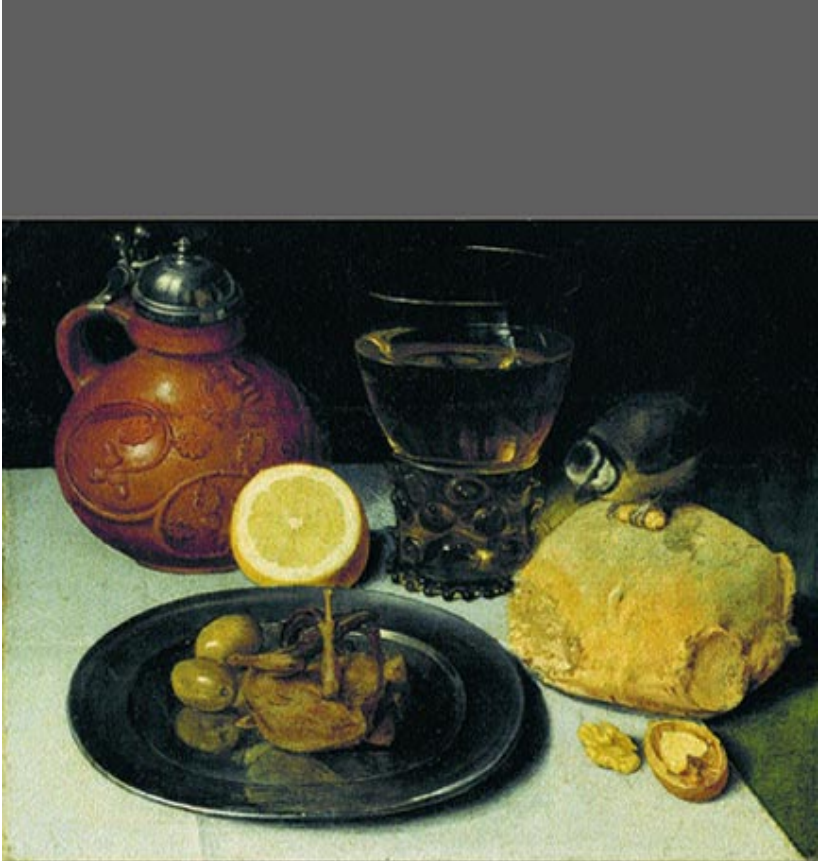


Excerpted from



Eating Right IN THE RENAISSANCE

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Note on Spelling</i>	ix
Introduction	i
1. Overview of the Genre	14
2. The Human Body: Humors, Digestion, and the Physiology of Nutrition	48
3. Food: Qualities, Substance, and Virtues	79
4. External Factors	115
5. Food and the Individual	163
6. Food and Class	184
7. Food and Nation	217
8. Medicine and Cuisine	241
Postscript: The End of a Genre and Its Legacy	284
<i>Bibliography</i>	295
<i>Index</i>	309
<i>Illustrations follow page 77</i>	

Food and the Individual

At first glance, it may seem that taste preferences and food choices are informed by simple biological and economic factors. A person eats whatever tastes good and can be readily obtained. In fact, it is almost never so simple. As a species, we learn to eat foods that are not immediately pleasant and sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to find calorically inefficient foods. We also spurn perfectly nutritious foods that can be had for the taking. Obviously “taste” is something profoundly shaped by cultural, social, and psychological factors. A food sacred to one society may be taboo to another. What may be a rare delicacy to one social group may be repulsive even to think of for another. Individual food preferences are also shaped by past experiences, idiosyncratic associations, and the preferences of family and peers.

Within one culture, or even to one individual, the meaning of any given food can change over time, in different contexts, and among different social groups. To one generation, expensive alcohol may be an extravagant luxury, to another a crippling vice. To one individual, strange and exotic food is an exciting adventure into the unknown, to another it is threatening and dangerous. A simple dish of beans may evoke nostalgic memories of the homeland for one person, while it is nothing but lowly peasant food to another. All these attitudes reveal much more than the mere effect of food on the taste buds. Taste preferences give us an indirect glimpse at the concerns, fears, and prejudices of the individual, the group, and the entire culture.

In examining food preferences found in a purely prescriptive literature, we are, of course, one step removed from actual consumption. There is really no way to be sure if anyone consistently followed the advice offered in dietary regimens. The fact that they often could not is itself revealing. In the past, just as today, the dietary ideal should not be taken as an indication of actual eating habits but rather as a mirror of cultural ideals. Take for example a slick new cookbook that explains how to throw elegant dinner parties. Whether readers actually throw these parties is perhaps less important and interesting than the cultural ideal embodied in sociability, *savoir faire*, and sophistication that is being bought by the readers of such literature. The cookbook is thus an idealization of values shared by a particular group and sought by the individual. In a society that constructs ideal beauty as a slim figure, logically diet books for weight-reduction will proliferate. Chances are that few people will ever attain the slim body promised, but the cultural ideal is still clearly spelled out in the literature and the success stories are touted publicly as an incentive to imitate.

Any food literature, including nutritional science, can thus be read as an embodiment of cultural ideals and personal aspirations. Again, as discussed in the introduction, what people think they ought to eat is a reflection of what they want to be. The individual who seeks out rare and foreign ingredients hopes to become cosmopolitan and erudite and in consuming these foods directly incorporates these qualities. The devotee of organic produce does become literally and psychologically clean and natural through choosing pesticide-free foods. The daring chili enthusiast becomes intrepid through the act of eating dangerous food and gets a quick thrill from downing the fiery condiment. The narrowly ethnocentric person sticks to familiar, safe food to avoid being tainted by the other. That is, each individual consumes his or her own ideal self image, or at least uses this ideal to inform specific food choices whenever possible. And naturally, these ideals change over time and under the influence of fellow diners by whom one wishes to be accepted. Nonetheless, a person's favorite foods and his or her overall attitude toward eating almost always reveal something basic and integral to that individual's personality and conception of self. The sensualist, the control freak, the socially repressed—all are immediately exposed by their eating habits.

Some of these ideal self-images are worked out into elaborate systems that may incorporate a philosophy, political agenda, or worldview. These

systems might even be thought of as food ideologies. Vegetarianism is as much a way of life as a dietary choice, as were the self-abnegating monastic regimens that flourished in medieval and early modern Europe. The diets proposed by Renaissance physicians and dilettantes are also, arguably, complex food systems offering the reader not just health but a cultural ideal distinct from the other competing systems, namely that of the poor, forged out of necessity, and that of the rich, formed by fashion. For readers of the dietary literature, this ready-made system could be used to direct specific food choices that approximate the personal self-image. When an author recommends light and easily digested chicken for the studious reader, in that reader's mind eating chicken is associated with or even promotes studiousness. The authors conveniently explained the meaning of each food and exactly what effect it would have on the body, so readers could adapt the more general guidelines to their own personal needs. But from author to author, and in different social contexts, the specific meaning of each food changed subtly, reflecting broader and deeper cultural concerns. For example, in authors whose ideal included conviviality, wine was considered a necessary part of the ideal diet. For those who promised piety, abstinence was preferred. When longevity was the primary concern, wine in careful moderation was recommended. The attitudes toward food found in dietary literature therefore give us an indirect idea of what was important to the readers and an idea of how they may have ideally envisioned themselves.

By examining these specific meanings and how they changed over time, it is thus possible to chart larger cultural changes and shifting conceptions of personhood. If the ideal meal is intended to impress fellow diners with a dazzling display of wealth, then luxury is clearly a cultural ideal of the intended audience, and diners literally incorporate that wealth by eating rare and expensive foods. They become what they eat. Conversely, if the ideal meal is simple and frugal, thrift and resourcefulness may be the most important cultural values being promoted, and in such a work, rustic foods like turnips and onions take on a completely different meaning than they would in other contexts. To use a more familiar example, coarse brown bread in one cultural setting may remind people of their ethnic heritage, in another it may promote health through roughage, in yet another it is unrefined and uncouth. The meaning of any given food all depends on the social setting and the mindset of the consumer. Salad to a sixteenth-century author may have been a lowly and perhaps dangerous meal, but to the poet Ronsard it was a

symbol of elegiac simplicity, to be enjoyed with a close friend on a country picnic.¹

Within Renaissance dietary literature, the shifting meaning of various foods can therefore be used as an indication of shifting values and, in a sense, a measure of the evolution of the ideal self-image. Take, for example, the fate of saffron. In the early Renaissance, or period 1, saffron was an ideal symbol of wealth, not only because it was difficult to harvest and expensive but because it lent a dazzling effect to foods. The way to impress a guest was to present saffron-daubed dishes sparkling like gold. Saffron became a symbol for gold, as visibly striking as the shimmering gold background of a religious painting.² To the wealthy reader of culinary literature, eating saffron invests the body with wealth the same way a gold chain would, but here it is literally incorporated. The ideal self-image of wealth and power expressed in extravagance and conspicuous consumption, in lieu of eating actual gold, is fulfilled by consuming its analogue. The fact that period 1 dietaries consistently praised saffron reflects the fact that these authors worked primarily for courtly patrons, although the praise generally focused on saffron's nutritional value rather than its indication of opulence. For Ficino saffron is a food with a magical affinity to the sun and gold itself, and therefore promotes wisdom. It also aids longevity because gold is an incorruptible substance, and so therefore is its analogue.³ Benedict claims that saffron has a great power to strengthen the heart, to illuminate the spirits, and to make the consumer joyful.⁴

This enthusiasm for saffron abates during the sixteenth century among period 2 and 3 authors, and some even claim that it is dangerous. This

1. Ronsard, "La salade," in *Poems of Pierre de Ronsard*, trans. Nicholas Kilmer (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 146–54. Interestingly, the poem ends with Ronsard's complaint about his quartan fever, which the salad would have helped to cure.

2. There are some striking parallels between art history and culinary history especially concerning the use of gold. It may be no coincidence that gold backgrounds and gold-colored foods both go out of fashion at roughly the same time, somewhere in the early sixteenth century.

3. Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, 113, 135, 139, and throughout the text. Ficino also offers a recipe for the heart, liver, stomach, testicles, and brain of hens and capons, ground with sugar, egg yolk, cinnamon, and saffron, and then coated with gold, 197. Recipes including saffron and gold are found everywhere in *De vita*.

4. Benedictus, pp. F1v–F2r: "in tantum quod aliquando multitudo sue commestionis cum letitia ad exterior spiritus dispergit fontem naturalis caloris derelinquendo, propter quod quidam dixerunt qui summere mediam unciam de croco mortem ridendo et letificando inducit." The verb here is *laetificio*, to gladden, rather than a derivative of *letifer*, deadly.

is the effect, on the one hand, of increasing distance from wealthy patrons, but it can also be linked to simple economic factors. Saffron was first cultivated on a large scale in the sixteenth century.⁵ It thus became a more affordable luxury and consequently a less potent symbol of wealth, because more and more people could use it. Much the same happened to spices after the Portuguese opened up direct trading routes to the East. Among the rich, spices and saffron went out of fashion. In dietaries too, saffron was devalued, especially as authors became less concerned with the symbols of wealth. If anything, period 2 and 3 authors consciously avoided anything redolent of luxury, excess, and unnecessary expense. Saffron's fate reflects these cultural changes as well as the changing ideal self-image of readers. Ironically, as saffron was more widely used and as lower social ranks were increasingly able to imitate their superiors, courtly cookbooks included saffron less. Dietaries followed suit, particularly as authors felt that it was being abused.

This is merely one example of how dietary literature may be used as an index of historical changes in the ideal self-image of readers. The symbolism surrounding most foods changes far more subtly than saffron. Nonetheless, specific recommendations do reveal exactly what readers sought to avoid and what they sought to become. In Renaissance nutritional theory, the transfer of qualitative characteristics from food to consumer is, of course, much more direct than it is in our own system. Because being nourished involves literal assimilation of a food's qualities into the flesh, humors, and spirits of the consumer, dietary guidelines offered a far more explicit image of self-construction. For example, avoiding melancholy was a major preoccupation throughout the genre, as was avoiding wrath, sloth, and any other extreme emotion caused by an imbalance of humors. Authors catered to and directly promoted this concern. For the reader who took this literature seriously, managing the emotions and exerting rigorous self-control was a positive goal. In other words, the self-image of those who bought dietary books included emotional reservation, not unlike the cool composure explicitly depicted in Castiglione's *The Courtier*. So when a dietary author suggests avoiding hare's flesh because it promotes melancholy, he is really promising a means for the reader to achieve the personal goal of emotional self-control. When another author suggests avoiding goat's flesh because it

5. Toussaint-Samat, 522. See also in connection to spices in general and their changing status, Mennel, 53–61, and throughout; also Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*, trans. David Jacobson (New York: Vintage, 1992), 3–14.

is a lascivious animal and will promote lust in the consumer, the self-image being sold is sexual continence. But as we have seen, the dietary authors were by no means unified in this attitude, and other authors offered long lists of aphrodisiacs. Why and when these attitudes toward food change, and what they tell us about the readers themselves, will be the focus this chapter.

Among the courtly period 1 authors, the direct transference of the qualities and characteristics of food was an integral part of the entire system. Assimilating the ideal self was a simple and direct process: the timid rabbit will make the consumer fearful, according to Savonarola.⁶ By the same logic, a meal of brains will promote intelligence because the substance of the meal is directly transformed into the substance of the brain. Although explained in humoral terms, this kind of direct assimilation appears to predate the humoral system or at least has affinities to folk medicine. When Platina condemns pork as a phlegmatic food whose excessive humidity in the form of fat promotes slovenly habits and gluttony, it is not humoral theory that provides the rationale but rather the concept of direct transference. Pigs are the most voracious and indiscriminate of animals, and therefore whoever would avoid gluttony should also avoid pork.⁷ Quite simply, we become like pigs when we eat pork. Dependence on Muslim and Jewish authorities among most period 1 authors probably only lent weight to this claim. Mohammed thought pigs were spawned from the elephant's excrement that piled up on Noah's ark.⁸ This accounts for their vile habits and unsuitability as human food. For Platina, his translators, and his readers, the ideal eater is more circumspect about the cleanliness and quality of food he consumes. The positive values promoted are selectivity and restraint.⁹

6. Savonarola, *Libreto*, p. 30r.

7. Platina, *De honesta voluptate et valetudine vulgare*, pp. 20v–21r:

Succidia: Questo animale edacissimo cioe papatore. Per laqual cosa lo abunda di molto sangue e di calore . . . li spurchi e sordidi luochi voluntieri usa e habitare. . . . La carne porcina si fresca come salata, benche lasia giota al gusto: tamen le pentiosa al tutto: e di male nutrimento come dice Celso.

And in *Le grande cuisiner*, p. 43v: "le dict porceau est une beste (surtoutes autres) gouleue."

8. Fridaevallis, 140: "in arca Noe suem ortum ex elephanti stercore blaterat."

9. As an example of how food symbolism has changed, our modern aversion to pork has very little to do with the animal's habits, as few of us have direct contact with pigs. Our current concern is with fat content. We are afraid of becoming fat ourselves, and thus many people avoid pork. The industry has bred much leaner pigs in recent decades, though this does not seem to have broken the powerful symbolism of pork as a fattening food. The pork marketing agencies realized, ingeniously, that another potent symbol may obscure

Although period 1 authors continually referred to this kind of direct transference, they tried desperately to couch their comments in humoral terms. In Benedict, wolf's liver is recommended for courage. He argues that because the liver manufactures blood, it therefore promotes robustness, strength, and courage in the consumer.¹⁰ But clearly, the characteristics of the audacious wolf are being assimilated into the human body. What this reveals is that Benedict expected that some of his readers, presumably elite warriors, wanted to become courageous. Even Cardano, in the mid-sixteenth century, comments that Corsicans and Maltese become cruel, stout, rash, bold, and nimble because they eat dogs.¹¹ For the reader who hopes to avoid these characteristics, more docile animals are appropriate as food. Yet increasingly into period 2 and 3, direct transference theory disappears from dietaries. Plain empirical evidence simply was not seen to support such claims, nor were the classical Greek authorities, for the most part. Nonnius, for example, wonders how credulous people could possibly believe that deer, because they live so long, could confer longevity.¹² Similarly, testicles for virility, brains for wit, and comparable recommendations disappear.

Nevertheless, symbolic meanings of food survived in more subtle forms and continued to pervade the dietary literature throughout the Renaissance. One revealing illustration is the pigeon, always considered among the healthiest of foods. To these authors, the pigeon symbolized lightness and airiness. Its ceaseless activity and gentle demeanor rendered it the ideal food for those who imagined themselves to be delicate and fragile. Diets for students consistently commend pigeons, especially free-ranging, following the assumption that they will promote light and airy spirits and mental agility. Clearly this was the ideal image sought by potential readers. This example could not possibly pose a more stark contrast to the modern dietary symbolism. Today pigeons are practically considered vermin, feeding off human refuse and filth, and this image has been extended to all pigeons, even those outside cities—except that when they are called doves they become symbols of peace and purity. For the Renaissance physician, however, pigeons were classed within the

the older one. We have yet to discover if pork will succeed as “the other white meat,” but evidence strongly suggests that it will.

10. Benedictus, p. 11r: “Epar lupi epati hominis multum confert. Prohibet metum et abominationem aque.”

11. Cited by Moffett, 78.

12. Nonnius, 190: “Plurimi vanissima credulitate sibi persuadent, cervorum esu, vitae spatium in multos annos poste produci, quia animal illud long aevum, ab omnibus credatur. Quasi illius vivacitas in humaniam speciem transire posset?”

most important category of light, subtle, and refined foods. All these descriptions accurately reflect the author's ideal self-image and probably appealed to an audience with similar values. Light was sometimes interpreted as whiteness, as in white wines and white-colored flesh. It might also apply to physically light substances or parts of animals that were considered well-exercised and purged of superfluities. Whiter, flakier, and smaller fish are preferred to dark and large ones. Interestingly, sole was the "sea capon" (the original "chicken of the sea"); tuna was more often compared to beef.¹³ Light also connoted foods that are easy to digest and thus make spirits subtle and humors flow easily. The meaning of the word *light* in this context bears little relation to our modern use of the term *lite*, meaning low in calories. Renaissance theorists had in mind light spirits, which would pass through the brain easily and instill subtlety, quickness of wit, and an incisive intellect. The mechanical passage of spirits was directly connected to mental agility. The ideal self-image and the most important criterion for choosing foods turns out to be that which promote intelligence. This is hardly surprising, considering that the genre frequently aimed toward an academic or learned professional audience.

Concern for the mind also explains the overriding preference for dry foods. An overly moist brain will not retain images efficiently, and the memory is dulled by thick and viscous foods.¹⁴ Sanguine and phlegmatic people are always described as slow-witted and forgetful. The symbolism here is simple: dryness equals intelligence. Joubert remarks that some incredulous people arrived at the absurd conclusion that all one need do to become smart is dry the body out.¹⁵

Coldness also harms the neural functions and can cause tremors or memory loss.¹⁶ Thus, the desire to avoid all cold and moist foods, such as fruits and vegetables, can also be linked to this concern for intelligence, as can recommendations that promote hot and dry spices and herbs that are sharp and "acute." Humoral theory that ordinarily prescribes these only for certain complexions here bends to accommodate anyone who seeks to be wise. To achieve the self-image of subtlety

13. Venner, 74; Duchesne, 460.

14. Lessius, 160–75, adds that what we learn is imprinted better in the memory when the brain is drier and the passages within the brain are free of clogging fluids.

15. Joubert, *Erreurs populaires*, book 2, p. A3r: "Car si on devenoit savant par la seule exiccacion du cors, il s'ansuivroit, qu'on n'auroit besoin de doctrine. . . ."

16. Menapius, p. 588: "tremorem ac stuporem membrorum et oblivionem memoriae tarditatem que mentis: quae et ipsa quoque sunt à frigore."

and intelligence, readers were instructed exactly which foods to use regardless of their humoral temperament. Chicken and veal, poached eggs, white bread, white wine, and few fruits and vegetables apart from figs and raisins and perhaps asparagus becomes the stereotypical diet for intelligence. Of course, beyond this basic list the details varied widely from author to author, but these are the standbys and with the simplified theory were often presented to the reader as the only really safe foods to eat on a regular basis. Anything terrestrial or gross will weigh down the spirits. Fruits like peaches, melons, and cucumbers are also forbidden. Mushrooms are execrable. Apples are also sometimes forbidden outright; it is perhaps no coincidence that they were identified as the forbidden fruit.

One major question remains unanswered. Were readers actually intimidated by these lists? Was the superego conditioned to feel guilt when these standards were not met? The failure to follow dietary guidelines may reflect indifference or a conscious rejection of the values embodied in the literature. If physicians condemned a particular food and people continued to eat it anyway, either they mistrusted the advice, were willing to accept the consequences, or had been barraged with so many conflicting opinions that they became skeptical of all such authoritative pronouncements. An individual's personal experience may also prompt denial of expert advice. As was so frequently the case in the dietary literature itself, especially in the more skeptical period 3, authors continued to recommend familiar foods despite the warnings of the ancient authorities because people had eaten them without harm for so long.

But the continued popularity of the genre and an eager book-buying audience suggests that the cultural ideals promised in dietaries were indeed embraced, even though the dietary rules were frequently transgressed in practice. The fact that dieticians' tirades increased in intensity throughout the Renaissance is good evidence that many people did not heed their warnings. Their advice may have been internalized, but it was unsuccessfully followed. The result of trusting but not following dietary doctrine is secular food guilt and is related to the guilt experienced by the believer who breaks the basic tenets of religion. Either he or she is willing to accept the consequences—that is, damnation—or finds consolation in some eventual absolution. In modern dietary parlance one hears "I'll start my diet tomorrow." The transgression is redeemed by penitence down the road. In this scenario, the nutritional ideal approximates the superego, chastising the consumer every time an urge overwhelms the body. But the ideal remains in place, despite the temporary

lapse in judgment. The remarkable success of this genre, and the continual upbraiding of the audience for their failure to follow sound advice, is good evidence that dietary guidelines were both taken seriously and seldom carefully followed.

The internal evidence provided by the dietaries themselves suggests that this secular food guilt was actually a gradual historical development. Period 1 authors seem to have been almost entirely free of the nagging sense of nutritional morality. By period 2 and 3, the authors, and perhaps their readers as well, were continually harassed by rules that they realized were difficult to follow in practice. Numerous clues reveal this change, the most significant of which is a shift of emphasis within theory itself.

As has been mentioned, standard theory promoted the idea that when the body is in health, foods composed of humors similar to the individual are most nourishing because they are most easily assimilated and incorporated. Most importantly, these are the foods that taste good. The tongue naturally embraces foods composed of humors similar to its own. "Quod sapit nutrit," as Avicenna said, "what tastes good is good for us."¹⁷ This idea is consistently followed throughout period 1. Foods whose qualities are opposite to our own are to be used only in sickness or distemperature as correctives or as condiments to correct foods with extreme qualities. In health, a hot and moist food is best for a sanguine body and tastes best; in a phlegmatic distemperature, hot and dry foods act as a corrective. This means that under normal circumstances we should eat foods that taste best. Even foods that might otherwise be harmful can be used by those who like them. Hippocrates, after all, said that in deciding between two foods, do choose the one that tastes better over the one that is better for you but disagreeable.¹⁸ Manfredi remarks that even harmful foods can be used by those who crave them. Because intense desire and enjoyment act as correctives, the stomach is able to embrace and digest such foods.¹⁹ Good taste is the ultimate criterion of good nourishment: our taste buds tell our minds what our bodies need.

17. Benedictus, p. C8v: "sano illud nutrimentum melius est quod melius sapit . . . melius amplectitur et digeritur."

18. Gazius, pp. D3r–D5r, does remark, however, that of two foods equal in quality we should choose the one more convenient to our nature and lighter in digestion. But we should not use foods with opposite qualities when healthy. "Naturalia custodire et regere cum similibus debemus: sicut quae extra naturam cum contrariis expellere."

19. Manfredi, 3: "per appetito e desiderio grande che ha il stomaco a quello unde sta per grande appetito che ha ad uno cibo cattivo si correggia la malitia de tal cibo . . . piu forte ha la sua operatione e fassi migliore digestione nel cibo dilectevole." He also remarks that

One can easily imagine that with such a theory in hand readers would indulge, guilt-free, in all manner of sweets and confections. This could easily become a candy-eating culture. In fact, it was. Sugar was considered a universal condiment, suitable for flavoring all foods.²⁰ Being similar to the human substance and good tasting to everyone, it must be nutritious. Sweetened pastries, tarts, pies, doughnuts, and wafers were all praised and even considered medicinal. Sweet wines were also considered ideal, for all complexions and all ages. Moderation was still the key, but these delectable foods were thought naturally beneficial if used wisely.

Period 1 regimens did point out some absolutely harmful foods. The taste criterion never translates into dietary anarchy. That would make the dietaries themselves superfluous. Although readers were not advised to eat anything they like at any time and in any quantity, in general pleasure was a major consideration. Platina's work is certainly among the least restrictive of this group, but his title may serve as a reasonably accurate description of these dieticians' goals: *Honest Pleasure*. Health and pleasure are not mutually exclusive but rather reinforce each other. Food in moderation will confer greater enjoyment, and health will ensure continued pleasure. Temperance only maximizes delectation.

Give to each person what is convenient, pleasant, appetizing, and nourishing, according to Platina.²¹ Savonarola also points out not only which foods are most useful but which are most delectable. In praising raisins he says "among foods used in meals for your Lord, it is certainly most convenient and delectable."²² Rarely are good-tasting foods condemned outright, and even these can be corrected with condiments. For the most part a skillful cook is an asset to health, and most foods when prepared correctly are perfectly fine. In the period 1 regimens, a wide variety of foods are also approved. Benedict allows, under the proper conditions, squash, cheese, fried foods, duck, hedgehog, frogs, stockfish, and even spleen.²³ These are all vilified by later dieticians in periods 2

an occult virtue or conformity of elements may aid people in digesting harmful foods like onions.

20. Platina, *Le grande cuisiner*, p. 37v. Sugar is "necessaire aux cuisiniers pour attemper et donner bon goust à toutes viâdes."

21. Platina, *Le grande cuisiner*, p. 10r: "a chacun ce qui luy convient, luy est plaisant, appetissant, et nourrissant."

22. Savonarola, *Libreto*, p. 11v: "E anco con i cibi usata e certo a tua signoria in sue viande convenientissima e delectevole." He also notes that nuts and figs will offer much more pleasure than harm, p. 16r.

23. Benedictus, pp. F8r (squash), G5v (cheese): "nam sicut in regulis generalibus dictum est cibus consuetus et qui cum appetitu sumitur et si malis sit meliorem generat san-

and 3. Gazius remarks that dill is a fine flavoring because it is delectable, despite the authorities' censure. We ought to eat "suave" foods to conserve health.²⁴ Manfredi allows peacock and even recommends melons because they lift thirst and provoke urine and, most importantly, because they taste so good.²⁵ Montagnana's *Consilia*, a popular medical guide of the period, also allows fried foods, salted foods, and stuffed sausages.²⁶ Platina endorses head cheese, tongue, andouilles, and sausages, and this is within his own dietary section, not from the recipes he borrowed from Martino.²⁷ In fact, there is scarcely anything he condemns outright: snails, frogs, herring, game pies, and peacocks served in their feathers all make an appearance. Eel pie appears to be going a bit too far though. Avicenna may have thought chestnuts are only fit food for pigs, but Savonarola admits that he eats them at home boiled.²⁸

How then did it come to pass that all these foods were condemned in the following periods? Why were so many foods forbidden despite their pleasant taste? A major shift in emphasis within nutritional theory itself accounts for this change. Whereas before the general rule that similar substances nourish and opposites correct was applied to specific recommendations, in period 2 and 3, all substances appear to be corrective. That is, similar substances no longer appear as nourishments; only opposites do. The assumption, on the part of dieticians, is that everyone needs correction.

Jean-Louis Flandrin has argued that "by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the principles of a healthy diet had changed completely." Before the mid-sixteenth century, in our period 1, the aim of

guinem qua laudabilior cibus non cum tanto appetitu comestus," H2r (fried foods), H5r (ducks), H7r (hedgehogs), M6v (frogs), N3r (stockfish), I1r (spleen). Pork spleen is best because its acidity helps digestion and provokes the appetite.

24. Gazius, p. O6r: "nos autem delectabilia et suavia debemus assumere si sanitatem volumus conservare."

25. Manfredi, pp. 7v and 9v: "mellon rossi . . . si fan colera rossa tollen la sete e fanno molti humori molta urina fa e assai bon sapore." This cannot be merely a regional preference, because later Italian authors advise their readers to avoid melons, *even though* they taste good.

26. Bartolomeo Montagnana, *Consilia Montagnane* (Lyons: Jacobi myt Calcographi, 1525), 2: "Frixia vero cum oleo more sarracenorum vel diligentium oleum melior et levior esse dicitur"; "Caro omnis conservata et salsa ut farcimum landutulorum et aliorum non valde pinguium est laudabilis." The first edition of this work appeared in Padua in 1475, but the text itself was composed in 1436, according to Klebs, and should perhaps be considered a medieval rather than an early Renaissance work.

27. Platina, *Le grande cuisiner*, 101.

28. Savonarola, *Libreto*, 17. Despite the dangers of chestnuts, they are infinitely improved with roasting and boiling and "delectevole sono al gusto."

diet was the maintenance of the individual's complexion with similar substances: cold foods for cold people, hot foods for hot people. After 1550 diet sought to "counter rather than reinforce the peculiarities of the individual constitution."²⁹ As an example, Flandrin offers a comparison between Bruyerin Champier and Joubert. The former condemns the drinking of very cold wine, which as an extreme opposite would damage the body. Wine is best at the body's own temperature. In contrast, Joubert allows cold wine that corrects the influence of external heat. One exemplifies maintenance, the other correction.³⁰ Yet it is not entirely clear whether this represents a "profound transformation" of theory. Certainly all authors in all periods continued to repeat the standard dictum: similar substances maintain and opposites correct. They must have been applying this rule in different ways, and perhaps a closer look at the precise intensity of qualities recommended will explain this apparent shift in theory.

When we are tempered, qualitatively tempered foods like ourselves will not alter us. A healthy sanguine man should consume hot and moist staples. On the other hand, should he become excessively hot and moist, then cold and dry foods would be required to temper the complexion. No dietician would argue with this. Why then would hot and moist sugar be forbidden to this individual, even in health? It is because sugar is not a food but a condiment. Its extreme hot and moist qualities would only distemper our sanguine man. That is, the entire system had never been so simple as *all* similars nourish and *all* opposites correct. It is only relatively tempered foods, not condiments, that can maintain a complexion. Sugar would throw the sanguine complexion off balance.

In other words, to maintain health, similar substances of a comparable or lesser degree of intensity are appropriate; to correct imbalance, an opposite in proportional intensity is effective. For example, a healthy choleric man (h^2, d^2) may eat pheasant (h^1, d^1). The equation would leave him somewhere around hot and dry in the upper first degree, to be precise, the first degree and forty-five minutes. However, garlic (h^4, d^4) would make him sick, dragging him beyond his natural choleric com-

29. Jean-Louis Flandrin, "Distinction through Taste," in *A History of Private Life*, vol. 3, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1989), 295–96. See also the more recent Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, eds., *Histoire de l'alimentation* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1996), 491–510 and 683–704.

30. Flandrin, "Medecine et habitudes alimentaires anciennes," in Margolin and Sauzet, *Pratiques et discours alimentaires*, 86–87.

plexion. But were he distempered (h^3 , d^3), a cold salad (c^1 , m^1) would be the perfect corrective.³¹ Thus, when sixteenth-century regimens commended lettuce only for choleric and never for phlegmatics, their goal was to avoid excessive distemperature.

In Flandrin's example, Bruyerin Champier refers to a healthy person drinking cold wine. This would cause an imbalance, even sudden cold pains in the head, still a familiar phenomenon. Later authors say exactly the same thing.³² Joubert refers to distempered and hot people, who have no reason to avoid wine chilled in caves or even cold water. Revealingly, on the same page Joubert does condemn wine with ice or snow in it or chilled in saltpeter as far too cold.³³ There is really no major theoretical distinction between the two authors on this point. One follows doctrine to the letter, the other defers to experience, but both employ the same basic theory: similar substances nourish, opposites correct.

Nonetheless, it is true that a change of emphasis takes place in the regimens. It seems, as Flandrin points out, that correction entirely overshadows maintenance, as if all human beings were considered distempered. This shift is indeed apparent by mid-century, but the change is quite subtle. Grataroli comments, "they that have very melancholique blood, muste use moyste and hoate meates, they that that be cholérique must use cold and moist. But phlegmatic persons must eat such meates as have vertue to drie and calefie."³⁴ The first case does seem to be an example of distemperature, but is the latter as well? Perhaps this is a change of emphasis and a simplification rather than a change of theory to "opposites nourish." The use of opposing "substances" was also always a part of theory, further complicating the question. For example, melancholics and phlegmatics were always advised to use light attenuating substances (usually hot), and sanguines and choleric were told to eat crasser foods (usually cold) because of their different digestive strengths.³⁵ This change is ultimately not the result of any alteration of theory, nor is it a result of abandoning the Arab authorities for the Greeks. It is really a change of attitude and mood. Period 1 authors were interested in health and pleasure; diet for them consisted in striking a

31. The use of these degrees to describe the human complexion is merely to prove a point, most physicians would agree that such a distemperature would kill the patient.

32. Hollings, 55, condemns chilled wine, as do most authors.

33. Joubert, *Erreurs populaires*, book 2, 52.

34. Grataroli, p. F2v.

35. Valverde, 55–56.

balance between the body's needs and the mind's rational management. Thus, the individual was the final arbiter of diet.

In the period 2 and 3 authors, this emphasis changes entirely. The body must be corrected, its natural instincts are base, and the mind must take complete control. The final arbiter becomes reason as guided by medical authority. The distinction between conservation and preservation is no longer made; it is assumed that every body is infirm and requires correction. As Brooke says, "A Healthful man is hardly to be found, everyone having his constitution more or less depraved," and "the generality of people are infirm."³⁶ This shift may partly be the result of misinterpreting Galen's original comments that the perfectly tempered constitution is a rarity, and in period 2, a heavy dependence on Galen may have prompted overemphasis of this point. But it does not seem that this strict attitude has its origin in Galenism per se, especially since it grows in intensity in period 3 when authors grow less dependent on Galen. Period 3 authors also insist that the body size should be corrected. Fat people should eat thinning foods, thin people fattening foods. Bachot, for example, offers his readers slimming and fattening diets to render any body "en-bon-point," which means not only healthy but regular sized.³⁷ The ideal is regularity, conformity, standardization. The idea of sustaining your own individual complexion gives way to a continual balancing act striving for tempered mediocrity.

This change of mood in periods 2 and 3 also ushers in the idea that taste should no longer be the basis for choosing food. Authority demands that you eat what is good for you, not what tastes good. The body's urges and preferences are something to be ashamed of and destroyed. "By the very order of nature, reason ought to rule and all appetites are to be bridled and subdued," says Cogan. We must "bend" our natural inclinations, and our appetites should be "well broken."³⁸ Whereas in earlier dietaries hunger was a sure sign that the previous digestion was complete and another meal could commence, here it becomes something suspect and dangerous. Viviani claims that hunger is not a reliable sign that the stomach is empty, because it can be accidentally triggered by

36. Brooke, 18 and 123.

37. Bachot, 402–5. Pictorius, 26, also suggests "Magri facilmente patiscono per la resolutione de gli spiriti onde hanno bisogno di molto cibo che gli nodrisca, è grassi che hanno l'abbondantia della flegma con poco caldo naturale, hanno bisogno di cibo che sia di poco nutrimento."

38. Cogan, pp. 2v–3v.

an unnatural accumulation of acidic or acerbic humors.³⁹ The message is to distrust the body and follow your physician's advice. Nonnius goes so far to say that food should be eaten not for pleasure but as a form of medicine that may also perchance be satisfying. The dominant consideration must be health, and for health's sake pleasure must often be forsaken.⁴⁰ If invited to a banquet of "delicate cates," Brooke advises that "tis best to decline the Field, not being able to endure the combate,"⁴¹ such is human weakness that we would most likely succumb to this formidable foe. The metaphor of eating as a dangerous battle against the body's urges illustrates succinctly the development of food guilt.

How is it that food in the previous century was seen as something to be enjoyed honestly and here it has become an enemy to conquer? This change of mood and the apparition of guilt may have had some connection to the Reformations, both Protestant and Catholic, since it pervades all of Europe. Most theorists make few explicit references to religion, so any such influence must be purely conjectural. On the whole, this species of guilt appears to be secular, even though it appropriates the language of theology. Still, there is no eternal punishment for gluttony mentioned, only earthly suffering and illness.

In fact, sickness is specifically the result of human error in this system. Health is something we can control, and the body's ailments are a direct physical punishment for our dietary sins. Should you be struck with gout, Durante reminds us, "Culpa misella tua est" [it's your own fault].⁴² "Neither did the Almighty create our Diseases with us, they are like Insects, the offspring of Corruption, of our Disorder and Luxury."⁴³ Many diseases are the direct result of our immoderate use of harmful foods.⁴⁴ Even epidemics and pestilence spread more easily and are more difficult to cure when the body is weakened by intemperance. "For our

39. Viviani, 91-93: "Donde avviene, che non distinguendo gli huomini frà queste due spezie di fame, incorrono spesso in gravissimi errori." He means natural as opposed to unnatural hunger. Robertus Geopretius, *Regimen sanitatis*, (Ghent: Jodocus Lambertus, 1538), 361, also comments that if distempered, "non è da obedire allo appetito, perche la naturale disposition appetisce quel che gli è simile, e quella che è fuor di natura quel che gli è contrario." Even the quantity of food "deve essere tanta che sodisfaccia alla natura e non allo appetito."

40. Nonnius, introduction, p. 14v, Menapius, 525, suggests that milk should be corrected with salt. He admits that it is distasteful, but much better for you.

41. Brooke, 112.

42. Durante, 33; Menapius, 473, also says, "nostris verò temporibus, inquit, usque, adeò auctis edulis, ut nihil eis addi posse videatur, infinita est podagricorum multitudo."

43. Brooke, 20.

44. Bruyerin Champier, 54-55.

sinnes and offenses adversitie and sickness is layde upon us,” interjects Grataroli.⁴⁵ The sins he refers to are gastronomic indulgence. To succumb to the pleasures of food is to invite physical suffering.

This undertone of repression and guilt suffuses the same theoretical doctrine that informed earlier treatises yet arrives at quite different results. Tastes and personal preferences are no longer guides to the body’s needs but are sinful urges to be stifled. What tastes good is no longer what nourishes best. Only theory itself can instruct us in diet. The key to health is an exterior voice, generated on the pages of dietary regimens and imposed upon the individual as the superego. When a delicious food is approached, the period 1 dietician counseled moderation, circumspection, and corrective measures. Period 2 and 3 authors growled a resounding no, the price of disobedience being immediate and long-term suffering, both physical and mental.

The number of foods newly labeled delicious but dangerous is astounding. In fact, an oversolicitous reader might come to suspect all foods that taste good. To be corrective, theoretically, a food would have to be slightly unpleasant and dissimilar to our distempered flesh. The reader who came to believe that the body is in constant need of correction might well feel best eating distasteful foods. Anything too exciting smacks of sinful indulgence. The most salient change in the details of dietary recommendations is the excision of sweets. There seems to be several possible reasons for this, but one is certainly guilt. Sweets are no longer subtle, hot, and moist foods that are easily assimilated into the body. They are now difficult to digest, gross, and oppilative, and therefore contraband.⁴⁶ In authors’ minds comfits, marzipan, and other purely medicinal sweets were being used solely for pleasure and in frightening excess. Menapius counsels avoiding sweets altogether, because if one happens to overdo it, the sweets easily corrupt and convert into bile.⁴⁷ The image of incorruptible, preservative sugar gives way to sugar as a delicious but dangerous temptation.

Of course, labeling such foods in this way may have only increased their ultimate appeal. Sugar may suddenly have become an object of de-

45. Grataroli, p. X4r.

46. Conrad Gesner, *Sanitatis tuendae praecepta cum aliis, tum literarum studiosis hominibus, et iis qui minus exercentur, cognitu necessaria*. (Zurich: Andrea and Jacob Gesner, 1556), 15–16: “Condita omnia duabus de causis inutilia sunt: quoniam et plus propter dulcedinem assumitur: et quod modo par est, tamen aegrius concoquitur.”

47. Menapius, 560–61: “Dulcia . . . sed advertere tu debes . . . nam si nimis copiose iisdem vescamure [sic], facile corrumpentur, et in bilem convertentur.”

licious disobedience. Perhaps the same “wet paint” attraction that lures young Americans to smoking also charged sugar with the same appeal of rebellion in the sixteenth century. Dieticians may have done their best to frighten people away from candy and accidentally given it the “naughty but nice” reputation it has to this day. Some people, of course, indulge freely without guilt, others abstain without difficulty, but a third group wages a constant internal battle against their own urges. The latter would not have been possible without official condemnation. That is, the dietaries promote guilt, because without knowledge of sin, there can be no sin.

The irony of this situation is that at precisely the moment these authors condemned sugar, it became all the more available and affordable. By the mid-sixteenth century an unprecedented volume of sugar was first imported from the New World. The price immediately came down and, no longer an extravagant luxury or a medicinal remedy, sugar was increasingly used by the general populace in greater quantities well into modern times.⁴⁸ Sweet pastries, once medicinal favorites, also receive the stamp of disapproval in periods 2 and 3 regimens. In England, “Bunns with eggs and spices, sugar-cakes, wafers, simnels and cracknels, and all other kind of delicious stuff” are condemned. In the Spanish Netherlands it is “Bellaria, Placenta, Crustula, Torta, Obelias Panis.” The latter, Nonnius explains are now called *Oublies* or *Gaufres*, that is, a kind of waffle, often dunked in wine. In Germany, honey cakes or *Itrion* and in France “Bignetz, petit choux, . . . gasteaux et terteaux” are all labeled delicious and dangerous.⁴⁹ All generate crass humors and clog the veins and arteries; they best avoided entirely.

This stigma was extended to many other types of food as well. Duchesne reminds us that the most tasty meats are often not the most healthy. Being a Gascon, he admits his fondness for roast suckling pig but warns that it should not be eaten often. Tripe with mustard, boudins and sausages “sont plus tost friandes” [are rather tasty] but are still very harmful. The less used the better.⁵⁰ Note that these are all precisely the foods eaten with reckless abandon by the giants in the satirical opening scenes of Rabelais’s *Gargantua*. They were perfect symbols not only of

48. The classic work on sugar is Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin; New York: Viking Penguin, 1985).

49. Moffett, 242; Nonnius, 28; Menapius, 539; Calanius, 54.

50. Duchesne, 411, 418, and 434.

coarseness but of indulgence. Not surprisingly, similar foods scramble about Pieter Brueghel's *Land of Cockaigne* (or *Schlaraffenland*, painted in 1567) in animated form, waiting to be gobbled up by the engorged gluttons. Sausages usually take center stage in carnivalesque celebrations, being the symbol of not only gustatory but sexual license. In these works a veiled moral message was being offered the sober reader: these are foods for people out of control. They are only for the immature, irresponsible, and less than fully human.

On the same topic, Moffett confesses that pork is "sweet, luscious, and pleasant to wantons, and earnestly desired of distempered stomachs: but it is the mother of many mischiefs, and was the bane of mine own Mother."⁵¹ This is guilt indeed. Perhaps the popularity of pork was only heightened by its scarcity and the image of sinful indulgence. This may account for the odd mania over Bartholomew-Pig, the roast pork served at fairs, in England.⁵² Martilmas-beefe (heavily salted or "corned") gains a similar rebellious appeal. It is no wonder these foods, condemned by medical authorities, are served specifically at festivals, the time for indulgent abandon and ritual taboo-breaking. Peaches, dates, and melons especially become the focus of frantic attention as well. The satirical encomia of Berni ("In lode delle pesche" [In praise of peaches]) and Firenzuola ("In lode della salsiccia" [In praise of sausages]) are all addressed to the delicious and dangerous foods.⁵³ It were

51. Moffett, 65. Sebizius, an Alsatian, has much the same to say about pork cracklings, 598: "Pellis igne retorrída gratissimum quidem est gulosorum palato ferculorum, verum neque succi bonitatem habet, neque facile digeritur, et choleram parit. . . ."

52. In Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) women get uncontrollable cravings to eat roast pork served at the fair. Shakespeare's irresponsible Falstaff is also described as "thou whorson little tydie bartholomew bore-pigge" *Henry IV*, part 2, 2.4.250. In both the image of pig as an indulgent and infantile transgression is explicit. Responsible and guilt-ridden males know better. As a somewhat far-fetched analogy, the appeal of Food TV's Emeril Lagasse and his raucous chant "pork fat rules!" lies precisely in the fact that modern nutritionists have condemned pork fat, and his audience is finally fed up. This is again a delicious transgression.

53. Francesco Berni, in Massimo Montanari, *Nuovo convivio* (Rome and Bari: Editori Laterza, 1991), 34-36:

Tutte le frutta, in tutte le stagioni,
 come dir mele rose, appie e francesche,
 pere, susine, ciregie e poponi,
 son bone, a chi le piacen, secche e fresche;
 ma, s'i avessi ad esser guidice io,
 le non hanno a far nulla colle pèsche . . .

He also comments in direct contradiction of medical authorities that peaches are healthy, even aperitive, cordial, flavorful, gentle, and restorative.

as if the more foods were proscribed by dieticians, the more popular they became and the more honest and moral readers were nagged to avoid them. The list of forbidden pleasures only increases: fattened chickens, mustard and heavy sauces, pickled and smoked foods, fish (eels in particular), aged cheese. Even the multitude of aphrodisiacs once offered in good conscience are now to be shunned.

A sense of sexual guilt goes hand in hand with food guilt. The “civilizing” of both appetites proceeds in tandem. As a brief comparison, Platina, in period 1, has no qualms about discussing the benefits of sex, even in the midst of the papal curia. It makes the body lighter, stokes the appetite, helps sleep, and is pleasurable. And most importantly, if not expelled, an excess of sperm can turn venomous, something particularly dangerous for celibate men and women, including virgins, as we have seen. In stark contrast, Grataroli, admittedly influenced by Protestant ethics, suggests that sex weakens the heart, debilitates the brain, and wastes the body’s substance. Sex is not necessary for personal maintenance and should only be used to propagate the species.⁵⁴ With precisely the same theory, an entirely different emphasis can emerge depending on the attitude of the author and presumably his readers as well. In a word, period 2 and 3 authors were remarkably prude compared to their counterparts in the previous century. Authors like Bruyerin and Hessus in period 2 and Bachot and Hollings in period 3 never even bring the subject up. Moffett too admits that “nothing is more available to engender lust, then the eating of certain sea fishes and sea-plants, which I had rather in this lascivious age to conceal from posterity, then to specify them unto my countrymen.”⁵⁵

The development of food guilt cannot entirely account for the transformation of this genre. Food symbolism is far more complex than a simple polarity between delicious / dangerous and bland / healthy. Many foods and styles of preparation were proscribed merely because of their social connotations. By examining the associations of food and class we can arrive at a more concise image of how dieticians and their followers envisioned themselves and where they situated themselves in the social hierarchy. For example, why are an increasing number of foods condemned as “fit only for peasants” or “best left to gluttonous courtiers”? These prejudices reveal not only the evolving ideal self-image of the

54. Platina, *Le grande cuisiner*, p. 8r; Grataroli, p. N4v.

55. Moffett, 54.

dieticians as distinct from other groups but also mirror the changing shape of European society itself. In delineating the rational diet as a distinct way of life appropriate for a certain type of person, the regimens carve out a social niche, superior not by virtue of its wealth or austerity but through self-control and conscious application of rational dietary principles.