

Gastronomy: Food for Pleasure

Gastronomy is the study of the relationship between culture and food. The term originates from the ancient Greek words *gastros* for stomach and *nomos* for knowing. While the use of the term may be modern, its meaning dates to texts where food is integral to communicating the message. Food characterizes situations and persons, and it structures and marks the dramatic development of the text. Metaphors frequently consist of gastronomic terms, and many of Jesus' parables are connected with food. In Biblical Texts a person's character was revealed in his or her good behavior at a table. A negative figure was usually depicted as lacking good table manners, such as eating and drinking too much, consuming impure food, choosing a wrong seat according to the hierarchy, and general immoderateness. Frequently such people are killed, and their bodies become food for the dogs (Exodus 32:6; 1 Kings 14:11, 21:23; 2 Chronicles 9:4; Jeremiah 15:3). Wine and Beer were highly valued but abuse discouraged and condemned. Good and ideal people eat and drink moderately. They are modest and hospitable, and they carefully choose their food and their company at table. Evidently since the earliest of times, food had other functions beyond filling the stomach, at least after the basic needs for nutrition had been met. In Imperial China the palaces employed professional cooks in high esteem: Yi Yin had been a famous cook before he became prime minister. Yi Yin, whose original name was Ah Heng, was a slave of the Youxinshi family. He wanted to convince Tang of his good ideas, but lacked a way, so he brought his kitchen utensils with him and won Tang's trust by demonstrating his cooking skills. Tang described him as cooking delicious dishes and having the ability to govern the country, so he appointed Yi Yin as his prime minister.

Under the rules described in the Rites of the Zhou Dynasty, when the emperor took a meal, there were 12 deep bowls with legs and 12 plates. Music was played to urge him to eat. This was the custom during the Shang Dynasty. A diet system later was instituted for the emperor, princes, dukes, and ministers. According to the Book of Rites, there were 26 bowls for the emperor, 16 for the princes and dukes, 13 for the marquis, 8 for the senior officials, and 6 for the junior officials. There were five grades of meals, one each for the emperor, princes and dukes, marquis, senior officials, and junior officials. Meals were arranged according to this rule.

Banquets and feasts given by the emperor and his officials also had rules. According to the Rites of the Zhou Dynasty 11th century B.C., when the emperor gives a banquet, there must be six cereals and six animals for food, the six clears for drink, 120 delicacies, eight dainties, and 120 urns of sauce. The six cereals included rice, millet, broomcorn, sorghum, wheat, and wild rice stem. The six animals were the horse, cow, sheep, pig, dog, and chicken. The six clears were water, thick liquid, li wine, chun wine, yi wine, and ye wine. The 120 delicacies referred to all the delicacies the emperor ate.

A complete organization was responsible for the imperial food served in the Zhou Dynasty palace; it included a large staff and a clear division of labor. The staff extended to 2,300 and functions included not only a hierarchy of cooks, but Nutritionists, Dieticians, wine Officers, and others. Home