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## PROSPECTS FOR THE HISTORY OF FOOD

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Food history is a booming business. It attracts cooks, connoisseurs, cranks and serious chroniclers of culinary taste, casual dilettantism and deep delving into dusty archives. Some parts of the history of food are well developed, but others have only recently begun to attract serious interest. In the past, professional academic historians have to a large extent confined their research to what I shall call the 'supply side' history of food, while paying little attention to the vast domain of the 'demand side' - why people ate what they did, and why their tastes changed over time. That has helped to make that field vulnerable to antiquarianism. There is scarcely any area of history which has been so prone to the uncritical acceptance of anecdote, the creation and perpetuation of myth, the projection of personal feelings onto the subject matter, or the accumulation of undigested facts unrelated to theoretically significant questions. Fortunately everything is changing. The appearance of the diverse collection of essays in this special issue of *Groniek* is a sign that food history is now growing both in vigour and in scope in the Netherlands as in so many other countries.

### THE SUPPLY SIDE: THE TRADITIONAL FOOD HISTORY

Certain aspects of the history of food are of course long established interests among professional historians. Economic historians in particular have long studied the supply and distribution of food. One can mention Fritz Curschmann's remarkable study of famines in the Middle Ages published as early as 1900, and Wilhelm Abel's pioneering researches on fluctuations in agricultural output in Europe since the

Middle Ages (1935), which pointed for example to the relative abundance of meat in European diets during the two centuries after the Black Death. More recently, Günter Wiegmann's *Alltags- und Festspeisen* (1967) has traced the ways in which developing patterns of trade spread consumption of various foodstuffs through German society. British economic historians have looked particularly at how changes in the technology of food processing and changing patterns of retail distribution have affected the popular diet since the nineteenth century (see for example Burnett, 1966, and several of the essays in Oddy and Miller, 1976). It was from France, however, that there came the greatest single impulse to the renewal of interest in the history of food. A marvellous profusion of research sprang forth in response to Fernand Braudel's call in *Annales E-S-C* in 1961 for a history of *la vie matérielle et comportements biologiques*. Every volume of the *Annales* over the last quarter of a century has carried articles on food history, and some of the best essays have been collected together in the books edited by Hémardinquer (1970) and by Forster and Ranum (1979). The research associated with the *Annales* has been very diverse. It has published Jean-Claude Bonnet's essay on 'Le réseau culinaire dans l'Encyclopédie' (1976), Jean Soler's semiotic analysis of food in the Bible (1973), Roland Barthes's essay 'Pour une psycho-sociologie de l'alimentation contemporaine' (1961), and Jean-Paul Aron's work on nineteenth-century Paris restaurant menus (1967). But the bulk of the work has been in more conventional historical territory, using archives to document the fluctuations of food prices and quantities passing-through town markets, or the food consumed in institutions as diverse as prisons, hospitals, ships, monasteries, and noble households between the late Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. In mass, these very detailed pieces of research are difficult to digest and form into a coherent picture of the history of food, although Braudel himself presents an impressive synthesis in his last great work *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme* (1979).

One technique of particular interest in 'supply side' food history is the application of modern nutritional knowledge to data on the diets of the past. Such analyses can yield clues about the health of past populations, including their possible proneness to deficiency diseases, and form a valuable supplement to more conventional economic measures of trends in standards of living. It was a distinguished biochemist, Sir Jack Drummond, who wrote the classic study - *The Englishman's Food* (1939) - which in many ways remains the first reference point for food history in England. Among his most controversial findings was that "the opening of the twentieth

century found malnutrition more rife in England than it had been since the great dearths of medieval and Tudor times" (1) - an extreme conclusion disputed by Burnett (2) and other later historians who have taken the trouble to acquire knowledge of dietetics. That such findings are often open to dispute is less a reflection of the continuing growth of modern nutritional knowledge and changing dietetic opinion than of the imperfections of historical evidence. This is seen, for example, in the continuing question of whether the health of medieval and early modern European upper classes was jeopardised by their inadequate intake of vegetables: there is still much uncertainty about whether or not they actually ate vegetables from their gardens which were not recorded in household accounts because they were regarded as 'free'. Louis Stouff in *Ravitaillement et alimentation en Provence aux 14e et 15e siècles* (1970) - the most impressive work of scholarship to come out the *Annales* stable, dealing as it does with the food of all social ranks in a single region over two centuries - tends to the view that vegetables were eaten in quantities greater than appear in the accounts. His conclusions tend therefore towards the optimistic, but are otherwise typical of the sort of findings yielded by this line of research. For example,

"the food consumed by the household of the Archbishop of Arles was excessive in quantity, but relatively well balanced. Only calcium was deficient, and it would have been necessary to reduce the consumption of bread by half and triple the consumption of cheese in order to have a diet appropriate to the norms of modern dietetics." (3)

By the 1980s, nutritionists' opinions were swinging back more favourably towards the merits of bread; but a more substantial historical objection comes from Dyer (4), working on comparable household accounts in England, who argues that late medieval accounting techniques would have involved the valuation of garden produce used in any quantity, and that the absence of vegetables in the accounts really does indicate that the quantities eaten were small. This debate illustrates rather neatly the diverse kinds of knowledge - nutritional, medical, economic, historical - which have to be brought to bear in studying diets in the past.

One other kind of research well established among academic historians is worth mentioning: the history of particular foodstuffs. Classics of this genre include Sir William-Ashley's *The Bread of our Forefathers* (1928) - a near-definitive study of the composition of bread in Britain - Peter



Mathias's *The Brewing Industry in England, 1700-1830* (1959), and Redcliffe Salaman's *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (1949). Braudel's *Civilisation matérielle* also traces the history of numerous commodities, emphasising especially how the ingredients of the European diet became more and more diverse with the growth of worldwide trade in the post-Columbian era. Two other recent books deserve mention: Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft* (1980) and Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1985). The former is a social history of stimulants - tea, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, beer and brandy. More likely to achieve classic status is Mintz's study of the history of sugar. An anthropologist working since the 1940s in the Caribbean, Mintz was initially interested in the history of sugar production and the plantation society it created in the West Indies. But he gradually became aware that in order to explain all that, it was also necessary to study the way in which the demand for sugar in ever-growing quantities spread among all ranks of society - not in the Caribbean, of course, but in North America, Europe, and especially in Britain which was the chief colonial power of the region. Mintz, working under the influence of 'dependency theorists' like Wallerstein (1974, 1980) is therefore led to investigate the growth of the taste for sweetness, in coffee, tea, and cocoa, then in cakes and puddings as witnessed by recipe books from the late seventeenth century onwards, through to the pervasive use of sugar in the modern food processing industry. The modern 'sweet tooth', Mintz argues, is not an innate, biologically rooted preference, but the outcome of a long social process in which commercial interests and trade across the Atlantic Ocean have played their part in shaping people's tastes in an inescapable way from generation to generation. Mintz's book therefore bridges the older 'supply side' food history and the more recent growth of interest in 'demand side' food history.

#### THE DEMAND SIDE: THE HISTORY OF TASTE

It is much easier to find out **what** people ate in the past than **why** they ate it (always supposing that they had much choice in the matter!). *De gustibus non est disputandum*, it is said. Nor *explicandum* either, it sometimes seems. One problem for historians and other social scientists investigating people's likes and dislikes - whether today or in the past - is that the people themselves continually fabricate their own explanations and justifications, weaving about their preferences a web of myth, anecdote, rationalisation



and prejudice. It is not always at all easy to know how many of these 'native' explanations to accept at face value, or how far what is literally untrue may nevertheless be a pointer towards some different truth. Anthropologists have long been aware of these difficulties when studying food avoidances, classifications and 'taboos' among exotic cultures. It can be less easy to be detached when examining one's own culture, albeit in the past. People become very involved in their food: they feel strongly about it, and what they eat becomes part of their identity. Cooks and gastronomes everywhere have long been eager inventors and retailers of myths about the origins of dishes, terms and techniques. The English have long believed that their methods of cookery are extremely simple because they have the finest raw materials whose flavours need no modification, and that the French have to cook in a more elaborate way to disguise their inferior materials. (The French, with almost as much justification, believe the English cook the way they do because they are barbarians.) Similarly, it is said that medieval cooks in grand households used spices extensively to disguise the taste of food which was often tainted, even rotten. The idea that spices were used simply because medieval people - unlike their descendants a few centuries later - actually liked their flavor is hard to accept.

The history of taste, if less developed than that of food supplies, still has a long ancestry. It can be traced to the work of Le Grand d'Aussy, perhaps the first serious food historian, whose *Histoire de la vie privée des françois* (1782) contains many passages sketching the social milieux within which preferences were shaped. Most histories of food in Europe have noted such obvious manifestations of the social conditioning of taste as the prestige of white bread. The further down the social scale, the darker the bread. The upper classes regarded black or brown breads with aversion - it was even claimed their stomachs could not digest them - while the lower orders aspired to white or whiter bread. That is, until white bread became available to all - when, brown bread having so to speak fallen off the bottom of the social scale, it reappeared as a fashion in at least the upper reaches of English society in the twentieth century. But such fashions are very obvious - they are extremely well documented and jump out of the sources into the historian's lap. More subtle sociological questions about the development of taste are more difficult to answer: questions about how people actually cooked their food, how different cuisines came to be associated with different social strata, nations, and religious communities, why people came to prefer their food prepared this way rather than that. It is this area, it

seems to me, which is least developed and which historians have been slow to take seriously.

Too often, but perhaps inevitably, historians' questions are shaped by the sources available in archives and libraries. The available answers determine the questions. Particularly for the more distant past, evidence about food supplies and consumption is far more abundant than evidence of taste, likes and dislikes, or cuisine. Nearer to the present day, the archives contain more diverse material: Jean-Paul Aron used a collection of nineteenth-century restaurant menus in the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris to marvellous effect in his *Essai sur la sensibilité alimentaire à Paris au 19e siècle* (1967) and *Le mangeur du 19e siècle* (1973), tracing the interconnections between the tastes of each stratum of Parisian society. I myself (1985) made a comparative study of French and English women's magazine cookery columns and of catering trade journals from the late nineteenth century onwards in the newspaper libraries at Versailles and Colindale. But for the most part, from the Middle Ages almost to the present day, the principal sources used for the history of taste are cookery books and manuscripts. Although this is now a very active field of research, it is one in which the risk of mere antiquarianism - of recording quaint and interesting facts for their own sake and independent of broader historical questions - is greatest. For there are several problems in using cookery books and manuscripts as firm evidence in the history of taste.

First of all, there are many bibliographical problems. The best French bibliography, which also includes many books in languages other than French, is still Georges Vicaire's *Bibliographie Gastronomique* of 1890, an achievement so impressive that it seems to have deterred later attempts to complete its omissions and correct its errors. Italian sources were well served by Lord Westbury's *Handlist* of 1963. Until recently, the best bibliography of English cookery books was Oxford's, a slim and far from complete list dating from 1913. Fortunately, under the auspices of Alan Davidson of Prospect Books, a series of sumptuous and comprehensive short-title catalogues of British household and cookery books is in preparation, of which Maclean's volume on the eighteenth century (1981) is the first to appear. For America, there is Lowenstein's *American Cookery Books, 1742-1860* (1972) and Bitting's voluminous bibliography of 1939, which does not confine itself to the USA. Bitting also has the merit of including a lot of ephemera as well as 'serious' cookery books - in the history of food, such ephemera may be at least as revealing as more pretentious publications. For

Germany and the Netherlands, or indeed other European countries, I am not aware of any exhaustive bibliographies comparable to those just mentioned.

Bibliographical work is often an essential preparation for the development of substantive historical work in a field, but it is not a substitute for it. With or without comprehensive bibliographies, intensive research on cookery books and manuscripts is now in train in several countries. Cookery books have been a principal focus of the Cookery Symposia organised annually since 1980 at St Antony's College, Oxford, by Alan Davidson and the historian Theodore Zeldin, and similar symposia have been held in Boston, USA, and Adelaide, Australia. A particularly active centre of academic research is the group associated with JeanLouis Flandrin at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris. Members of Flandrin's seminar have worked for instance on the affiliations between the various late medieval French and Italian manuscripts, seeking to resolve the vexed question (with patriotic undertones) of who influenced whom at that period. Very detailed counts of ingredients listed in early manuscripts have revealed that there are some slight national differences as early as the end of the Middle Ages - the English even then seem to have used sugar more than the French - although the overall style of courtly cooking was the same throughout western Europe. And two members of Flandrin's group, Mary and Philip Hyman, have shown through a detailed analysis of *Le Grand Cuisinier de Toute Cuisine* (the most reprinted cookery book of sixteenth-century France) that it is not - as has always been asserted - a version of a medieval manuscript, but a collection of then substantially new recipes. That is just one example of an opinion often repeated at second hand which does not stand up to serious historical study.

Even so, a few critical queries may be raised concerning the questions which cookery historians have asked about cookery books. One of the most obvious doubts relates to the connection between what is presented in the books and what was actually happening in the kitchens and dining rooms. For instance, in Alain Girard's opinion, "the first century of printing did no more than increase the circulation of the manuscript texts of the previous age" (5) - even though that century is widely believed to have been one in which tastes in food, in courtly circles at least, began to develop markedly. Later, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, it has been suggested that there was typically a lag of up to four decades between changes occurring in the English kitchen and their appearance in the cookery books. Yet in other cases, especially in eighteenth-century France, some of the books seem to represent the very latest culinary fashions



or even run ahead of them. One reason for uncertainty about such leads and lags is that we only imperfectly understand how early cookery books were used, and by whom. Were they written by practising cooks for the use of fellow practitioners, or were they written as a record of high fashion by and for a literate elite who only vicariously commanded operations in the kitchen? On the whole, the very early appearance of cookery books in every part of western Europe, and the fact that they were written in the vulgar languages, suggests they were by practitioners for practitioners, meaning literate craftsman-cooks and literate middleclass housewives. Even then, it has to be remembered that the history of eating is strongly marked by what Norbert Elias calls the 'polyphony of history' - the food, cookery, and tastes of the lower orders, especially in the countryside, changed with almost imperceptible slowness until the nineteenth century, in comparison with the accelerating pace of fashion in the courtly and bourgeois milieux to which the cookery books were addressed. Yet the tastes of all strata are interdependent, tied together by the impulses of the higher to distance themselves from the lower, and of the lower to emulate the higher. Cookery books tell only one side of the story.

In studying the development of taste through cookery books, one common line of investigation is into the affiliation of recipes from one cookery book to another - in other words, into who copied what from whom, and how diffusion of techniques and tastes thus took place. A good example of this kind of research is Mary and Philip Hyman's study (1979, 1981) of Vincent La Chapelle's borrowings, in *The Modern Cook* (1733) from the earlier work of Massialot, *Le Cuisinier royal et bourgeois* (1691). Another example is Jennifer Stead's study (1983) of Hannah Glasse's borrowings directly and indirectly from French sources for *The Art of Cookery* (1747), the most famous English cookery book of the eighteenth century. The Hymans' study was provoked by La Chapelle's bold assertion that "I have not borrowed a single circumstance in the ensuing treatise from any author, the whole being the result of my own practice and experience"; Stead's was in part a response to Glasse's proclaimed hostility to French cookery: "so much is the blind Folly of this Age, that they would rather be imposed on by a French Booby, than give Encouragement to a good English Cook". Investigation shows both La Chapelle and Glasse to have borrowed extensively, and the Hymans conclude that La Chapelle was "one of the boldest liars in history".

But what exactly is the historical value of studies of this kind? Elizabeth David, the distinguished English

'scholar-cook', is inclined to the view that every writer of cookery books plagiarised everyone else at will, and that exact measurements of the phenomenon are of little value. I am more cautious. It is certainly true that the sense of 'originality' and personal property in recipes and culinary ideas developed only very gradually - as in the fine arts - from the Renaissance onwards. La Chapelle's claim to personal originality is one of the earliest, which is what makes it interesting. But, for that very reason, the further back in time one goes, the less sense does it make to use 'affiliative' research simply in order to level accusations of moral turpitude at cookery books authors of the past.

Another problem with this line of investigation is that the conclusions one can draw are in any case entirely negative: Jennifer Stead admits that her search for the origins of Glasse's recipes was, however laborious, still partial. There can always be other books that were sources, so one can only demonstrate that 'plagiarism' took place, not that it did not.

All the same, 'affiliative' studies do have their place, provide that they are carried out within an adequate conceptual framework. In other words, they are useful as long as one knows what one is looking for, what questions one is trying to answer and why. It is of no interest at all to show merely that a recipe or an ingredient appeared in one book and then in another - one damned book after another, just like old fashioned kings-and-battles political history - but that information may be useful in answering a variety of other, more interesting questions.

Those questions may at their simplest concern the technical development of cookery. Usually this will be a matter of using hindsight in order to identify when, where and how a 'later' technique superseded an 'earlier', to build up a picture of culinary 'progress'. In their study of La Chapelle's debts to Massialot, the Hymans point out several ways in which La Chapelle's detailed instructions represent an advance on Massialot's.

Another kind of question - half technical, half social - might concern the process of popularisation. For instance, did the women writers of eighteenth-century England essentially play the role of "simplifier and translator of the recipes of the classic cuisine to women with neither the training nor time to produce the original masterpieces in their own kitchens", as Banner puts it? (6) If so, the important thing is to go beyond tracing affiliations back from Glasse and Massialot, and look also at how a recipe is presented and explained. Professional, male, 'courtly' cooks did not always write in a way easily accessible to domestic

cooks, and even if Glasse and other women writers represented no technical originality, their role in the social history of cookery was nonetheless enormous.

At still higher levels of abstraction are questions about the development and diffusion of whole styles and traditions of cookery, whole systems of taste in food. How exactly has French cookery influenced English over the centuries - has it been a case of 'cultural dependency'? If so, how exactly in the documents is 'French' cookery to be distinguished from 'English'? Or 'courtly' taste from 'bourgeois'? These are the sort of questions with which I have been concerned myself. Here the technical cookery expert will be able to help the historian. And detailed analyses of cookery books do have a part to play.

Yet a word of caution is still in order. Cookery book history seems to me to be passing through a phase of 'diffusionism' akin to that found in anthropology towards the end of the nineteenth century (7), when it was considered interesting in its own right to show that a custom had spread from one tribe to another. (Originally, the 'South-West German' school of anthropology had been motivated to this kind of research by a desire to trace everything back to the Garden of Eden.) The weakness of this approach, as later anthropologists pointed out, is that to show that one tribe copied (or may have copied) the initiation rituals (or whatever) of another tribe does not explain *why* they copied them. Or why they did not copy other traits equally available for them to copy. Why did some customs 'fit' into the way of life of a tribe, and others not? These thoughts should be borne in mind when studying who copied which dish: which did they copy, and which did they reject, and above all, *why*?

## THEORETICAL MODELS

This brings us to ask, if the history of food is to avoid crude empiricism or antiquarianism, what theoretical models are most useful to historians working in this field?

Anthropology has been particularly quarried for ideas, not just by historians but by other social scientists too. Peter Farb and George Armelagos, in *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (1980) provide a useful introduction to the anthropology of eating habits, even if in a rather popular style. More scholarly is Jack Goody's *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982). In comparing the traditionally socially homogeneous cuisine of West African societies with the socially very hierarchical cuisines of western Europe, Goody is led into the history of European cookery; but he also provides a



skilful critique of other anthropologists' writings on food, especially those of the structuralist persuasion.

Structuralism, notably through the writings of Claude Lévi Strauss and Mary Douglas, has been a dominating influence on social scientific students of food for the last two decades. The great virtue of the structuralist approach is that it clearly recognises that 'taste' is culturally shaped and socially controlled, and not explicable in purely nutritional terms. Its weakness is that it tends to be static, and has little to say about how tastes change and develop in society over time, which ought to damn it among food historians.

Certainly it is essential to take account of the powerful aesthetic component of the whole business of the choice and preparation of food. Mary Douglas has argued that a clear distinction has to be made between the aesthetic and nutritional components:

"My own preferred approach would be to take the aesthetic as distinct from the nutritional aspect of food to be that part which is subject to pattern-making rules of poetry, music or dance. The explanation for any such rule will only be found in its contribution to the pattern it helps to create." (8)

She goes on to explain that the rules about the choice, the cooking or the serving of foods which people justify by reference to risks of poisoning, infection or indigestibility count as nutritional rather than aesthetic.

Studies of small remote societies, writes Douglas, "suggest that each individual, by cultural training, enters a sensory world that is presegmented and prejudged for him", and she hopes that research into the cultural aspects of food habits will eventually enable us "to discover the principles and ranking of tastes and smells" (9), though she admits that the actual segmentation and ranking will differ from one society or social group to another. Douglas has focused most attention on the task of 'deciphering a meal', or rather whole sequences of meals. For, as she remarks in the course of analysing the food system of her own household,

"Between breakfast and the last nightcap, the food of the day comes in an ordered pattern. Between Monday and Sunday, the food of the week is patterned again. Then there is the sequence of holidays and fast days throughout the year, to say nothing of life cycle feasts, birthdays and weddings." (10)

There is a clear idea of what should constitute Christmas dinner; Sunday dinner constitutes a lesser peak during each week; and meals are ordered in scale of importance in relation to each other, by the addition or omission of an item, through the week and the day down to the meanest pause for a snack. Fieldwork among a small number of London workingclass families by one of Douglas's graduate students revealed tea and biscuits as the lowest unit in the food system.(11) For the chain which links meals together gives each meal its meaning. Food categories encode social events, as Douglas puts it - they express hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries. Thus in the Douglas household - no doubt a fairly typical British upper-middle class one - drinks were shared with strangers, acquaintances and workmen, but meals were shared only with family, close friends and honoured guests; so the meal structure serves to maintain external boundaries, and significant thresholds are crossed when a guest is invited to share a meal.

Obviously there is no reason why this kind of structuralist analysis should not be used by historians in studying past communities, if their sources are adequate to it. This may sometimes be of great interest. Yet the structuralist approach is of limited value in the historical study of taste and cuisine, because it has little to offer in explaining how they change over time.

The fundamental reason why structuralism is unable to explain the origins of or changes within patterns of food preference is that the basic impulse behind the whole approach is one of 'process-reduction'.(12) By this is meant the tendency in Western thought to look behind flow and process for something which is static and constant. In the social sciences particularly there is a widespread inclination to look for static structures underlying the flux and change of the social relations we actually observe, resulting in **"the changeless aspects of all phenomena being interpreted as most real and significant"**.(13) The structuralist preoccupation with codes and deep structures is a striking example of this: not only are the codes apparently depicted as static and unchanging but so, as often as not, are the patterns of social relations which they are supposed to 'express'.

The search for a fixed 'code' or 'deep structure' underlying people's surface behaviour would be theoretically more interesting if the code thus discovered enabled us to predict - or in the case of historians, retrodict - a hitherto unknown surface structure, such as the behaviour of a society or social group not previously studied. **"But"**, as Jack Goody observes,

"in practice there is no adequate way in which this program me could be carried out. Therefore, because the deep structure is derived from surface elements alone and is unknowable without them, it is meaningless to discuss one as expressing the other, except in a circular, Pickwickian sense." (14)

Or, as E.B. Ross puts much to the same point, "Structural and symbolic anthropologists seem largely to accept such prescriptions and avoidances [of particular animals as food] as given, and justify them within an ideological domain." (15)

I myself have drawn far more theoretical inspiration from the work of Norbert Elias, who offers an inherently dynamic sociology which one might expect to appeal strongly to historians. This is not the place to summarise my own findings, but I would like to point to three problems in the history of food and eating which Elias's theories led me to raise - but by no means to resolve finally - in *All Manners of Food*.

First there is the question of what I called 'the civilising of appetite' - using the word appetite in a specific quantitative sense. I asked whether the same long-term changes in the structure of European societies which, according to Elias (1939), brought about changes in manners and in the tension-balance of personalities through growing pressures towards higher standards of self-control, were also reflected in the patterning of appetite. The oscillation between extremes of gluttonous gorging and enforced fasting in medieval times was, I suggested, all of a piece with other aspects of the medieval and early modern personality, related to the insecurity of life in general and of food supplies in particular. With increasing reliability of supplies, a more regular self-control over appetite became an increasing necessity first for the prosperous and then, with rather more equal social distribution of nourishment, for lower ranks of society too. Testing this hypothesis would involve seeking evidence from many parts of the domain of food history. 'Supply side' studies of harvests, famines, trade and markets are relevant, but we also need a clearer understanding of the influence of medical opinion about under- and overeating (16), and the development of the ideal body-image. Most intractable of all is the question of whether a process of the civilising of appetite was accompanied by changes in actual body weights and shapes. I despair of ever finding time-series data on that, and the indirect evidence of paintings is tricky to handle.

A second question which continues to intrigue me concerns



food dislikes, avoidances and repugnance. Of course a great deal has been written about why cows are sacred in India, pork forbidden to Jews and Moslems, why in some human cultures people delight in eating horsemeat or dogs, while in other cultures they shudder at the very thought. The anthropologist Marvin Harris, in *Good to Eat* (1986), has recently given a more plausible explanation than most, a developmental theory couched in terms of the long-term consequences of competition, in certain ecological situations, between man and beast for the same foods. My own fascination with such matters began with Norbert Elias's response to a conference paper I gave at the very start of my research - he invited me to investigate why the French still eat a great deal of offal (organs like liver, kidney, heart, tripe, tongue, the head and brains, tail and feet) while the English no longer eat so many of these things, and the typical American feels positive repugnance to most of them. I do not think there is any single answer, but I traced back in English history such influences as 'the nursery food syndrome', fear of after effects such as indigestion and bad breath and the growth of more 'civilised' feelings towards animals. There is still a lot of mileage in this question, in other European countries as well as Britain, France and America.

That brings me to a third and final problem. I tried to compare just two countries, England and France, to discover how the food cultures of these two geographically close and historically interdependent countries had come to diverge. I concluded that the crucial milieu for the formation of French *haute cuisine* was the court society of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; the rather different course of development taken by eating in England reflected the much more attenuated cultural power among the nobility and country gentry during that period. The two countries' different experience in the eighteenth century prepared the ground for France's dominance over England, in a kind of culinary cultural dependency, in the nineteenth century. That, at any rate, is a crude summary of what was a complicated enough issue even looking at only two countries. One way in which my hypothesis might be tested and extended would be to see how it can be adapted to other countries. Italy is an interesting case: credited with pioneering the development of courtly cuisine in the Renaissance, today it seems to have a highly distinctive national cuisine which, for all its regional variations, is nevertheless rather homogeneous between social strata. Possibly even more interesting is the case of Germany: the contrast between French and German food is perhaps more extreme than between French and English, and that is probably related to the old polarity in German society be-

tween bourgeoisie and courtiers, with their respective emblems of **Kultur** and **Zivilisation**.<sup>(17)</sup> As for eating in the Netherlands, others are far better placed than I am to comment on that!

## CONCLUSION

I have tried in this essay to give a brief and necessarily selective overview of some of the current lines of development in the history of food, pointed to some potential methodological pitfalls, and ridden a few personal hobby-horses. This has been a bird's eye view, but the view of one bird sitting on one particular branch. The essays in this issue of **Groniek** demonstrate how many more branches there are in the tree.

## NOTES

1. Drummond, *The Englishman's Food*, 483.
2. Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 27.
3. Stouff, *Ravitaillement*, 238.
4. Dyer, "English Diet", 195.
5. Girard, 1982, 2.
6. Banner, "Why Women Have not been Great Cooks", 199.
7. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 373-392.
8. Douglas, "Food as an Art Form", 84.
9. Douglas, "Culture", 59.
10. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal", 62.
11. Douglas, "Taking the Biscuit".
12. Elias, *Was ist Soziologie?*, 119ff.
13. *Ibidem*, 120.
14. Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, 31.
15. Ross, "Food Taboes", 1.
16. Mennell, "On the Civilising of Appetite".
17. Elias, *über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, chapter 1.