach to analysing the cultural, commercial, and political flows of goods globally was elaborated by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) with his analysis of world-systems, a framework he developed to understand the historical changes involved in the rise of the modern world. Wallerstein classified different regions interconnected through commercial and political ties as core, semi-periphery, periphery and external in terms

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of their role within the system. The core regions were those benefiting the most, obtaining raw materials and commodities from other areas to manufacture items that were then redirected to the periphery as added value goods, thus extracting further wealth from the periphery. World-systems were based on dynamics that included capital accumulation as a motor force, international divisions of labour (with types of labour conditions within each area), alternating periods of competition and hegemony, and economic cycles of growth and crisis. This analytical approach has been applied to empires, but its efficacy has been shown also in the examination of trade networks and other forms of political and economic relationship, including the more contemporary forms of neo-colonialism, that is to say, dependence of a country from its former colonial power in terms of indirect political means and economic ties (see section Colonial empires).

In the following sub-section, we will focus on the analysis of a few cases of food-related trade networks, from antiquity to colonial times, to achieve a better understanding of how commerce shaped food cultures and often found itself at the root of forms of globalisation that, although different from the contemporary phenomenon, offer interesting elements of comparison with it.

### 1.5.1. The seafaring routes: The Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean

In most of antiquity and until the beginning of the Portuguese exploration of the African Coast in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, two water bodies constituted great spaces of exchange, trade and cultural diffusion of food and foodways: the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Mediterranean allowed the productive and commercial networks of the Fertile Crescent to connect with Northern Africa and Southern Europe. Starting from the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC, a league of independent city-state ports, such as Byblos, Tyre and Sidon, inhabited by a population known as the Phoenicians, developed a civilisation based on commerce and seafaring. The Phoenicians, who traded throughout the Mediterranean in ivory, bronze, wood, glass and purple-dyed textiles founded outposts in Italy (Sardinia and Western Sicily), North Africa (Carthage) and Spain. It is presumable that these colonies became also centres of diffusion of agricultural techniques and crops from the Middle East, including olives, grapes and vegetables such as scallion, whose name might derive from the Phoenician town of Ashkelon (in today's Israel). The areas in Northern Africa controlled by Carthage would become in following centuries one of the wheat baskets of the Roman Empire. It is also likely that

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the Phoenicians diffused methods to obtain salt from seawater and salting techniques for the conservation of fish, initiating the salt ponds on the coast of Western Sicily and the tradition of tuna fishing in the area.

From the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, Greece cities founded colonies all over the Mediterranean in order to ease their internal demographic pressure. These colonies, which maintained cultural ties with the cities from which they originated, played a fundamental role in the diffusion of wheat, grapes, olives and other crops all over the Mediterranean, but especially in Southern Italy, Southern France and the Mediterranean coast of Spain. Moreover, they introduced the mentality that equated the consumption of Mediterranean products in a structured manner with civilisation, defining all the other neighbouring populations as barbarians eating uncouth foods. The Romans will inherit this identification between diet and superior culture, defining their relationship with the foodways of the populations they conquered, especially the Germans from Northern Europe who consumed cereals like barley and rye, used butter and drank beer. The Mediterranean Sea became the core of the expansion and the administrative structures of the Roman Empire, to the point that it was often referred to as *mare nostrum* (our sea). The security that followed the imperial expansion facilitated the increase of food trade that focused on staples such as wheat, but included also exotic fruits and spices from the east. When the empire collapsed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Byzantine seafarers from today's Istanbul took control of the maritime routes until their supremacy was defied by the expansion of the Muslim Empire.

From the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Mediterranean allowed the Islamic expansion into Northern Africa, Sicily and Spain. Despite recent debates about the actual role Muslim states played in reviving Western European agriculture through the introduction of new crops and technologies, some of which had already been known in the area, there is no doubt that a territory stretching from Central Asia to the Atlantic facilitated the movement and adoption of diverse agricultural techniques, ingredient, dishes and cooking styles.

For instance, according to Wright, eggplants, spinach, citrus, pomegranate, almonds, rice, saffron and indigo were introduced into Western Europe in this period. The cultivation of sugar cane, which the Muslims had absorbed from India, spread west to Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Sicily and even Spain. Waines and Zaouali state that Islamic cuisines were the result of the encounter of various culinary cultures, including the Byzantine, with its use of Mediterranean products, and the Persian, which left traces in the use of fried meats, the presence of fruit and nuts (including almonds) in meat dishes and the relevance of rice consumption. Islamic communities spread these cooking techniques across the Mediterranean territories they controlled, together with other culinary elements including the introduction of sweetness in savoury dishes and the use of sugar in pastry.

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Notwithstanding its ethnic and political fragmentation following the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic world maintained a strong cultural identity as an integrated economic space where commerce flourished reaching out to India, South East Asia and Eastern Africa, exploiting pre-existing maritime routes over the Indian Ocean.

Spices coming from India (pepper), Sri Lanka (cinnamon) and as far as the Moluccas islands (clove and nutmeg) were sold all over the Islamic world reaching the Mediterranean and the Christian Kingdoms of Western Europe, where they were considered luxury items. Although the Romans already maintained indirect contact with the Asian world and the Indian Ocean, as the use of spices in Roman cuisines indicates, it was the Islamic merchants and seafarers that directly connected the two great bodies of water. The seafaring routes that crisscrossed the Indian Ocean stretched all the way to the Red Sea, reaching Egypt, the Persian Gulf and the coast of East Africa. Here, the exchange of products between the communities on the shore and those in the interior –as diverse as hunter-gatherers, agriculturalists (sorghum), pastoralists (sheep and cattle) and fishing people– stimulated the development of coastal urban centres. Slaves from this area were brought to the area around Basra in today's Iraq to work in sugar cane plantations. The commercial towns on the East African coast, where the Swahili culture developed, tightly integrated in the Indian Ocean maritime routes became areas of introduction for Asian crops such as citrus fruits, rice, tamarind, coconuts, bananas and sugarcane, the latter maybe introduced by the Indonesians who had settled in Madagascar. The global relevance of these urban centres is proved by the presence of valuable items such as copper, silver coins and porcelain vessels from China, mostly for table use. The Indian Ocean also allowed the establishment of direct connections between India, South East Asia and the islands in today's Indonesia, China and Japan. As stated by Beaujard, while most of the commerce focuses on luxury products like spices, staple crops like rice were also traded between different areas.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century witnesses an increase of the Chinese presence along commercial routes both on land and by sea, facilitating the export of Chinese products (especially sugar) and ensuring the import of spices and other delicacies (like bird nests from South East Asia). However, from the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Ming dynasty decided to focus on continental matters and to discontinue its trade in the Indian Ocean. This new policy had momentous consequences. When in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the commerce of spices and other products towards the Western Mediterranean was drastically limited by the expansion of the new empire founded in the Middle East by the Ottoman Turks, Portugal, which had just freed itself from Islamic control, decided in 1419 to proceed to the exploration of the African coast looking for a passage towards the east in order to access a direct source of spices. In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope and, in 1498, Vasco da Gama reached India, marking the beginning of the Portuguese penetration

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into the Indian Ocean. The newcomers established a series of commercial outposts in seaports (Socotra at the entrance of the Red Sea, Ormuz in the Persian Gulf, Goa in India, Macau in China, Malacca in today's Malaysia and Nagasaki in Japan) that allowed them to encroach on existing trade routes and to control the flux of spices and other goods.

From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, both the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean became part of a new world system that had its core around the Atlantic and originated the Columbian Exchange that will be discussed in a following section.

### 1.5.2. The land routes: the Sahara and the Silk Route

The introduction of camels in the Sahara, probably from the Arabic Peninsula via Somalia and Egypt between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, and the integration of the area in the Muslim commercial and cultural networks from the 7<sup>th</sup> century marked the development of long-distance trans-Saharan trade. These routes hinged on a series of oases that functioned as exchange locations and that connected Mediterranean Africa with the Sahel, the Niger basin and the West African coasts.

While these exchanges focused on high-value goods such as iron, gold and slaves, they also included diverse food items from the various ecozones of the areas, including salt, dates from the oases, groundnuts and Shea butter from the savannah and even tropical crops such as palm oil, palm wine, yams, Malagueta pepper and kola nuts.

Due to the environmental barriers and diseases, such as malaria, yellow fever or trypanosomes carried by the tsetse fly, most African trade was short-distance and goods travelled through a system of relay stations and market places that often constituted the core for the development of kingdoms and, occasionally, larger empires like Ghana and its successors Takrur on the Senegal river and Mali along the Niger river. However, also before the contact with Islam, urban cultures, such as Jenné and Gao, had developed thanks to the surplus from the cultivation of areas naturally flooded by water and from pastoralist production, with transportable grains traded all the way to Timbuktu at the edge of the desert. Further south, the rotational bush-fallow agriculture close to the rain forest and the domestication of trypanosomiasis-resistant dwarf cattle had allowed the establishment of power centres such as Ife and Benin.

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The Muslim traveller Ibn Battuta and the historian Ibn Khaldun, whose reflections are now valuable resources, illustrate the period that preceded the arrival of the western explorers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which saw the expansion of regional empires based on both agriculture and commerce, such as Songhay in West Africa, Kongo on the coast of Central Africa, Lunda and Luba in the interior of today's Congo and Mwenemutapa between the Zambesi and Limpopo rivers, where the Bantu populations practiced intensive terraced farming.

The trans-Saharan caravans were not the only examples of inland long-distance trading in the Eurasian continent before the arrival of the Europeans in the Indian Ocean and in the Americas. Other commercial routes had developed over the centuries. Nomad and hunter traders had given origin to a flux of merchandise that included furs, ambers and honey in the northern steppes of today's Russia. Much more relevant in terms of volume and cultural influence was the set of routes that connected China to the oases along the Tarim basin and the Takamaklan desert in Central Asia, to continue either south through the Pamir toward the Indian Ocean or west toward the coastal ports on the Mediterranean. While these routes also focused mainly on luxury items, in particular silk, the frequent movements of merchants, soldiers and migrants played an important role in the diffusion of food and foodways across the area.

The elites of the Tang dynasty, which ruled China between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> century, often had Central Asian ancestors and they frequently maintained forms of connection with those cultures. The influence of Central Asian Buddhism, for instance, is evident in the diffusion of dairy products into China, the decrease in the use of beef and the diffusion of vegetarianism due to religious reasons (even if large sections of the populations were almost vegetarian due to the scarcity of meat) and the growing popularity of tea, which had probably first appeared in China after the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD). From the west, several new crops were introduced into China, such as spinach, lettuce, almonds and figs.

The inland trade across Asia intensified during the Mongol domination in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, when for a brief period all the territories from China to Eastern Europe were under a single authority. Already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, some European kings, including the pope, had sent Franciscan monks to contact the Mongol rulers in the hope of creating an alliance against the common Muslim enemies. The monks William of Rubruck and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine wrote a very detailed account of the Mongols and their customs, including the use of fermented mare milk (kumiss) and the habits of drying meat in the wind and of curing it under the saddles through the contact with the horses' skin and sweat. However, the most famous chronicle of the

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period was the one written by the Italian merchant Marco Polo, who provided European readers with descriptions of the eastern wonders, including details about food production and consumption.

As we will see in the next section, the maritime and inland trade routes that had allowed the diffusion of agricultural invocation, products, cooking techniques and cultural values for centuries across Europe, Asia and Africa were supplanted by a new set of maritime routes that shifted the core of the international commerce from the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean.

### 1.5.3. The Columbian Exchange

We have already mentioned the relevance of seafaring routes in the diffusion and the trade of staple crops and luxury food items. However, nothing compared to the intensity and the extension of food exchanges that followed the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The travels of Columbus across the Atlantic looking for alternative access to the places of origin of spices marked the beginning of one of the largest movements of people, plants and animals in the history of humanity, commonly known as the Columbian Exchange.

Pomeranz and Topik say that the effect of these epochal events was amplified by the establishment of western colonies that directly controlled cities and territories not only in the Americas, but also in Africa and Asia. According to Diamond, the arrival of explorers and settlers from the Old World in the western hemisphere also marked the appearance of unknown diseases, such as measles, typhus and smallpox, which wiped out a large percentage of the natives.

Food travelled from one corner of the world to the other, while plants and animals were adopted in places very far from their original environments, thanks to the improvement of naval and seafaring technologies. McCann says that corn is probably one of the best examples of these new global crops: in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it had already been widely adopted in Western and Eastern Europe, in Africa and other parts of the Old World. On the other hand, plants from Eurasia like radishes, cabbages, citrus fruit, banana and sugar cane thrived in the Caribbean.

Sweet potato, potatoes, beans, tomato, chili peppers, maize, peanuts and pineapple were introduced in the areas around the Indian Ocean by the Portuguese and entered China via Macao and Manila, where the Spaniards had brought them from Mexico. Adaptive to marginal lands, assuring high yields and often introduced into new areas by local officials, potatoes, maize

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and beans allowed for the survival of the poor peasantry and for population growth in China, where small holdings became more common following the peasant rebellions at the end of the Mongol domination.

In West Africa, probably through the same short-distance commerce that allowed the movement of coastal goods like sea salt and fish into the interior, crops from the Americas such as corn, peppers and beans penetrated the continent, just as had happened in the past with bananas and other crops from Asia on the East African Coast. According to Curtin, a major role in these dynamics was played by those communities of African traders that acted as intermediaries between the populations in the interior and the European representatives on the coasts.

It is likely that the American crops were first grown in the European trading posts and slave stations along the shore to feed the prisoners during the long periods between their capture and the actual transportation to the American plantations and later during the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. Once settled in the New World, when they were allowed to cultivate plots to supplement the rations provided by their owners, African slaves often continued growing the same set of crops that ensured their sustenance in Africa, like okra, black eyed peas, rice and corn, which had acclimated so fast that it was often perceived as truly American.

#### 1.5.4. Food and political domination

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the establishment of worldwide empires based on the need of European powers to extract raw materials and agricultural products from the newly "discovered" American territories made the diffusion of ingredients, techniques and food habits much faster and extensive than ever before. However, it was not the first time that vast multicultural empires controlled large swaths of territories, profiting on diverse natural environments producing distinctive crops. It was not rare for empires to conquer lands in order to have access to what they needed for their expansion, their smooth functioning and, at times, their survival.

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The growth of the Roman Empire, for instance, was based on the control of provinces that specialised in cultivations with different comparative advantages and varying commercial values. As mentioned by Erdkamp and Garnsey, the production of very lucrative wines and olive oils was mainly concentrated in Italy, while wheat was grown in provinces located in today's North Africa and the Middle East. Chang says that the Chinese Empire concentrated its rice production in the south, while the north maintained its focus on wheat, barley, sorghum and millet, thus ensuring a variety of staples. At the same time, as we noticed when discussing the Mongol Empire, direct control of vast territories allowed the development of trade, thanks to safer routes and better infrastructure like roads, ports and exchange stations. Typical examples are the caravanserais in territories controlled by Muslim states: quadrangular constructions developed around a central courtyard whose main function was to receive travellers and merchandise and to take care of animals, offering water, warehouses and often also a place of prayer.

As we have already mentioned, the power of empires was shown at the tables of the elites by the conspicuous display of rare luxury items coming from faraway lands. However, the capacity of ensuring food for its citizens, especially in urban environments, was also fundamental to strengthen the political legitimacy and authority of an imperial formation. For instance, in the Ottoman Empire, which dominated the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and large sections of the Middle East between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, food embodied fundamental symbolic values in terms of the effectiveness of the government and the administration. The Ottomans, a population of Turkish descent from Central Asia, had penetrated the Byzantine Empire in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, developing a culinary culture that, while respecting Islamic principles, borrowed from traditions spanning from Asia to Europe. It also absorbed elements from the Central Asian elites, which placed food at the core of political relationships, reflecting the strength of the connection between subjects and their ruler, who was supposed to ensure their sustenance (often referred to as "bread and salt").

The logistics of assuring the sustenance of the whole empire, a political priority and a source of legitimacy for the Ottomans, required requisitions and transportation of goods through state-controlled supply networks from the different provinces of the empire. The military always made sure that the troops, the first professional and permanent army in Europe, were well fed, especially during campaigns of expansion, although the regulations protecting the peasants and the production in the lands crossed by the army were very strict. The Janissaries, members of the most exclusive corps, named their officers using titles inspired to camp kitchens, such as "soup maker" and "cook". The corps itself was known as *ocak* (hearth) and the cauldron in which their food was cooked was considered as a symbol of solidarity and loyalty to the sultan.

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However, over time, the systems of food provisions, distribution and market control that had been among the main instruments of the political establishment ensuring legitimacy and avoiding famines became increasingly inefficient as the empire reached the limits of its geographical expansion and regional authorities acquired greater autonomy from Istanbul.

Since lands and titles attributed to the sultan to his followers were not hereditary, with the lack of central control the local lords took advantage of their temporary positions to extract as much as they could from their subjects during their tenure in terms of crops and food products, often causing unrest. Some of the public kitchens that had ensured food to the poor in the previous centuries fell in disrepair, while a few stopped functioning altogether.

### 1.5.5. Colonial empires

The period following the appearance of Western European powers in the Indian Ocean and in the Americas saw the expansion of empires that were mostly based on the production, the control and the trade of valuable commodities: gold from Mexico, silver from Peru and Bolivia, spices from Eastern Asia, sugar from the Caribbean and a new category of new stimulant substances that could be smoked, drank or eaten destined to turn into the most valuable global commodities. However, at least at the beginning, many of these crops constituted natural monopolies. China, for instance, was the sole producer of tea, while cocoa originally grew only in Mexico, Central America and the Amazon basin, coffee in Yemen, coca in the Andes and tobacco in the Americas.

To avoid the hurdles connected with these natural monopolies, the burgeoning European empires focused on transferring those cultivations to their own colonies. The new scientific approach to nature that was changing European mentalities proved to be the perfect partner of imperial expansion. In fact, great efforts were dedicated to studying tropical and exotic crops not only in their natural habitats, but also in botanical gardens, where seeds and young plants were nurtured to be then redistributed across far-flung territories in the hope they would adapt and expand.

Some of these plants did not require much to prosper in the new environments. Sugarcane, for instance, introduced by the Spaniards in Caribbean islands, was planted by the Dutch in the Northeast of Brazil, in the short period they controlled those territories at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and then transferred to the French and English islands, in particular Jamaica, Trinidad, Martinique and Guadeloupe. While at the beginning sugarcane was grown by European small-holders and indentured servants, over time the possibility of enormous revenues favoured the establishment of large plantations, modelled on the Spanish and Portuguese cultivations in the

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Canary and Cape Verde Islands, manned by large numbers of African slaves in a production system that was highly organised, time-sensitive and required relevant investment of capital.

As Milton states, traditional spices were introduced in the New World to break the East Asian monopolies, which had caused excesses like the massacres in the Bandas islands perpetrated by the Dutch VOC (East India Company) to maintain control over the production of nutmeg. Over time, Grenada became a major producer of clove and nutmeg, while the French introduced pepper in Mauritius, Réunion and French Guyana. While cacao originally grew only in Mesoamerica and in the upper Amazon basin, once it became a highly demanded product, the Spaniards, who had a monopoly on it, expanded the cultivation to Venezuela, Brazil (under Spanish control in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) and the Philippines. The Dutch then transferred seeds from Venezuela to Curaçao in 1634, thus breaking the Spanish monopoly. The French introduced the plant in their Caribbean islands, while the Dutch brought it to Ceylon and Indonesia. Over time the cultivation spread also to West and Central Africa.

In this period, tea remained a Chinese monopoly. The Portuguese first got acquainted with the drink when they encroached on the Indian Ocean trade routes, followed by the British, the French and the Dutch. But it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that European demand grew to the point that the Chinese monopoly came to be perceived as a hurdle to free commerce that eventually led to a series of devastating wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, known as the Opium Wars. The first of these conflicts (1839-1842) was ignited by the need of the British Empire to counterbalance the trade deficit with China caused by the immense quantities of imports like tea, porcelain and above all tea, which had become extremely popular in England. The British found the answer in a crop that grew in many areas of the Raj: poppy and its derivative opium. They started smuggling huge quantities of the drug into China, which resulted into an epidemic of drug addiction that undermined social structures in many areas. When a large delivery of opium was destroyed in the port of Canton, the British attacked and, with the 1842 treaty, forced China to open its ports to foreign commerce, to allow other countries to establish extraterritorial enclaves and to surrender the island of Hong King to Great Britain.

Coffee, in its Arabica variety, had been domesticated in Ethiopia and brought to Yemen, from where it acquired cultural relevance among increasingly larger strata of the population in Western Asia and, later, in the Ottoman Empire. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of Ottoman diplomats and merchants made the drink popular also in Europe. As demand grew, the Dutch managed to introduce some plants to Ceylon and Java, and to bring coffee plants to the Amsterdam Botanical Gardens in 1706. From there, the French transferred the

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crop to Martinique, Haiti and French Guyana, from where it spread to Brazil, thus eliminating the remnants of the Ottoman monopoly by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Other plants were transferred not because of their commercial value, but because of their potential as source of nourishment. This is the case for the breadfruit, which was famously brought from the recently discovered Tahiti to the Caribbean by Captain William Bligh in order to feed the local slaves, even though local crops would have provided enough sustenance, had they been taken into consideration by the plantation owners.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, improvements in communication technologies and transportation boosted international trade and the expansion of colonial empires. Following the growth of consumer markets, urbanisation and the industrialisation of food production in most Western European countries and later in the United States and Japan, the demand for commercial crops of sugar, chocolate and coffee grew exponentially both in extension and in levels of organisation. However, the abolition of slavery dismantled the production model based on the plantation system, despite the strong resistance from colonial landowners. The process –jumpstarted by the Haitian revolution in 1804– ended only in the late 1880s with the elimination of slavery in Cuba and Brazil. Some Caribbean colonies shifted from sugar to other crops such as bananas, pineapples, nutmeg and coffee, for which demand was growing in Europe, while in others, like Jamaica, plantations were divided among smallholders.

To maintain the plantations that the freed slaves often refused to cultivate, landowners had to recur to forms of coercion such as contract labour or debt peonage, bringing workers from India to Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad, Reunion and Natal, while Chinese peasants moved to Jamaica, Cuba, the valleys of the Peruvian coast, Java and Hawaii. These new massive movements influenced the development of culinary traditions. When the Indians arrived in the Americas some of their traditional ingredients, such as mangoes and tamarind, had already been introduced by the British colonial authorities, always eager to maximise the agricultural potential of their territories. While Chinese food traditions did not impact much on the local cuisines (with the exception of maybe pickled vegetables and the use of soy sauce for some meat marinades), Indian culinary habits and techniques have left a durable trace.

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As the imperialist powers ensured cheap and reliable sources, goods that were previously limited to the upper classes, became available to all walks of society. Towards the end of the century, commodity sales were organised in structured markets, with actual grading of the products and the establishment of international standards. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the economic exploitation of colonies became increasingly systematic. For instance, as mentioned by Adas and Schendel, once the French made rice production a priority in their Indochina territories and the British did the same in Lower Burma, it became more convenient for the neighbouring islands under Dutch control, such as Java, to buy rice from those areas to sell it to farmers that could then switch from traditional cultivations, including rice, to export crops like sugar. Bowman says that rice from Indochina was also imported into French West Africa, where peanut cultivation expanded, shifting labour away from staple production for subsistence and local trade.

Colonial rule also ensured that greater shares of the peasants' production went to the foreign authorities, who were often more efficient and better organised in collecting taxes than their pre-colonial predecessors; as a consequence, life conditions worsened for farmers and unrest and riots increased, even though the occupants had recourse to modern weaponry to repress them, often affecting production negatively.

After the worldwide economic recession that followed the 1929 crisis, World War II was a period of food scarcity and hardship in many areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The first years of war brought requisitions of cash crops by the colonial powers, together with difficulties in transportation and distribution that caused shortages of imported goods, both essential and luxury items, leading to rationing in urban areas. The consequences of the conflict were less evident in areas that had traditionally practiced subsistence agriculture and local barter.

The years following the end of the war witnessed a worldwide effort to jumpstart reconstruction and development, together with calls for political self-determination that eventually gave way to dynamics of decolonisation, as former territories that were part of global empires acquired independence, more or less peacefully. However, many new nations, especially in Africa, felt that the former colonial powers still controlled them through indirect political means and economic dependency, exploiting them under a new set of relationships that came to be known as neo-colonialism.

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## 2. Sharing tables

In the previous section, we looked at how food diffusion, exchange and trade among human communities all over the world has determined or, at least, affected many historical phenomena and, more in general, the development of their material life. In this section, we will turn our attention to the communities themselves, to analyse how the role of food production, distribution and consumption can interact with cultural, social, political and economic structures and how they have at times influenced them.

The emotional and cultural relevance of food cannot be ignored. Ingestion and incorporation constitute a paramount component of our connection with reality and the world outside our body. Food is pervasive and has been found at the centre of frequent and significant communicative interactions that have influenced various aspects of individual and communal identities, functioning as a relevant signifier of power, cultural capital, class status, gender, ethnicity, race and religion. As in the previous section, we will not try to provide an exhaustive history of all the anthropological and sociological aspects of food in history, but we will rather concentrate on limited cases and examples to outline common dynamics that can help us achieve a better understanding of phenomena and events in different times and places.

### 2.1. Body and soul: Food and religions

Religion and spirituality have often played a fundamental role in determining the relationship of human communities and their food sources, not only in determining what is legitimate, just and allowed to eat, but also in understanding aspects of production and distribution of food. Societies and cultures have often marked specific foods as taboo, defining them as defiling or impure. Conversely, other foods were considered sacred and their consumption was limited to special occasions or prohibited to all members of the community except the religious leaders in charge with the relationships with the gods. In many civilisations, great emphasis was given to food offerings to divine beings or to facilitate the afterlife; the preparation of these foods was frequently carried out by dedicated staff that was paid and entitled to some of the sacrificial goods when they were redistributed after the ceremony. Food and cooking were also relevant in organised religions to reflect beliefs and the structure of the community of believers.

In this section, we will limit ourselves to analysing the role food played in the three monotheist religions that shaped the history of the Mediterranean cultural area. These examples will help us achieve a better understanding of how eating and cooking have influenced human cultures. Similar observations could be provided for Buddhism and its complex relationship

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with vegetarianism, Jainism and its refuse to kill any living creature, Taoism and its theories about the inner landscape of men as a reflection of external universe, Aztec religion and the relevance of sacrifice.

Food references abound in the Bible. Dietary rules constituted a very important element in the Old Testament culture and religion. *Kashrut*, the complex set of rules determining what can be eaten, how it should be eaten, and when has constantly played a fundamental role in the history of Jews. The whole system is dependent on a number of prohibitions that were already dictated in Leviticus XI and Deuteronomy XIV. The religious law prohibited eating animals that are not ruminant and are not hooved, including pigs, horses, rabbits, and camels. Among the birds, waterfowl, nocturnal birds of prey and those who do not fly could not be consumed, together with insects, rodents and animals that crawl on the ground on their belly, such as snakes. To be consumed, fish must have fins and scales, thus excluding eels, rays, crustaceans and molluscs. In addition to foods to avoid, there were a few rules for cooking: for instance, Jews are not supposed to cook meat in milk because the Torah does not allow eating the meat of an animal cooked in its mother's milk.

Special rules governed the slaughtering and preparation of the pure animals. Ritual slaughtering consisted of killing the animal with one cut of a sharp knife, so as to cause immediate death and complete bleeding. This probably stemmed from the fact that only God could take and give life. Meat consumption could only happen with a sacrifice (hence the need for the ritual) and after the removal of blood, as the vital principle, and it must be offered to God. The ritual butcher also had to make sure that the animal was not ill or imperfect; otherwise it could not be consumed, and then took care to eliminate the sciatic nerve. The prohibition against eating the sciatic nerve came from the Genesis account of Jacob's struggle with the angel, during which the patriarch was lamed. The meat had then to be well rinsed and put in salt for no less than twenty minutes and one hour. After salting, the meat had to be washed in running water two or three times to completely remove the blood.

As mentioned by Feely-Harnik (1994), the New Testament, particularly the Acts of the Apostles, relates how food issues became urgent when the first community of the followers of Jesus spread across the Mediterranean. New converts from cultures outside Judaism could not understand all the fuss about what and how to eat. A full-blown crisis was avoided when Peter, in a trance-like state, dreamed of a large sheet coming down from the sky, on which fell all kinds of food, regardless of their purity and impurity according to the *kashrut* rules (Acts 10:10-16). Peter interpreted the vision as a sign from God that Christians were not necessarily required to follow the Jewish dietary rules. However, Paul reminded the members of the community that it

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would have been better to avoid those foods that could have scandalised the Jewish members out of consideration from them and not because any intrinsic quality attributed to the foods themselves (1 Cor. 8.1-11.1).

As Jesus himself pointed out, impurity and sin did not depend of what entered the body, but on what came out of it in terms of words, thoughts and actions (Mt 15:10-19). Personal responsibility put Jesus' followers in the position to make independent food choices. Despite the desire to actually obey God's will, anxiety ensued, as the long debates on predestination and free will in Christianity demonstrate: who decides whether the faithful are saved? How do they know they are on the right path? Does any authority on earth possess the power to determine what God wants from the faithful?

In Christianity, the body is often described as the temple of the Spirit. Christians have long known that. Paul states this in his first letter to the community in Corinth. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Paul's admonition can be interpreted both at the individual and at the communal level. After all, the Church is the body of Christ. At the same time, the body can become the occasion for temptation and sin. Gluttony has been listed as one of the seven capital sins. For this reason, as pointed out by Grimm, fast has historically been embraced as a way to mortify the body and to get closer to God, imposing a discipline that is supposed to build character and faith. Fagan says that the demands of the Catholic Church about the avoidance of meat during specific days or whole liturgical periods, such as the Lent preceding Easter, had enormous influence in shaping the food habits in Catholic countries and were the object of harsh criticism during Protestant reform.

Islam also presents relevant food-related aspects. As mentioned by Hoffman, whatever the differences due to status or local traditions, some food-related principles were –and still are– common to the whole Muslim world, dictated by the Holy Book, the Qur'an; one of the five pillars of Islam was in fact the fast to be kept during the month of Ramadan to commemorate the revelation of the book to Muhammad. All Muslims older than ten years of age were required to abstain from food, drink and sex from dawn to dusk; pregnant women, sick people and travellers were excused, but they were expected to fast later for a number of days equal to those during which they had not respected the fast. Festive meals were prepared every evening after sunset, culminating with the celebration of the 'Aid al Fitr, where lavish banquets were organised in every family according to their economic means. On that day, no Muslim was supposed to go hungry, so that the better off would take care of the less fortunate. The custom was a reflection of another pillar of Islam, the *zakat* (alimony), which was considered an expression of the spirit of sharing uniting all Muslims in the Umma, the community of the faithful. The Qur'an also warns against the excesses caused by alcoholic drinks, often connected to

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gambling and disturbance; however, wine will flow in Paradise together with honey. Other prohibitions regarded the consumption of pork and all animals sacrificed to gods other than Allah. Complex rules about ritual butchering (dhabīhah), similar to the Jewish *kashrut*, were also imposed, as was a taboo about the ingestion of blood and animals found already dead. This set of rules defined the food that according to Islamic law (sharī'a) can be considered *halāl* (lawful and licit), as opposed to the sphere of the *haram*, which includes the foods and the practices considered impure and forbidden.

## 2.2. Body, health, and science

Often in connection with religious beliefs, human communities have developed complex systems of interpretation about the functioning of the body, its relation to health and the role that food plays in maintaining, enhancing or endangering wellbeing from the material point of view. Of course, each culture determined the frontier between body and spirit in different ways and some did not even consider this dichotomy as relevant. We will limit ourselves at a better understanding of the western concepts about diet and health, but other important traditions developed in India and in China, often based on similar dynamics although embracing different principles.

Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the populations living in Western Europe based their health and diet beliefs on the theories elaborated by famous doctors from the past. The most influential were Hippocrates of Cos (between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC), Celsus (1<sup>st</sup> century AD) and, above all, Galen (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD). According to their assumptions, a healthy human body was the result of the balance of four fluids, also known as "humours": blood, choler (yellow bile), phlegm and melancholy (black bile). Each of these fluids manifested different physical qualities: heat, coldness, moisture and dryness. In this theoretical system, blood was considered hot and moist, choler was hot and dry, phlegm was cold and moist and melancholy was cold and dry. The predominance of any of the four humours conditioned the health and the character of each individual, their "complexion", in the language of the time. A prevalence of blood determined a sanguine disposition, an excess of choler provoked outburst of anger and so on. Different foods were also supposed to have their own complexions, which were assimilated by the bodies that ate them. In this framework, sickness was considered an unbalance of humours, due to the excess of a certain fluid. The naturally healthy balance differed for each individual and was ensured by the ingestion and the digestion of elements that presented opposite qualities to the surplus fluid. For instance, if a person suffered from melancholy, losing weight and showing sunken eyes, the excess of the cold and dry humour was to be counterbalanced by the consumption of hot and moist ingredients, such as onions. As a consequence, there were no general cures that worked for everybody: doctors were supposed to determine the natural complexion of their patients and to interpret all symptoms in

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terms of surplus of certain fluids. Based on the resulting diagnosis, they would advise the consumption of specific foods or substances. Furthermore, digestion was considered as a form of cooking that took place in the stomach and the intestine, where food was the fuel providing energy to the body.

With the fall of the Roman Empire and the arrival of Germanic tribes from the north, this medical wisdom was basically lost, maintained only vaguely in the monasteries, which continued to cultivate the Greek and Roman traditions. Galen's approach to diet survived in the Byzantine Empire, later translated by Nestorian refugees into Syria, and then brought into Persia, where it was made available to the local scholars and became part of Islamic sciences.

The ancient texts were translated back into Latin only from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in the Salerno School of Medicine and in the scholarly circles of Toledo. Ibn Sinna, also known as Avicenna, who lived between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> century, reorganised the theories received from Celsus and Galen in his Canon (Qanun), which for centuries became the authority in the field. This medical wisdom reached Italy when the Arabs conquered Sicily and it was successively adopted in the Norman reigns of Southern Italy. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a medical school was founded in Salerno, near Naples, where scholars translated a landslide of texts and compiled a famous dietary known as *Regimen Sanitatis*, which upheld humoral physiology and made it popular all over Italy. The establishment of the University of Naples by Frederick II, an emperor who gave protection to Muslim science, in 1224 and the proximity of Amalfi, a seaport open to Arab drug dealers and whose ships traded in all kind of Oriental products, had an unfavourable influence on the school in Salerno. The rise of universities in Montpellier, Padua and Bologna, the latter particularly renowned for the studies in human anatomy, determined the decadence of Salerno.

In the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, many scholars fought against the influence of religion and scholastic philosophy over medicine and other sciences, using their knowledge of Greek to access the original texts from antiquity. From the 1470s to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a great number of dietary volumes were published, stimulated by the invention of the printing press.

From the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, scientific endeavours were characterised by the intense activity of translators, by the critical treatment of sources from the Greek-Roman antiquity and by independent investigations that introduced enormous changes in the way Europeans understood their body and the connections between food and health. Scholars such as Andreas Vesalius and Gabriele Falloppio, who taught in Padua, demonstrated the weakness of the anatomical concepts in the Galenic theory by dissecting corpses. Numerous authors, including Gerolamo Cardano, Alessandro Petronio and Giovanni Domenico Sala, opposed widespread nutritional concepts basing

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their critique on local habits and traditions and on personal observation. A German travelling doctor, Theophrastus Bombastus of Hohenheim, known as Paracelsus, elaborated a new theory of the causes of disease (etiology), introducing chemical therapeutics. Furthermore, he strongly upheld the usefulness of mineral waters and native botanical drugs from which he distilled "essences" and "tinctures" that were meant to replace folk remedies. Developing the theories put forth by Paracelsus, some chemists and alchemists noted that many natural substances, when heated, separated in a volatile fluid, which they equated to mercury; an oily substance, or sulphur; and a solid residue; or salt. While mercury determined smells, sulphur induced sweetness and moistness and salt controlled the taste and texture of foods.

While the theory of fluids was attacked by the developments of chemistry, the idea that digestion was similar to cooking slowly also became obsolete. The discovery of blood circulation by the English physician William Harvey of Folkestone (1578-1657), published in 1628, and research by Marcello Malpighi on blood corpuscles using the microscope, gave the final blow to Galen's theories. These findings were at the base of the efforts by many scientists, called iatrophysicists, to explain all physiological processes according to the laws of physics. Opposing their views, other doctors, known as ierochemists, maintained that chemistry was sufficient to account for all medical facts. Among these, the Belgian Jan Baptista van Helmont (1577-1644), famous for his studies on gas, conjectured that many processes of the living body, like digestion, nutrition and even movement were due to ferments that converted dead substances, such as food, into living flesh. Franz Sylvius (1614-72) also sought to explain physiological processes by suggesting fermentation (molecular motion of matter) and "vital spirits" as moving forces. A few years before, the Croatian Santorio Santorio (1561-1636), born from a nobleman from Friuli in the service of the Venetian republic, had studied the human body by weighing its solid and liquid intakes and excretions.

These theories remained prevalent until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when scientists like Jakob Moleschott (1822-93) and Justus Freiherr von Liebig (1803-73), who also had the first intuition to divide nutrients in carbohydrates, proteins and fats, developed the modern concept of metabolism.

### 2.3. Distinctions: Food and social dynamics

Food has constantly been used as a marker of social status by human communities. We are not sure about food-related dynamics in cultures of hunters and gatherers and in the first sedentary communities of agriculturalists. However, we have clear evidence of this kind of phenomena since visual representations and written texts became available with the first urban civilisation in the third millennium BC: the Sumerians, in today's Iraq.

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Sumer agriculture ensured unprecedented yields and part of the wealth was transferred to the upper classes, the courtesans and the priests, who offer us the first evidence of the use of food to create or underline social distinctions.

These dynamics would be visible also in many other civilisations in history, making them into a constant cultural element.

- Food production as a duty of the lower classes
- Differences in food availability and accessibility among social strata in terms of consumption and difference
- Upper classes' selection of strange, unusual, or out of season foods, often expensive and sometimes imported from distant places
- Availability of vessels and table implements with high monetary value and specific styles for the upper classes
- Development of rules of conduct and etiquette, familiar only to initiates; refinement and taste used to create social distinction
- Use of banquets to celebrate major events such agreements, alliances, visits of foreign delegations and even foundations (buildings or major cities). Elaborated preparations and intended to surprise, which required professional cooks.

Due to the scope of this course, it is not possible to analyse all the manifestations of food-related distinctions dynamics in human history. The rest of this section will focus rather on the development of haute French cuisine, which constitutes an interesting case study for its enduring influence all over the world.

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Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the food of the French court did not particularly distinguish itself from that of other European courts. As pointed out by Mennell, since the late Middle Ages, noblemen who wanted to stand out developed table manners, so that elegance and refinement took over pure displays of greed and physical power expressed as capacity of inordinate ingestion. Upper classes desired the finest dishes, using expensive spices as a sign social distinction, and embraced a taste for luxury and ostentation. Banquets were spectacular and courses were often brought to the table just to awe the guests rather than for consumption. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, cookbooks began to appear, addressed to an audience of professional chefs who served the nobility, both in their palaces and in the taverns. As mentioned by Albala, the Renaissance banquets did not change in terms of spectacle and excess and, from the culinary point of view, continued to propose mediaeval cuisine.

The development of a true haute cuisine from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is a phenomenon particularly visible in Paris and initially limited to the court, which was asserting its role at the heart of the nation state and therefore appreciated anything that emphasised power by differentiating itself in terms of luxury and refinement. Haute cuisine was developed quite independently of the local and regional cuisine, considered low class and suited only to the provincial gentry, constantly ridiculed in the court of Paris. The new cooking style, which required the work of highly trained chefs, differentiated itself also in terms of actual ingredients, dishes, and techniques. Courses became more varied, with more complex recipes that highlighted the single ingredients, their freshness and their quality. While fresh vegetables became more popular, since they reflected the ability of the nobles to have access to highly seasonal and perishable food, the use of spices became sparser since, with the development of global empires, spices were no longer so exclusive and hard to get.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the hegemony of French haute cuisine began to consolidate in Europe. In many countries, the upper classes adopted French style food in order to increase their distance from the local and popular cuisines. French cooking, at the same time, did not stand still but constantly stimulated originality and innovation, also determined by competition among members of the upper classes to be ahead of the culinary curve. These dynamics triggered various subsequent cycles of growth, consolidation, decline and renewal of cooking styles until the present day.

While the upper classes embraced the model of conspicuous consumption offered by the banquet, the lower classes developed their own ways of using food to mark themselves as members of specific communities. Popular feasts, often connected to the liturgical calendar, often became occasion to reinforce cultural and social bonds around the consumption of foods that underlined

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the uniqueness of the occasion in terms of abundance (especially when scarcity and famine were a constant worry) and difference from the everyday fare.

At times, the upper classes love for ostentatious luxury engendered resentment that was dangerous for social stability. For that reasons, authorities often introduced sumptuary laws that dictated specific limits to consumption. In many cases, authorities also tried to mitigate food scarcity for the lower classes, especially in urban centres and particularly in the capital by distributing grains and foods. Public banquets in the ancient Greek cities had this function, ensuring some form of redistribution while underlining the belonging to the same political community. The Romans had founded a special administration, called *annona*, in charge with dispensing grains and bread to the populace of Rome in order to avoid any kind of turmoil. There lies the origin of the Latin expression *panes et circences*, bread and circus games, the two free propaganda tools favoured by emperors to ingratiate themselves to their subjects. At the height of the Ottoman Empire, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, officials were in charge of ensuring stocks (especially grains), of provisioning the city markets (in particular the capital Istanbul), of fixing and controlling the prices for most staples and of fighting illegal food imports and exports. Pilgrims on their way to Mecca had their caravans protected and their supplies ensured once in the holy sites. Through religious endowments, imperial elites stimulated the establishment of soup kitchens to feed the poor (usually providing bread and soup with rice or bulgur), thus following the Islamic precept of charity. Singer says that the first recorded soup kitchen was founded in 1336 and by the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were more than eighty in the empire with only twenty in Istanbul. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as mentioned by Li and Dray-Novey, in China, the Qing dynasty established a system of granaries run by civil functionaries to avoid scarcity and turmoil in areas where the market alone was not able to guarantee sufficient provisioning. Thanks to this system, which remained efficient during the whole 18<sup>th</sup> century, farmers could borrow grain and then give it back at the time of the harvest. Furthermore, as Will and Wong state, emergency grain could be sent to areas struck by famine.

The last few examples show the relevance of food not only as a social marker in terms of status or class, but also as an important element in political negotiations that constituted the core of human communities in history.

#### 2.4. Sexing the plate: Food and gender

Gender identifications are also closely connected to food. Some ingredients, dishes or ways of consumption are sexualised, being considered either masculine or feminine. In many cultures women are still in charge of shopping and preparation of meals, of growing vegetables and raising animals. At times, food-related work was divided along gender lines and the roles did not always correspond to those we perceive as normal in our cultures. For instance, when

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the first European explorers got into direct contact with North American native tribes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the newcomers would often describe the native males as shifty and lazy, only busy with hunting, fishing and fighting while the women toiled to produce, gather and cook food. However, this negative perception was probably connected to the fact that, in the Old World, hunting was mostly a leisure activity for the upper classes and did not constitute a way of living.

From a methodological point of view, until the 1950s, issues of gender were not discussed too often. Relying mostly on written texts and official documents, historians were frequently unable to look into the daily lives of the society they were examining and, at any rate, material culture was not high on their priorities. Following the second wave of feminism that started in the 1960s, many female scholars started asking questions about what role women played in the civilisations of the past. Food became of course a focus of interest, but mostly in a negative place. The kitchen was the place where women were exploited and the goal of history was to unveil the sufferance related to daily chores imposed by men. While it is impossible to deny those aspects, more recently women have approached these issues in a more nuanced way pointing out how food, eating and cooking were often the only spaces available to women to express themselves as individuals and in their social ties. The kitchen at times became an arena of female affirmation and autonomy in male dominated societies. Theophano says that cookbooks and recipes suddenly turned into precious historical sources that allowed a new approach to material culture and female lives. As mentioned by Bentley and Cwiertka, authors have explored the role women played during war efforts through food preparation and food-related propaganda. Furthermore, according to Walker Bynum and Stearns, the relationship between women, food and the body became the centre of particular interest with research looking at mediaeval female saints and at the development of body images in history.

This field of historical research is burgeoning, providing depth and new approaches to analyse events and phenomena that had already been studied, but only from the male point of view.

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### 3. Food and local identities

Meals unite and divide. They connect those who share them, reinforcing their mutual bonds and confirming their identities as individuals and as members of a community. At the same time, meals exclude those who do not participate in them, threatening and negating their very humanity. Food has always been one of the defining aspects of social groups, whose members acknowledge each other as such by the way they eat, by what they eat and by what they abhor.

Food is not only central to social identities, but also to the formation of ethnic consciousness. The ancient Greeks used to accuse the neighbouring populations they considered "barbarians" of eating raw meat, of being unable to share food with their own kind in an orderly way and even of devouring whatever they had at hand whenever they felt the urge without waiting for the right time of the day. Centuries later, when their empire was threatened from waves of Germanic populations, the Romans sustained their position of self-proclaimed inheritors of the Mediterranean civilisation by upholding the nutritional model centred on wine, olive oil and wheat against the Germanic preference for beer, butter and other cereals.

In this section, we will analyse the elements that have defined food's identity in history, with its connection to specific communities and their political life.

#### 3.1. Relational identities, exchanges and networks

First of all, it is necessary to understand how certain ingredients, dishes or customs come to be perceived as "typical", "local" or "traditional" by specific communities. Very often history is invoked to point out how a food-related element has been part of the cultural identity for a long time, acquiring over time the characteristics of "originality" and "authenticity". At the same time, these foods are often considered as the reflection of the "essence" of a place and the people who inhabit them. However, when historical analysis is applied to these products, it becomes clear that they acquired their specificity precisely because they became part of trade, exchange and extended market networks. The crucial and "unique" qualities of these products are inherently relational, rather than uniquely the expression of the "spirit" of a community. If a product was consumed only in the place where it was produced, it was not perceived as special in any way or specific to that particular place. It was just food. But when it travelled or was purchased by outsiders, its local and traditional specific traits became visible, with the consequences that also the producers themselves acknowledged the different elements that defined it against the background of other similar products. For instance, Italian Parmigiano Reggiano acquired its renown during the Renaissance, when the



renewed activity of urban centres like Reggio and Parma allowed neighbouring farmers to bring their products to the nearby urban markets, where these products were recognised by travellers and merchants as unique and "typical" of that city.

Similar dynamics can shape a whole culinary tradition. For instance, until the 1960s Belizeans did not necessarily identify their food as a national cuisine or as a unique expression of their culture. When immigrants moved to foreign countries, they realised that their food was actually specific and different and it could constitute a culinary attraction in the new places where they had settled. At the same time, as tourism became more frequent, foreigners travelling to Belize would identify certain dishes or techniques as local and typical, helping to precipitate the formation of a "national" cuisine that is now offered as part of the tourist attractions.

The notion of identity moves thus from production to exchange, from point to network. Communities have acknowledged certain elements of their culinary traditions as specific and reinforced their identity only when exposed to other communities that produced different kinds of food. If this is the case, it is obviously important to understand how these networks have functioned in different periods in history, to avoid generalisations about globalisation that might risk hiding divergent cultural, social and economic dynamics. Since both locality and the global are socially produced, it is necessary to abandon the naïve point of view that considers the local as "natural", original, connected to biodiversity and heterogeneity, as the last defence against the homogenising, unnatural forces of globalisation.

However, while the international exposure can bring new life, or even save, a disappearing ingredient or dish, the participation in the global flows of people, money, goods and information can also bring disruption and tensions. For instance, it is increasingly harder for non-sedentary populations to maintain their food customs. Pastoralists such as the Maasai of Kenya see the territories related to their traditional productions shrinking because of expansion of farming, urban growth and even the presence of natural parks. In Inner Mongolia, the collectivisation during the Maoist era and the recent privatisation of lands have worsened the pastoralists' life standards, reduced their mobility and damaged the pastures; similar dynamics are taking place in other areas of Central Asia.

### 3.2. Colonialism, creolisation, hybridization

When talking about contemporary identities, there is a sense that globalisation is inevitably influencing all local identities and even that the renewed relevance of local identities might be a by-product of those trends in globalisation that at first glance would seem to erase any difference. At times, contemporary identities are defined as inevitably hybrid and "creole," referring to the processes of miscegenation and cultural mixing that took place in

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the Caribbean during the dominance of colonial empires. Hybridisation and creolisation are embraced and heralded as signs of time. As we will see in the following subsection, these processes play a relevant role in the development of modern cuisines. However, when applied to high-end food or to trends in post-industrial societies, these concepts are often emptied of their historical and cultural significance. Sheller (2003) says that all the power relations and inequality that have shaped these dynamics in history are ignored or, worse, erased. For this reason, it is useful to look back to explore the origin of these phenomena during the establishment of the European empires in the newly "discovered" Americas.

At the beginning of the colonisation, the arrival of the Spaniards and the Portuguese to what is now known as America led to the development of cuisines that adopted and appropriated ingredients and techniques from the local cultures, but also maintained many features of the Old World foodways. In fact, European crops like wheat thrived in Northern Mexico, although adopted sceptically by local populations, while olive trees and vineyards did better in Peru and California. Furthermore, culinary customs connected with Christianity and its ceremonies, considered inherently superior, were imposed as a way for the natives to reach salvation. According to Bauer, European foodways and ingredients also penetrated the areas with higher concentrations of native people, signifying prestige and a superior social status. As mentioned by Laudan and Pilcher, as much as they wanted to distance themselves from the natives by displaying conspicuous consumption and by sticking to bread and wine, for instance, instead of maize, potatoes, *pulque* and *chica*, the new creole upper-classes, born and raised in the colonies and often the fruit of racial miscegenation, adopted a hybrid material culture that expressed itself in dishes like mole. At the same time, the African slaves developed their own distinctive cuisines, with specialties that still survive, like the Peruvians *antichucos* (beef heart skewers), the Caribbean *callalloos* (soups with taro leaves and other greens) and the Brazilian *moquecas* (coconut milk stews seasoned with palm oil). Similar developments were evident in the south of the United States, where the plantation economy required the presence of slaves who were often in charge with growing and preparing food for their masters. In the north of the United States, the hybridisation took place along different lines, with the colonists slowly chasing the natives from their territory while adopting and adapting some of their foodways and ingredients. In all the New World colonies, food creolisation was based on dynamics of exploitation and appropriation, but also resistance.

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As western empires penetrated Asia and Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European ingredients and culinary traditions acquired worldwide prestige, often proposed to or imposed on foreign populations as a tangible aspect of the western cultural and moral superiority. All over the colonial world, from India to Mexico, foods of European origin were preferred to local ones by the ruling classes, to the point that, at times, products were exported to the motherland and then re-imported as high status delicacies. The French model of culinary excellence in terms of dishes, organisation of the service, décor and service acquired particular high status, also in other European countries. In Indochina, wheat baguette, pastries, sausages and even asparagus became quite popular in urban centres, mixed by the locals with their traditional dishes and ingredients. French haute cuisine was also all the rage all over Latin America, from Mexico to Argentina, where the new creole elites were trying to acquire global visibility and to increase their distance from the Indian and Mestizo populations. Traditional foods like Mexican tortillas were considered with a certain suspicion, as a symbol of backwardness and at times even of racial inferiority.

These dynamics were visible also in Japan, where from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the local elites were engaged in a process of total renewal of the material aspects of society. Western food was embraced as modern, efficient and nutritious. The emperor made a point at showing that he consumed beef, against the widespread Buddhist vegetarian customs. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Japan became itself a colonial power by seizing large areas of East Asia, promoted its own food traditions as superior to those of the occupied population, all while absorbing elements of Chinese and Korean cuisines.

However, despite the aspects of domination and exploitation that marked the relationships between western powers, their colonies and other independent but less developed areas of the world, elements of the subjugated cultures managed to affirm themselves and to be eventually adopted by the hegemonic culture, through processes of filtration, adaptation and often appropriation. For instance, the British colonists in India tended to adopt elements from different local cuisines, integrating them in a gastronomic vocabulary that tended to be the same from south to north. Curries, at first indicating only spiced relishes that accompanied rice, came to mean all sorts of liquid or stew-like concoctions based on spice mixes, often accompanying meats. Only later the name was used for a specific Anglo-Indian dish, which became so popular that the British returning after their service in India made it also well known at home. Over time, productions of curry powders for domestic use, Indian-inspired pickles and chutneys developed, catering first to Raj colonists and veterans, but soon embraced by the general population.

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Elements of the exotic culture of the colonised were often taken out of their context and integrated in the productive processes that were shifting towards growing levels of industrialisation. It was, for instance, the case with Nestle, that in its effort to establish a dominant position in the powdered milk market in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, experimented with many advertising techniques that were then adopted internationally and discovered a product, yogurt, that would become later on an important component of its portfolio.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to Appadurai, while traditional lifestyles and foodways are disappearing, the populations of post-colonial countries are showing growing interest in food and cooking as constitutive elements of their national identities, often used to overcome class and regional tensions. As mentioned by Cusack, national governments in Africa and the Caribbean, increasingly aware the relevance of food for their tourist industry, are trying to create a marketable national cuisine almost by bureaucratic decree. This approach is just one aspect of the approach of developing countries towards tourism, which is often considered as one of the most important sources of revenue and local growth: on one hands, it has the potential to ensure jobs and to valorise local culinary traditions, on the other hand, it can succumb to commercial interests. For instance, Bélisle says that in resort hotels in some Caribbean locations, it was difficult to find local food, while ingredients as well as staff, were brought from abroad to satisfy international patrons. Yaw states that while the growing interests of tourists for local food tradition is changing this approach, there is a growing interest for sustainable tourism, which intrinsically requires a larger involvement of the local populations and the consumption of local food.

### 3.3. The History of *terroir*

The interest in wine and food, and especially in culinary traditions, local products and artisanal delicacies is reaching new heights in Western Europe, Japan and more recently in the US. Other countries are trailing right behind, like Brazil, Mexico and Costa Rica, where limited but growing upper classes with disposable incomes have recently shown shifting sensitivity about the cultural relevance of food traditions. In developing countries, until a few years ago, many local and traditional ingredients and dishes would have been considered embarrassing and uncouth, being uncomfortably close to the rural realities and the ethnic groups that had often been at the margin of national projects.

This global trend, quite visible in supermarkets, restaurants, but also green markets, is also promoted and exploited by media, marketers and politicians. These transformations in the consumer perceptions are also having an impact on production and distributions. The sectors of trade dedicated to specialty products are acquiring increased relevance, with clear efforts to breakdown

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bulk commodities into smaller categories of more expensive foodstuffs. A central concept in the development and the success of these products is *terroir*, according to which agricultural products are supposed to acquire their specific qualities from unique interactions between climate, geographic characteristics, earth composition and the presence of communities with their historical interactions with the physical environment. Sometimes experts affirm that the actual taste of certain ingredients is a direct consequence of the territory where they were produced, especially in the case of cheese, whose flavour depends also on the grass the cows have grazed, and grapes, which can absorb certain mineral elements from the land.

Historian Rachel Laudan points out how the concept acquired relevance in the French wine industry after the *phylloxera*, a pest of grapevines, almost destroyed the European vineyards in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was necessary to import plants from the Americas, which were resistant to the disease, and graft the autochthonous varieties on them to ensure the survival of the European wine industry. At that point, the uniqueness of French wines could not be attributed any longer solely to the quality of the grapes, since they grew out of imported roots. Attention turned then to the territory itself, promoting the concept of *terroir*.

At this time, Western European countries were bringing to completion their national projects under the guidance of a bourgeoisie that had built its economic and political power on industry, production, trade and international expansion. The ideologies behind this growth were, on one side, the belief in scientific progress as positive and inevitable, and on the other, faith in the civilising mission of the white man, identified as the Western male bourgeois. It is precisely in 1855, on the occasion of an international event, the *Exposition Universelle* on the Champs de Mars, that the former French president and presently Emperor Napoleon III (recently restored by referendum on 2 December 1852) requested a classification system of the Bordeaux wines presented at the event. The 1855 *Classement* ratified a classification of properties informally used among traders that had already become public in 1816 with the publication of André Jullien's *Topography* and had reached some form of consensus in 1846 with Charles Cocks and Michel Féret's *Bordeaux, its Wines and the Claret Country*, in English. However, the 1855 classification of the 60 wine makers (or *châteaux*) in the Bordeaux region in 5 crus was not only on their wine quality but also on the prices they commended on the British market, the most important at the time for French producers.

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Although the French government first attempted a formal system for the definition of *appellation d'origine* in 1919, the Controlled Appellation of Origin (AOC, *Appellation d'Origine Controlée*) was officially established in the 1930s and the National Institute for the Appellations of Origin (INAO), the body in charge with regulating the appellations, was established only in 1935. The first AOC was "Côtes du Rhône", approved in 1937, for the Rhône wine region. According to the new system, each wine-producing area was entitled to create rules to discipline its viticulture, within general guidelines given by the central authorities. Wine makers had to meet specific requirements in order to receive the coveted denomination, which was perceived as a sign of higher quality and had become, since the beginning, a very effective marketing device. Regulations were enforced defining the grape varieties that could be used, their proportion in the mix, the aging methods and so on. The new legal framework allowed producers to connect their products with *terroir* and traditions in the mind of their consumers, thus building a reputation as a unique commodity.

The system paid off, with consumers ready to pay more for wines that had received some sort of recognition from the state and a form of quality guarantee. As mentioned by Atkins, Lummel and Oddy, the concepts of *terroir* and AOC were particularly important at a time when consumers, increasingly urban, were removed from the production of food and became victims of frequent frauds. The necessity of food safety was translated into a system based not on the direct and personal connection with producers, distributors, and vendors, but rather on the reassuring and modern anonymity of science, technology and the law. While favouring change and progress, urban consumers felt the need to be reassured about their ties with the rural world, whose customs and timeless traditions constituted important elements of the cultural heritage of a nation.

Other countries followed the French example, adopting the concept of *terroir* and eventually creating the system of geographical indications that is the object of another course in this programme. For instance, according to Bassett, Blanc-Pamard and Boutrais, from the 1990s in West Africa, some village land-management initiatives highlighted the diversity of each area with its agricultural tradition and its specific crops. Parasecoli says that in Morocco, the production of argan oil has recently been covered by a geographical indication, following the adoption of legislation on the matter. As mentioned by Cafferada and Pomareda, various countries in Central America are also examining the economic and social advantages of embracing the geographical indication system.

### 3.4. Fusion, nouvelle cuisine and other trends

While *terroir* has become a central concept to understand consumption in post-industrial cultures, at the same time different trends point to other dynamics that highlight the modernity and creativity of culinary cultures in

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ways that would seem to transcend or even ignore the relevance of place. This section will analyse these trends from the historical point of view, trying to identify their origin, their processes of development and their cultural impact.

Since the late 1960s, a new generation of French chefs, typically owners of their restaurants, often small and located in the province, began to question the approach of classical haute cuisine. Among the first were Fernand Point at the Pyramide in Vienne, Michel Guerard in the Landes, Paul Bocuse in Collonges and Jean and Pierre Troisgros in Roanne. The fact that they were also owners of their restaurants allowed these chefs to focus on their technical skills and creativity, each trying to find a way to affirm their own uniqueness and gain visibility on the national food scene. The kitchen took over the front of the house. Chefs took to preparing food portions in the kitchen, with great attention to presentation. Moreover, the dishes were often brought to the table covered with metal bells to keep the heat (*service à l'assiette*). Despite their differences, these chefs were classified under the common definition of *nouvelle cuisine*, a definition that, as we will see in the following section, is not new in the history of French cuisine, used since the 18<sup>th</sup> century to indicate innovation and critique of the past. Among its fundamental principles, as highlighted by food critics Gault and Millau, who played an important role in shaping the new trend, we can mention the refusal of excessively complicated dishes; decrease of cooking times to keep the flavours of the ingredients; attention to new technologies; use of fresh and seasonal ingredients; simplified menus with less dishes; abandonment of marinades that were too long and strong; elimination of heavy sauces; attention to local cuisines, which could nonetheless be reinterpreted freely and creatively; and sensibility toward dietary issues.

These dynamics were not limited to France. In the early eighties, American chefs exploited the concept of the American melting pot and created a cuisine that reflected its multiculturalism. The informed attitude of American chefs was a result of a more aggressive interest in other cultures. Cultural boundaries were crossed, techniques and ingredients were collected and experimented with to create something new and distinctly American. For example, when a European-style braised ox tail used wasabi instead of horseradish, the traditional dish was integrated by an untraditional ingredient and therefore became a new fusion dish.

Fusion cuisine infused the concept of a melting pot with speed. In contrast to the slow, inevitable, melding of the melting pot, fusion cuisine happened quickly and consciously. Fusion cuisine was not the blending of ideas, techniques and ingredients that is behind the evolution of any lining cuisine, but it was a deliberate act of creation that integrated elements and ingredients from different cultures. In Seattle, the Americanisation of foods evolved into a local cuisine, known as the Pacific Northwest cuisine. Chefs in the northwest incorporated ideas from Europe with influences from their neighbours around the Pacific Rim and applied them to local produce, thus creating a cuisine

particular to their region. The northwest cuisine utilised the abundance of local produce such as morels, mussels, crabs, salmon, berries, apples, lamb, pears and lettuce and featured them at the peak of their growing season. The creators of this cuisine were all young Seattle chefs who embraced the concept of fusion cuisine as a quick integration of cultures that was highly stylised.

The flavours of Asia were especially appealing to a variety of people because it was viewed as a healthful alternative. Some qualities of Asian food fit neatly into the health obsessed atmosphere of the nineties. A variety of Asian cooking methods such as steaming, blanching and lightly stir-frying foods were adopted as low calorie preparations. Some elements of certain Asian cuisines used small amounts of animal protein and emphasised vegetables and tofu, therefore adhering to the contemporary consensus of a "healthier" diet. This reduction of protein and the absence of heavy fats also made the Asian diet low in cholesterol. In addition to these health benefits, the cuisines of Asia were highly spiced. Thus, one could eat healthful meals that were full of flavour.

As Asian flavours became more accessible in restaurants, home cooks became increasingly interested in re-creating these dishes at home. This interest in Asian foods created a consumer demand for Asian products. In reaction to this trend, retailers increased the availability of Asian products and spices. Besides the accessibility of Asian ingredients, Asian foods were appealing to the home cook because of their rapid preparation methods, such as stir-frying. Thus, Asian foods were viewed as a convenience food for the busy working person.

The transformation of high-end cuisine and its influence of home cooking in post-industrial society continue, amplified by media that are always looking for news. The last trend that has received worldwide attention is the so-called molecular gastronomy, which creates new dishes and techniques by applying chemistry, physics and technology to cooking methods.



## 4. Methods, signs and ideas

### 4.1. The transfer of knowledge

Food constitutes a vast repository of practices, values, knowledge, techniques, methods and information. In a previous section, we have already seen how eating and ingestion have been regulated by religious principles and by notions about the body and nutrition that constituted a scientific tradition and that was codified in written texts. We have then focused on the functions food plays in reinforcing or questioning social dynamics and its role in determining individual and collective identities, with important consequences on the fields of economics and politics. In this section, we will examine how the recipes, dishes and traditions we have previously discussed in their cultural, social and political aspects have been codified and transmitted throughout history. This section will focus mostly on western countries due to greater abundance of bibliographic material in English. However, we need to keep in mind that other civilisations have long traditions of culinary transmission and written recipes.

#### 4.1.1. Recipes and traditions

In western patriarchal societies, until a few decades ago, women –especially in lower social strata where they could not count on help– were in charge of transmitting their knowledge and experiences in all culinary matters to the women of the following generations. Especially in rural environments, there was no interest for new recipes; women's main task was frequently limited to making the best out of the limited resources available. Before the processes of urbanisation that invested Western Europe and the USA starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, food and dishes were connected with the flow of time and the cycle of life: through them, communities were able to participate and to mark changes in the seasons, the succession of crops, the main moments in a liturgical year or the various phases in a person's life. These ceremonies and customs played a very important role in the construction of the identity of both individuals and societies.

In the domestic realm, recipes and techniques were mostly transmitted orally and by practical example. In many cultures, not learning to read or write does not constitute a barrier to social engagement, due to the prevalence of oral traditions and languages. In Western Europe, instead, where reading and writing defined class and cultural capital, the direct diffusion of skills, values and practices through contact and shared work was not a choice for many women, who until a few decades ago were not taught to read and write. An exception was often constituted by upper-class women who, at any rate,

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were unlikely to be directly involved in the kitchen work unless they were supposed to give orders. Young girls were asked to help their mothers with the kitchen chores, starting from the easiest and least dangerous ones, and going onto more complex tasks. Not only culinary relevant know-how, techniques, behaviours and values were transmitted, but also the inherited distinction of roles that sustained the patriarchal society was confirmed. Women were supposed to be able to prepare and cook food by the time they were ready for marriage. A woman with scarce culinary abilities was pitied and frowned upon. Even when women learnt how to read and write, traditional dishes and procedures were mostly transmitted orally, also because there were no quantities, no weights, no measurements: everything was prepared following the cook's eyes, nose, hands and taste. Because these practices were part of the feminine experience, they were often considered as cultural irrelevant and so we have few documents on the subjects. Archaeology, iconography and ethnohistory help us understand these dynamics. Only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting in the USA but quickly spreading all over the world, also thanks to direct intervention of national governments, the home economics movement introduced a scientific approach to cooking that paralleled the success of packing, sanitation, convenience and novelty in the industrial production of food. Recipes had to be nutritionally sound, efficient in terms of time and inputs, easily replicable and framed into a communication form that included both precisely measured ingredients and detailed procedures.

Cookbooks have been among the most important methods of transmission of culinary knowledge through history. Already in antiquity, as mentioned by Apicius, we have examples of texts aiming at explaining recipes in terms of ingredients and methods, such as the Latin collection known as *De re coquinaria*, attributed to Marcus Gavius Apicius, who lived under the Roman emperor Trajan (1<sup>st</sup> century AD), but probably compiled between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century. Cookbooks flourished again in the Mediterranean during the expansion of the Muslim Empire. Dining constituted a culturally relevant aspect for the Muslim elites, and great attention was paid to cooking. According to Zaouali, for this reason, professional chefs, especially in the courts, organised and transmitted their knowledge in written texts that could travel to every corner of the empire.

In Western Europe, cookbooks started reappearing at the end of the Middle Ages with the rebirth of urban life and the development of urban elites, both noble and bourgeois. The first cookbooks, diffused both as parchment scrolls and bound books, listed recipes either by ingredient (vegetables, meat and so on) or by class of dishes. These early cookbooks were written either in Latin or in the various languages derived from it. The former were clearly meant for well-educated readers, probably the lords who could use them to choose dishes and give orders to their domestic staff. One of the first known examples, *Liber de Coquina* (The kitchen book) dates to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, probably written in the area of Naples. However, there also existed books in

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vulgar for the upper bourgeoisie, such as the *XII gentili homini giotissimi* (The 12 very glutton noble men), which included recipes that could be made at home. Cooks would mostly use the books in vulgar: recipes would include practical directions about ingredients, cost, preparation time or necessary tools. Nevertheless, these cooks were at least able to read, which indicates their upward status. In France, *Le Viandier*, generally attributed to Guillaume Tirel known as Taillevent, probably written between 1373 and 1380 for King Charles VI, was largely a collection of recipes gathered from existing sources and *Le Ménagier de Paris*, composed between 1392 and 1394, was written by a bourgeois of Paris for his fifteen year old bride as a guide to her duties in the kitchen. Around 1390, *The Forme of Cury* was compiled by the chefs of the court of Richard II of England containing recipes of Italian and French courts.

Probably the most famous chef in the early Renaissance was Mastro Martino, whose *Liber de arte coquinaria* (Book on the art of cooking, ca. 1465) became a classic. Born in what today is Italian speaking Switzerland, in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, he worked in Milan as the cook of the lords of the city, the Sforza family, and then in Rome, a position that put him in contact with very stimulating cultural milieus. Here he met another important writer, Bartolomeo Sacchi, also known as Platina, a food connoisseur and a librarian at the Vatican. In his 1474 *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (Honest pleasure and health), Platina, trained in the study of classic literature, stressed the cultural aspects of dishes and products, giving cuisine a new status. Later, with the diffusion of printing, cookbooks proliferated all over Europe.

Until the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, most cookbooks lacked originality, reflecting the common cooking style that was prevalent in European courts, very much influenced by the mediaeval and Renaissance traditions. The first work to show real innovation was *Le Cuisinier François* by Pierre La Varenne, published in 1651, a volume that focused on technical aspects ignoring diet and nutrition, which hitherto had occupied an important place in the concerns of the authors of culinary treatises.

Certain elements found in the book of La Varenne would become fundamental in the evolution of haute cuisine that we discussed in a previous section. In 1733 *The Modern Cook* was published first in English then in French by Vincent la Chapelle. Although many recipes are taken from previous texts, the author introduces some innovations that prove to be lasting, including the *bouquet garni*, the little bunch of mixed herbs that is often added to stocks to add flavour.

For the first time, towards the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of nouvelle cuisine, in the sense of a modern sense clearly perceived as different from the traditions of the past, became popular. This concept, which has been used cyclically in the debates within French cuisine –with the last example being the 1970's *nouvelle cuisine*– first appeared in *Les Dons de Comus* (1739)

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by François Marin and in the *Nouveau Traité de la Cuisine* written by Menon in 1739, who became famous with the *Cuisinière bourgeoise* (1746), a book that shows the penetration of the new style, although simplified, also in the bourgeois milieu. The introduction to Marin's book, attributed to the Jesuits Brumoy Pierre and Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant, supported the superiority of nouvelle cuisine compared to that of the past, causing reactions summarised in a pamphlet, *Lettre d'un Pâtissier Anglois*, attributed to Count Desalleurs, where proponents of nouvelle cuisine were satirised as pretentious and really not very original.

A thorough reorganisation of French cuisine was operated by Antonin Carême. Born in 1784 into a poor family, he was abandoned as a child, which forced him to find work in a bakery. As a pastry chef, he entered the service of Prince Talleyrand, where he remained for 12 years. This position enabled him to acquire international fame, leading him to organise banquets for Alexander I of Russia, the Prince of Wales and, later on, King Louis XVIII and Napoleon. But eventually he settled with the Rothschilds, who for seven years gave him carte blanche to express his creativity. Self-taught and addicted to writing, Carême published many volumes, drawing ideas for his dishes from architecture and archeology. Among his works we can mention *Le Maître d'Hôtel Parisien* (1822), *Le Cuisinier Parisien* (1828), and *L'art de la cuisine française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1833), his first true systematic treatise. The innovations introduced by Carême and his followers were systematised by Auguste Escoffier, whose work *Guide Culinaire* (1903) remains a cornerstone in the training of chefs in French haute cuisine.

At the same time, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the diffusion of cookbooks geared towards home cooks, which despite the influence of haute cuisine very often included local and popular recipes, allowing housewives to maintain a sense of respectability and refinement without being excessively complicated or expensive. Furthermore, with the development of nation states, cookbooks started organising recipes, techniques and ingredients around the concept of the national cuisine as an expression of the culture and the tradition of a specific people. In this period, we also see the diffusion of magazines that fell under two basic categories: for the industry and professional chefs and for housewives. If during World Wars I and II cookbooks reflected the penuries of the time, teaching housewives how to be frugal without giving up their expectations as good home makers with the economic growth and the urbanisation following the end of the wars and with more and more women joining the workforce, cookbooks emerged as a tool to get acquainted with recipes and techniques that were not transmitted any longer in the family or with traditions that otherwise risked to be lost.

### 4.1.2. The cooks

Despite the popularity of cookbooks authored by chefs and their diffusion since the Middle Ages, chefs and cooks remained invisible. However, it is plausible that many of the innovations in terms of ingredient use, techniques and kitchen work originated precisely among those occupied with the manual work of preparing food.

During the Italian Renaissance, labourers in the noble and courtly kitchens were classified according to their specific functions. Besides cooks proper, the *bottigliere* (bottler) was in charge of choosing, buying and pairing wines with the various dishes, while a *coppiere* (cup bearer) would serve them. The *trincianti* (cutters) were in charge of cutting meat in front of the guest with spectacular moves, usually directly from the spit, under the control the *scalchi*, sort of *maître d'hôtel* who would actually plan the sequence of the meal and every single dish. *Scalchi*, usually more educated than the cooks and in charge of interfacing between the kitchen and the desires of their employers, were often the authors of the cookbooks that dominated in the period.

The organisation of high-end kitchens remained the same until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. We will focus mostly on the French kitchen, because we have more available information and because of the influence that French cuisine had all over the world until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cook's training usually began between thirteen and sixteen years of age, under the guidance of an instructor in a kitchen and often without pay. Once they became adults, cooks were considered as simple labour, so much so they were called *ouvrier* (factory worker) and they were subject to high mobility, especially in larger restaurants, with risky jobs, without unemployment benefits and health care. The kitchens were also unhealthy and poorly ventilated. Moreover, the cooks were not visible but relegated to the kitchen: all contacts with the public were handled by the *maître d'hôtel* or directly by the owner. To help each other, the cooks gave rise to spontaneous associations, at times secret, called *compagnonnages*. To remedy this situation, professional associations were formed; the first was the Société des Mutualité Cuisiniers de Paris, founded in 1840. In 1884, the French state recognised the unions and, in 1885, the Chambre Syndicale des Cuisiniers, which aimed at obtaining better working conditions for cooks of every level, was founded.

Since the Renaissance, the kitchens were organised into independent sections, each under a chef in charge of certain dishes and courses, with the result that the same sauce could be produced in various sections, each for their own purposes, with frequent duplications that caused waste of time and money. This situation was changed by August Escoffier, who at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created the so-called *brigade de cuisine*; the kitchens are structured into five parts assigned to as many chefs: *garde-manger* (supplies and cold plates), *entremettier* (vegetables, soups, eggs), *rôtisseur* (roasting, grilling, frying), *saucier*

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(sauces), and *patissier* (confectionery and pastry). This new organisation allowed a more efficient division of labour, shortening the time needed to prepare dishes. The increasing specialisation and professionalisation of the cooks took place at the very time in history when many traditional guilds were seeing their power attacked by the new labour relations and the products introduced with industrialisation. Somehow it is a transposition of the gastronomic field processes adopted in industrial production.

The new model of kitchen organisation was adopted all over the world, also because when cooking schools were finally founded, they adopted French cuisine as their model in terms of dishes, techniques and logistics. Kitchen employment as a respectable and even prestigious professional choice is a very recent development, fuelled by the growing relevance of celebrity chefs in the media and increasing numbers of chefs who are also restaurant owners. However, women as career professional chefs are still relatively rare.

#### 4.2. Gastronomy and the standards of taste

Beside the texts dedicated to cooking and recipes, those consecrated to diet and health and those focused on manners since antiquity, we can identify a genre of works that concentrate rather on taste and connoisseurship, discussing the merits of different kinds of cuisines, the value of ingredients and even the skills of chefs from the point of view of the final consumer.

One of the first texts of this kind is surely the dialogue titled *Deipnosophistai* (The philosophers at dinner) by the Greek-Egyptian Athenaeus, in Roman Imperial times, which in turn attributed the first gastronomy text, the humorous didactic poem *Hedypatheia* (The life of luxury) to the Sicilian Archestratus, who lived in Gela, Southern Sicily, around the time of Alexander the Great's conquests.

The very word gastronomy was made popular in 1801 by Joseph Berchoux (1765-1839), who titled one of his poems *La Gastronomie, ou l'homme des champs à table* (Gastronomy, or the man from the fields at the table). The term was successful and was soon used to describe the art of good eating, a leisure activity about which the emerging middle class seemed to be passionate. It is no coincidence that food criticism and food writing as literary genres began just after the French Revolution. With the growth of the bourgeois public able to attend high-quality shops and restaurants, especially in cities, where such establishments multiplied, an attitude of sophistication and careful research and codification not only of customs and manners, but also of taste itself, became common. Some proclaimed themselves and then were recognised as experts and judges, exerting an influence on the transformation of the bourgeois public culinary sensibility. Although they referred in part to the taste and the cooking styles previously developed by the upper classes, these new critics played a democratising function, as they spread knowledge previously limited to the elite in the broader population. Like the dandies

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in England in regard to fashion and clothing, with their attitudes at times eccentric and extreme, the new French restaurant critics established new rules and parameters in a historical moment when old social structures were undermined by political and economic changes.

Grimod de la Reynière (1758-1838) is considered the founder of food criticism. From 1803 to 1812, he published the *Almanach des gourmands*, which reported the views expressed by a committee (called *Jury des dégustateurs*) on dishes and delicacies offered by caterers, restaurants, delis and pastry chefs of Paris. The concept of impartial and objective critic came only later: in fact, de la Reynière and his colleagues expected to be rewarded for positive reviews. The Almanac also contained Parisian itineraries that signalled the most interesting gastronomic places.

One of the most important works in gastronomic literature is undoubtedly the *Physiologie du Goût* (1826) by Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826). This text, published a few months before the author's death, adopted a rational, scientific and philosophical approach to the pleasures of the table. A series of 10 famous aphorisms was followed by 148 "gastronomic meditations" that combine physiological and nutritional knowledge of the time to events and reflections of various kinds. The book ended with an idiosyncratic and speculative "Philosophical history of cuisine", which symbolised the new attitude toward food. With Brillat-Savarin gastronomy becomes a proper literary genre, different from food criticism.

Also in France, Alexandre Dumas authored the *Grand dictionnaire de la cuisine* (1873). The famous writer, a well-known gourmet and bon vivant, collected comments, recipes and stories that he arranged alphabetically in brilliant and often humorous style. France was also the place of origin of another food-related class of texts: the gastronomic tourist guides. Right before War World I, the French Touring Club published *La géographie des gourmets au pays de France* (French Gourmet Geography) which became the model for similar guidebooks in other parts of the world and inspired books about local and regional cuisines. The increasing use of cars to organise leisure trips influenced this kind of texts. In 1920, the tyre manufacturer Michelin started adding restaurant addresses to its list of tyre and body shops in France. In 1926, a star was introduced to signal the best restaurants in each province and the 1931 edition of the guidebook developed the three stars system, extended also to restaurants in Paris. Since Michelin, many guidebooks have been published all over the world. Some adopted the same system, where teams of experts give points; others, like the American Zagat, preferred to convey the evaluations sent by normal restaurant-goers. For good and bad, restaurant guides have become a fixture in the world of food.

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### 4.3. Food in the arts

We cannot end this module on food history without pointing out the relevance of food and eating in the arts. Besides the genres we have already examined, food has played important roles also in literature. It would take a whole course just to follow the development of the literary use of food and eating, so we'll limit ourselves to examine some cases that exemplify recurrent elements.

Already in Homer, food is present to describe warrior celebrations and the sacrifices to the gods in the Mediterranean. In the texts of Greek historians, food was often used as part of the description of foreign populations, to underline the differences with the civilised Hellenic cities. Philosophers talked about it more in terms of ethics and politics, since food sharing was important in the ideological negotiations between the Greek elites and the lower classes. Food, which appeared in stories and fables, for instance in the animal-themed stories by Aesop, was also featured prominently in comedy, especially in connection with the material aspects of the body life, often in terms of social critique and to poke fun at the local customs and elites.

The same comical approach to food was also present in Latin comedy, but also in the work of the satirical poet Catullus. In the Roman world, frugality was considered a virtue, even if the generosity of a host to his guests was appreciated. However, with the Republic, the expansion in the Mediterranean and the beginning of the empire, the quality and quantity of consumption increases considerably. Nevertheless, moral and political corruption was often portrayed in terms of food through gluttony and extreme luxury. There was a contradiction between the admiration for frugality and actual behaviours. The poet Horace addressed this issue in the second book of Satires with the story of country mouse and city mouse, which opposed virtuous diet in rural areas to opulent urban ostentation. Obviously, in his description of the diet of the countryside, Horace referred to the lifestyle of aristocratic country houses, not that of labourers. The grand and extreme banquets common among the upper classes, and exotic foods featured at dinner parties in some of the wealthier Roman homes were captured by the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD writer Petronius Arbiter in his novel *Satyricon*, and more specifically in his description of the feast organised by the former slave Trimalchio. In Roman times, we also see the development of technical texts focusing on food production and agriculture, such as *De re rustica* by Varro, the *Natural history* by Plinius, and *De agricultura* by Columella; in these texts, the information was often framed within a critique of the excesses of the modern times.

The life of rural world is also very visible in the first literary text in Chinese literature, the collection of ancient poems known as *Shi Jing* (Book of odes), part of which might have been written at the turn of the first millennium BC. However, these texts are the reflection of popular songs, so they often refer to the actual life on the fields and to rural traditions, even if filtered through

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Wilkins, John (2000). *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Chef in Ancient Greek Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



the culture of the elite. This collection was considered one of the five classical texts in the philosophical school that started from the reflection of Kungzi (or Confucius) in the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Food appears also in some of the *Analects (Lun Yu)*, the aphoristic fragments of his teachings compiled by his disciples many years after his death. Kungzi used food to describe the morals and the customs of the ethical man, who avoids stuffing himself, who does not desire refined foods and who provides for his parents.

On the other hand, alcohol was featured prominently in Chinese poetry since the *Shi Jing*. In the following centuries, drinking will become very relevant as one of the behaviours embraced by the poet who distances himself from society and honours, and lives in isolation and meditation in the countryside. Even getting drunk in company of friends is represented in poetry. We have direct references to drunkenness in lines from the work of some of the most famous poets from the Tang dynasty, such as Du Fu ("A Hundred years I can pass with ease if I can only keep drunk") and Li Bo ("Drunk for months at end, in our eyes, no king, no Lord").

Drinking and eating in excess became the themes of a whole genre of literature that developed in the European Middle Ages and turned very popular in the Renaissance, which features fantasies about food abundance and imaginary places where eating has no limits, like in the Land of Cockaigne, the fantasy country described in many piece of folk traditions where cheese rains from the sky over slopes of pasta or rice, where sausages roll down towards whoever might feel like eating. These texts appear connected with the tradition of Carnival, the time of the year before Lent where the lower classes could let go, enjoy food and wine, and even poke fun at the elites. A masterpiece that is somehow connected with this genre is the 16<sup>th</sup> century novel *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Francois Rabelais, the story of two giants with an enormous appetite.

Food remained very visible in 19<sup>th</sup> century novels, which often tried to represent characters and environments in a realistic fashion. In the literary narratives, scenes involving production, cooking and eating were used with different goals: they might provide some information about the characters or describe situations, places or points in time, often as part of the background for the main action. Sometimes discussions at the table allow characters to interact and push the storyline forward, constituting at times crucial nodes where something important for the development of the plot happens.

In the case of the novels of the French author Emile Zola, such as *Le ventre de Paris* (1873) and *L'assommoir* (1877), food is also used to describe the moral and material poverty of the lower classes and the insensitivity and egoism of

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the upper ones in France at this time. Food used to create a literary exposé is also exemplified in Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* (1906), which denounced the corruption and danger of the American meatpacking industry.

As Malaguzzi (2008) points out, food appears prominently also in the visual arts. Since antiquity, scenes describing production, preparation and consumption are common in palaces and tombs. The burial chambers of the Egyptians, for instance, offered representations of hunting, fishing, wine and bread making and other rural activities, probably to metaphorically provide sustenance to the deceased, but also to underline their wealth and status. The Greeks painted food related scenes on their vases, dishes and drinking vessels, frequently as part of mythological stories with symbolic overtones. The Etruscans in Italy expressed their love for good eating and banqueting in tombs and sarcophagi, which often are realistic portraits of couples reclining together during a meal. The Roman elite decorated the walls of their homes, especially the rooms where meals and celebrations took place, with paintings of banquets and food; at times, the mosaics on the floors of those rooms also represented food or food-related themes.

Food played a crucial role in Christian iconography: the fish and the lamb, for instance, are metaphors for Christ himself; bread and wine are the symbol of communion; oil represents sanctity. The Last Supper became a very prevalent scene in painting, which allows us to get some ideas about how the elites ate at the time when the paintings were produced, since the artists tended to set the sacred event in their contemporary environment in terms of places, manners, vessels and food.

Food-related religious scenes, also including the wedding at Cana and, less frequently, the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, became frequent in the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Representation of food production and agricultural activities often appeared in the background of the religious scenes and as illustrations of books (for example, the famous *Book of Hours* of the Duke of Berry from 1405). Food gave a sense of realism to the artistic work and this aspect became more relevant as time went by. However, food also had moral overtones, like in the still life genre that became popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: especially in the Dutch culture, fruits, game and other ingredients were often symbols for the impermanence of material things, while the value and refinement of other objects represented, such as vessels and containers, on the other hand, was meant to convey the status of the artist's client.

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In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, paralleling the trend in literature, painting also got its inspiration from everyday life and food was featured in many compositions. As arts moved toward avant-garde, eating, dishes and food-related items did not disappear, but rather acquired different meanings, often ironic, in movements as diverse as surrealism, cubism or Andy Warhol's pop art.

#### Further reading

Richlin, Amy (1988). "Systems of Food Imagery in Catullus". *Classical World* 81(5): 355-363.

#### Summary

We started this course on food in history by highlighting the difficulties that lay ahead of our endeavour. Despite food production, distribution, preparation, consumption and even disposal play such an important role in our lives as individuals and as members of different societies, its apparent naturalness and normality turned it into a trivial matter for many intellectuals, including historians. For centuries, most scholars preferred to focus on the deeds on famous dead white men, on diplomatic complexities, on the changes of borders and frontiers, rather than getting involved with the little things of everyday life. Yet, every white dead man who has ever lead an army knew very well how important it is to feed the soldiers, which meant training experts in logistic matters that covered production (or more often appropriation), transportation, preparation and distribution in mind-boggling quantities and numbers. The defeat of Napoleon at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Russians was caused by the winter and by the lack of food. Similarly, the downfall of Hitler's war machine were caused again the wide plains of Russia, where provisioning proved impossible during the harsh winter.

Lack of food stumped more than a revolutionary attempt. For example, when in 1958 Mao Zedong launched the policy of the "Great Leap Forward" aimed at collectivising agriculture and at using China's growing population to industrialise the country, the ideological fervour ended up clashing with the harsh realities of one of the worst famines in the history of humanity, when millions of Chinese died because of insufficient crops caused by the misguided political attempt.

As a matter of fact, hunger has been one of the most important protagonists in human history. It is impossible to count how many mass migrations were caused by the lack of food caused by changes in climate, invasions, wars, draughts or diseases. The blight that struck Ireland in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and destroyed the potato harvest for years depriving the local population of their sustenance was the immediate cause of the resettlements of so many Irish in the United States. Famines changed the path of history and the distribution of the population in whole continents, like in the ones that followed the diffusion of the plagues known as Black Death in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and then the ones caused by the Hundred Years' War in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The relevance of food is evident not only when it causes havoc and desolation. Changes connected to agriculture and production are behind many of the great advances of humanity, starting from the Neolithic revolution. The diffusion of Eastern crops and technologies operated by the Muslim Empire allowed production of unheard of plants in many areas of the Mediterranean. The adoption of rice varieties from the southern kingdom of Champa (in today's southern Vietnam), which permitted multiple harvests during the year, allowed the Song dynasty to multiply its agricultural production and create a vibrant culinary culture. The introduction of crops from the Americas into many marginal areas in Europe, Asia and Africa, which until then had not been exploited for production, stimulated population growth and, as a consequence, economic and political transformations.

The examination of fundamental events from the past with the goal of unpacking their immediate and remote causes, their dynamics, their lines of development and their solution (or lack thereof) can offer elements of reflection when dealing with contemporary issues. It is not for antiquary curiosity or to have curious trivia to spice up a paper or an article that it is necessary to examine the role of food in history. The goal is to achieve a better understanding of who we are as individuals, as cultures and as societies in the hope of a more fruitful participation in the present and in the future.

