

IEHCA Conference

Making Meat: practices and representations

Tours, 29 November to 1 December 2012

Conference theme

With the domestication of pasture-fattened animals, man gradually assumed control of the animal world for the purpose of livestock production – a major revolution with numerous consequences. Meat production, in particular, was progressively concentrated on a few domesticated species: beef cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and poultry became the almost exclusive suppliers of the meat consumed in the Ancient World, a situation which has indisputably lasted for several thousand years. The consumption of farmed meat has been a key catalyst in the economic, social, and cultural history of our European societies since prehistoric times.

The aim of this conference is to examine the many aspects of the preparation and processing of this meat, and the representations which surround it, in a multidisciplinary and diachronic approach which includes iconography. The conference will seek to document production, preparation, and processing techniques, from the pasture to the market stall, from the live animal to the food into which meat is transformed, and the representations which are associated with them. It will also be interested in the spatial distribution of livestock farming and in the social organisation of butchery activities, within the interplay of real or imaginary distances between man, animal, and meat. These three important themes will all be lines of enquiry to be explored through the use of a multidisciplinary approach. Emphasis will be placed on the development or stability of practices, classifications, and representations within a wide chronological approach, limited, however, to the European and Mediterranean regions.

1 – Livestock farming systems

The adaptation of livestock farming systems to climatic conditions and to the economic, social, and cultural demands of meat production from the Neolithic period to the present day can be considered from the standpoint of different parameters. The choice of species, the selection and quality-labelling of breeds, as well as the place of livestock farming in the rural or urban landscape of Europe are more or less direct indicators of this. Zootechnical choices in terms of the feeding and care of the livestock, practices such as castration or the demographic management of the herd, e.g. the seasonality of births and slaughtering, leads on to a crucial selection, that of the animals fit to eat, according to the socio-economic criteria whose make-up we aim to retrieve.

2 – Slaughtering and butchering

The slaughtering of the animal and its transformation into cuts of meat in accordance with culturally distinctive butchering systems represents a key moment which can be dealt with from different angles. Consideration can be given to the relationship between the technical expertise involved in the butchering of the meat, the operational sequences involved in the processing of the meat, and slaughtering practices, which can be performed in a variety of contexts. Home slaughter for family consumption within a domestic or village structure, the sacrifice of animals in a religious context, or professional slaughtering in an urban butcher's shop or in an industrial abattoir all use techniques, and respond to restrictions, levels of demand, and symbolic representations which change markedly throughout history. The places and operational sequences of these different practices, the relationship between the sacred and the profane, the emergence of meat-related trades and butcher's shops (including those selling horse meat or dog meat), especially in our European societies, are examples of issues which could thus be dealt with.

Another theme is that of the relationship between the way in which an animal species is butchered to give different cuts of meat and the determining nature of anatomical constraints, the tools selected and available, or the degree of skill of the person butchering the meat. Its corollary is a reflection both on the scale of different methods of butchering, and on the indications of the effect of mental representations on butchering systems. These butchering systems are also directly linked to carcass-processing circuits and to their more or less standardised distribution within the society concerned.

3 – The choice and classification of meat

The study of the animal thus butchered, e.g. whether it is cut up into choice cuts, cheap cuts, or lean cuts of meat, or whether the meat is unsafe or inedible, will open up the discussion to include other topics in addition to those which concern the live animal. Issues concerning the quality assessment of different types of meat, their nutritional value, or the periods of time permitted for their consumption will also enable the conference to look at the variety of conservation methods which have been used in order to develop the deferred consumption of certain cuts of meat.

Multidisciplinary scientific committee

Christophe Bressac (Organismal biology, Zootechnics, François Rabelais University, Tours)

Martin Bruegel (History of food, INRA)

Olivier Etcheverria (Geography of food, ESTHUA (Études Supérieures de Tourisme de d'Hôtellerie de l'Université d'Angers – Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, University of Angers),

Madeleine Ferrières (Modern history, University of Avignon),

Sébastien Lepetz (Historic archaeozoology, CNRS),

Noëlie Vialles (Social anthropology, Collège de France),

Jean-Denis Vigne (Protohistoric archaeozoology, CNRS)

Jean-Pierre Williot (Contemporary history, François Rabelais University, Tours).

Coordination and organisation

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Call for Papers

Proposals for papers or poster presentations:

- titles
- abstracts provided in both French and English (2,000 characters maximum)
- contact details of the author(s)

to be submitted to [Marie-Pierre Horard-Herbin](#) and [Bruno Lauriou](#) **before 30 avril 2012**. Those invited to submit a full paper at the conference will be notified by the end of mai 2012.

Publication of the conference proceedings

The deadline for the receipt of articles will be 30 avril 2013, with the publication of the proceedings being scheduled for 2014.

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I.E.H.C.A. (Institut Européen d'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Alimentation – European Institute of Food History and Cultures)

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UMR CITERES, Laboratoire Archéologie et Territoires (Archaeology and Spatial Areas Laboratory)