

Historical Research on Food Consumption in Poland

STUDIES ON THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN HISTORY should not be limited to investigating the history of production. Man stands all his life between production and processing—between consumption and the exchange of goods. This determines the development in the use of material goods in relation to changes in the conditions of his existence. Historical studies in Poland attach much importance to all problems concerning each form of consumption, and amongst the whole set of those problems, that of food consumption seems to stand first. The importance of food consumption studies was adequately estimated in the period of positivism by French historians. An eminent historian, Louis Boudreau, wrote in his "Histoire de l'alimentation" at the end of the 19th century, . . . "the bill of fare of a banquet will better serve the knowledge of human affairs than the description of the events of war, a cookery book better than a set of diplomatic papers, and the statistics of food products than a story of court intrigues"¹.

Prominent Polish ethnographers and sociologists were already stressing the importance of studies on food consumption at the beginning of the 20th century. Their considerations gave a basis to the first discussions of theoretical, historical and economic problems, notably by J. Rutkowski in the period between the two World Wars^{1a}. A. Maurizio's irreplaceable work on vegetable food consumption is world famous².

Research on food consumption on a larger scale and supported by new theoretical assumptions was resumed in Poland after the second World War.

Two methodological articles started the fresh research on alimentation, which thereafter developed greatly. A. Wyczański wrote about the use and proper analysis of written documents, taking as examples the registers and bills of the 16th century. M. Dembińska attempted to co-ordinate the analysis of written documents with that of archaeological, ethnographical and iconographical sources, making good use of data from the earlier periods³. For a long time Polish archaeologists had been drawing attention to excavation material that threw light on the alimentation of early mediaeval societies and also those of very remote periods. Palaeobotanic and palaeozoologic investigations were very helpful. The first stage of research documented only the presence or absence of particular animal or plant species and their abundance. In the post-war years, the amount of meat consumed at these early periods had already been calculated on a weight of flesh to bone ratio, and it was also possible to tell what kind of meat prevailed at a given period. It was possible to say that in the early and late Middle Ages,

1. Louis Boudreau, *Histoire de l'alimentation*, Paris 1894, p. 2.

1a. J. Rutkowski, *Historia Kultury i próba systematyzacji jej zagadnień* [The History of Culture and an Attempt to Systematize its Problems]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. VII, no. 1 1959, pp. 3—61.

2. A. Maurizio, *Pożywienie roślinne i rolnictwo w rozwoju dziejowym* [Vegetable Food and Agriculture in the Evolution of History], Warszawa 1926. A. Maurizio was a Pole whose family came from Italy. He was also professor in Zürich and wrote his books in German.

3. A. Wyczański, *Uwagi o konsumpcji żywności w Polsce w XVI wieku*, [Remarks on Food Consumption in Poland in the 16th century]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, Vol. 8, 1960, nr. 1 s. 15—42; M. Dembińska, *Les méthodes de recherches sur l'alimentation en Pologne médiévale*. In: *Archaeologia Polona*, vol. 2 1959 pp. 141—152 [A Polish review published in foreign languages].

pork was more often consumed than beef, but changes occurred from the 14th century on⁴. Palaeobotanists also applied different methods to their studies on vegetable remains, trying to indicate the dynamics of development in the cultivation of certain plants during various periods⁵. Excavation results indicate a rather large consumption of meat in the early Middle Ages even among the lower social classes and a wide knowledge of different corn species in the mediaeval cultivation pattern. These problems were also of interest to historians *sensu stricto*⁶.

In 1963 there appeared a monograph on 10th—15th century food consumption in Poland, with particular emphasis on the 14th and 15th centuries, a period which was luckily represented by a quantity of source material in Polish archives⁷.

The first attempts to relate food consumption to economic history were in two interesting articles by A. Wyczański and B. Baranowski⁸. They did not simply

4. Here are several examples: M. Kubasiewicz, O metodyce badań wykopaliskowych kości zwierzęcych [On the Method of Excavation Research concerning Animal Bones]. In: *Materiały Zachodnio-Pomorskie*, vol. II Szczecin 1956 pp. 235—244; W. Holubowicz, M. Kubasiewicz, Kości zwierzęce źródłami historycznymi [Animal Bones as Historical Sources]. In: *Dawna Kultura* 1954, no. 2 pp. 75—81; M. Sobociński, Spożycie mięsa na wczesnośredniowiecznym grodzie w Bonikowie, pow. Kościan [Consumption of Meat in the Early Mediaeval Castle of Boników]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. IX 1961, No. 4 pp 771—77; see also Wyczański 1960 (s. note 3) and Dembińska 1963 (s. note 7).

5. For example: M. Klichowska, Znaleziska zboża na terenie ziem polskich od neolitu do XII wieku n. e. [Finds of Corn Grains in Poland's Territories from the Neolithic Period up to the 12th century]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. 9 1961, no. 4 pp. 675—701; idem, Możliwości konsumpcyjne zboża i morylkowych w północno-zachodniej Polsce od neolitu do końca XII wieku [The Consumption Potentialities of Corn and Papilionaceous Plants in Northwestern Poland from the Neolithic Period up to the End of the 12th century]. In: *Studia z dziejów gospodarstwa wiejskiego, Pożywienie w dawnej Polsce* [L'Alimentation en ancienne Pologne], vol. 9 fasc. 3, 1967, pp. 31—48; W. Giżbert, Starożytne rolnictwo w rejonie Nowej Huty [Ancient Agriculture in the Region of Nowa Huta]. In: *Przegląd Archeologiczny*, vol. XVI, 1963/1964, pp. 22—53; idem, Quelques remarques sur les trouvailles fossiles de l'épeautre (Triticum Spelta L.). In: *Archaeologia Polona*, vol. VIII, 1965, pp. 177—189 and many other articles by both authors.

6. R. Kiersnowski, Rośliny uprawne i pożywienie roślinne w Polsce wczesnofeudalnej, [Cultivated Plants and Vegetable Food in Early Mediaeval Feudal Poland]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. II, 1954, fasc. 4, pp. 346—387; M. Dembińska, Z problematyki badań nad strukturą upraw niektórych zboż w I tysiącleciu n. e. [The Set of Problems on the Structure of Cultivation of Certain Corn Species in the First Millennium A. C.]. In: *Archeologia Polski*, vol. X fasc. 1 pp. 276—304; B. Baranowski, Początki i rozpowszechnienie uprawy ziemniaków na ziemiach środkowych Polski [The Beginnings and Spread of Potato Cultivation in the Territories of Central Poland]. Łódź 1960.

7. M. Dembińska, Konsumentacja żywnościowa w Polsce średniowiecznej [Food Consumption in Mediaeval Poland], Warszawa 1963, 263 pp., Tables; See also polemic article by A. Kowalska-Lewicka, Pożywienie chłopskie w średniowieczu i przydatność badawcza źródeł etnograficznych [Peasants' Food in the Middle Ages and the Usefulness of Ethnographic Sources for our Studies]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. XIII, no. 4 1965 pp. 755—766.

8. B. Baranowski, Próba obliczenia rozmiarów produkcji i jej konsumpcji w czasach Księstwa Warszawskiego i Królestwa Polskiego [An Attempt at Computing the Size of Production and its Consumption in the time of the Dukedom of Warsaw and the Polish Kingdom (1807—1830)]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. VIII 1960, 209—228; A. Wyczański, Studia nad konsumpcją żywności w Polsce w XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII w., [Studies on Food Consumption in Poland in the 16th and the first half of the 17th century] (pp. 223), Warszawa 1969; see also M. Dembińska, Racje czy normy żywnościowe? [Rations or Norms of Daily Food Consumption?]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. XVIII no. 2 1970 pp. 277—294.

describe the alimentation of certain social or professional groups, but attempted to establish certain per capita standards of weight and calorific content of daily food consumption, on the basis of accessible sources.

The appearance of King Zygmunt III's royal kitchen was the subject of a very good article⁹. This is an important contribution to the research on alimentation in royal courts, including that of the royal Wasa family in Sweden. A more comprehensive collective work on nutrition in early Poland appeared in 1967 and also took into account papers by archaeologists, ethnographers and historians. This volume contains studies concerning various problems, which have hitherto been taken into account only peripherally¹⁰.

The effects of eating and drinking on human health was the subject of Z. Kuchowicz's research¹¹. Another author, T. Sobczak, attempted to pinpoint alterations in food consumption in the Kingdom of Poland in the 19th century, making use chiefly of statistical material¹².

An attempt at estimating the daily rations of food, especially those consumed by people belonging to professional and service groups, at various periods, has also been carried out in the literature on the subject in Poland¹³.

9. J. Michalewicz, *Z badań nad konsumpcją spożywczą w Polsce* [Studies on Food Consumption in Poland], *Kuchnia królewska Zygmunta III* [The Royal Kitchen of King Zygmunt III]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. XII 1965, fasc. 4 pp. 701—718.

10. Pożywienie w dawnej Polsce [Food Consumption in Ancient Poland]. In: *Studia z dziejów gospodarstwa wiejskiego*, Vol. 9 fasc. 3 1967: the following articles are included in this collective edition: J. Wielowiejski, Konsumpcja żywnościowa w Polsce w okresach późnoleśnickim i rzymskim [Food Consumption in Poland in the Late La Tène and Roman Period] pp. 7—30; Klichowska, Możliwości (s. note 5). Z. Bukowski, Uwagi o konserwacji ryb u Słowian w świetle materiałów archeologicznych i etnograficznych [Remarks on the Preservation of Fish Among Slavic Peoples in the Light of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials] pp. 49—82; M. Dembińska, Udział zbieractwa w średniowiecznej konsumpcji zbożowej [The Share of Foraging in the Mediaeval Consumption of Cereals] pp. 83—104; J. Tazbir, Konsumpcja cytrusów w Polsce w XV—XVIII w. [The Consumption of Citrus Fruit in Poland from the 15th to the 18th Century] pp. 105—114; I. Turnau, Pożywienie mieszkańców Warszawy w epoce Oświecenia [The Alimentation of the Inhabitants of Warsaw at the Renaissance Period] pp. 115—130; Z. Kuchowicz, Spożycie alkoholu i zagadnienie jego wartości w XVIII wieku [The Consumption of Alcohol and the Problem of its Value in the 18th century] pp. 131—150; A. Kowalska-Lewicka, Tradycyjne serowarstwo w Polsce [Traditional Cheese-Making in Poland] pp. 151—193.

11. Z. Kuchowicz, Wpływ odżywiania na stan zdrowotny społeczeństwa polskiego w XVII—XVIII wieku [The Influence of Food on the Health of Polish Society in the 18th century] Łódź 1966 (pp. 289); idem, O społecznych konsekwencjach postępującej degeneracji możliwości władztwa polskiego XVII—XVIII w. [Social Consequences of the Degeneration of the Polish Aristocracy in the XVIIth and XVIIIth century]. In: *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, An. 76 fasc. 1 1969 pp. 22—44 and the polemic response of E. Rostworowski, see in: *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, an. 76 fasc. 4 1969 pp. 865—887.

12. T. Sobczak, Przełom w konsumpcji żywnościowej w Królestwie Polskim w XIX w. [The Break in Food Consumption in the Polish Kingdom in the 19th century] Wrocław 1968 (pp. 261).

13. See works of A. Wycząński mentioned above; also polemic article of M. Dembińska, Rations or Norms (see note 8), and of the same, *Materialne i biologiczne warunki bytu* [Material and Biological Conditions of Existence]. In: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, An. XVI fasc. 2 1968 pp. 361—371; some authors made use of a conventionally fixed annual quantity of consumed cereals per capita as the main basis for calculating the changes in economic potential, see J. Topolski, *Wskaznik wzrostu gospodarczego Polski od X—XX w.* [An Index of the Economic Growth of Poland from the 10th to the 20th century]. In: *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. 64, fasc. 4 1967 pp. 995—1012.

In closing this short review of historical methods and investigations on food consumption, I should like to mention that we also find many valuable contributions concerning this problem in more general and synthetic works, such as those of three eminent scientists studying our most ancient history: J. Kostrzewski¹⁴, W. Hensel¹⁵ and H. Łowmiański¹⁶. Moreover W. Kula, a well-known theoretician and economic historian, gives a foremost place in his methodological book to the problems of food consumption¹⁷.

Both historians and ethnologists interested in this matter may often find it useful to glance into volumes of the series concerning the material culture, and the history of rural economy: *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materiałnej* and *Studia i Materiały z Historii Kultury Materiałnej*, particularly *Studia z dziejów gospodarstwa wiejskiego*.

Both publications are published by the Institute for the History of Material Culture.

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14. J. Kostrzewski, *Kultura Prapolska* [Protopolish Culture], Poznań 1949, II. ed (pp. 615) (an edition also in French).

15. W. Hensel, *Słowiańska wczesnośredniowieczna* [The Slavic Lands in the Early Middle Ages], third ed. Warszawa 1965 (pp. 678) and one in German.

16. H. Łowmiański, *Początki Polski* [The Beginnings of Poland], vol. III, Warszawa 1966, pp. 223—343.

17. W. Kula, *Problemy i metody historii gospodarczej* [Problems and Methods of the History of Economy] Warszawa 1963, pp. 263—316.