

FAMINE **and ABUNDANCE** **EXHIBITION**

English



**FAMINE HAS BEEN
ONE OF THE DRIVING
FORCES OF HUMANITY**

From 3'th June to 27'th August 2017



MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE GIRONA

Museu d'Història de Girona- Sala d'Exposicions, Plaçeta de l'Institut Vell, 1



1 FAMINE HAS BEEN ONE OF THE DRIVING FORCES OF HUMANITY

Famine and insecurity have plagued humanity from its beginnings, but the enlargement of the brain turned a group of primates into the most dangerous predators.

The revolutionary development of tools and the ability to control fire allowed humans to hunt other animals, pick fruit and roots, and cook their food, which made our brain accelerate its evolution.

450,000 years ago, the man of Aragon (*Homo erectus*) lived in Talteüll, in Northern Catalonia. From the mid Palaeolithic, with the arrival of Neanderthals, human presence in Catalonia intensified and tools related to fire first appeared. The hunting of large herbivores provided enough food for survival. The arrival of modern man (*Homo sapiens*) marked the upper Palaeolithic. At this time tools became highly specialized.

The ability to cook made us human

2 FOOD PRODUCTION BEGAN IN THE NEOLITHIC

The beginning of domestication

Agriculture allowed for an increase in the number of inhabitants. The production of food was a good idea, but was difficult in the beginning. Archaeology shows that people suffered from malnutrition and periodic famines.

There are no exact dates for the arrival of agriculture in Catalonia, but it seems to have occurred around 5000-4000 BC. Following an initial period during which people lived in caves, they began to form settlements, like La Draga, in Banyoles, and to exploit all the agricultural and livestock resources of the land. This created a surplus which benefited trade and the production of luxury products, like variscite necklaces, a stone extracted from the Gavà mines.

Complex societies were the product of efforts to end hunger

This was the beginning of techniques to improve production (fertilizers, fallows, etc.) and the first conservation methods: silos for cereals, smoking and drying meats, and fermentation to obtain beer or bread.

3 CHICKEN FIRST APPEARED AT THIS TIME

Proto-historic society: changes in motion

We see important changes in Catalonia from the 7th century BC onwards. Greeks, Phoenicians, and later Carthaginians came to trade with the Iberians, the inhabitants of the eastern coast of the peninsula, separated into various tribes.

There were true cities, as well as settlements and farms that exploited the agricultural resources. Grain was stored in fields of silos, and was often used as an export.

It is at this time that we find the first industrial production of wine at La Font de la Canya, in Avinyonet del Penedès. Its consumption is linked to the holding of large banquets, like that at the Castellar de Pontòs farmhouse, where the remains of a large meal (bones from mammals, birds, and fish) were buried, along with remnants of cereal and crockery, especially for drinking.

The chiefs could use special utensils in the kitchen, such as the andiron found at Puig Castellar in Santa Coloma de Gramenet.

4 COMMUNAL MEALS FIRST APPEARED

Rome: the beginning of our culture

We have inherited many things from the Romans, including our culinary tradition.

Apicius is the name of a famous gourmand who lived in the 1st century AD. The most complete recipe book of antiquity bears his name, although it is a compilation produced towards the end of the Roman era. We can say that gastronomy reached our home with the Romans.

The food eaten by people in villages was very frugal. Basic foods consisted of cereals, vegetables, and occasionally some meat. Wine was consumed in abundance and that of Laietània (modern-day Barcelona and its surrounding area) was notorious for its low quality.

From the mid 3rd century, a severe economic, political and military crisis took place. Great famines were suffered, which pushed many farmers to rebel and help the bands of barbarians that were growing in number and importance.

Towards the end of the empire, the famine was so pronounced that there were cases of child cannibalism

5 WE KNOW THAT FAMINE LED TO EATING HERBES, EARTH, CORPSES, OR TO ABANDONING CHILDREN

Early Middle Ages

With the end of the Roman Empire, small farms run by nuclear families began to appear, which yielded part of their harvest to the nobles who had jurisdiction over the land.

However, a part of the north-east of the peninsula came to belong to al-Andalus from 714, and this Muslim presence that lasted for more than four centuries in modern-day Catalonia left a profound mark that determined the future shaping of the territory.



The last supper. Museum of Lleida

Agricultural development, driven by a complete network of canals and important innovation in the field of agronomy, fomented the growth of Andalusí Arabic cities, as well as the acclimatization of produce from the Orient.

Being a border area, the clash of political systems and fundamental differences in agricultural systems produced practically systematic famines in the feudal world.

A lack of commercial structures to soften the blow of famine meant that some crises resulted in shocking death tolls.

With such a weakened agricultural system and the nobility taking a large part of the surplus, farmers, free or not, lived on the edge: a bad harvest one year could lead to them going hungry for several years, or even make them starve to death.

Jewish gastronomy

Jewish cooking has left us several influences. *Adafina*, a stew made with pulses, vegetables and meat, is a clear precursor of the Spanish *pucheros* and *cocidos*. Consuming vegetables, like aubergine, was popularized by the Jews.

The selection and handling of foods constitute an important part of the Jewish faith, strictly supervised by the community's rabbi. This has allowed Jewish cuisine to maintain a personality defined by the Kashrut, the dietary norms that determine whether food is apt for consumption. Some of the most important rules include not mixing dairy and meat, and not eating any mammal with a hoof that is not split in two and a ruminant, which prohibits pork, rabbit, and horse, among others.

Muslim abundance

Catalonia had a privileged position for cultural exchange with al-Andalus. One of the main Muslim contributions to Catalan (and European) cuisine is the introduction of several new products, such as sugarcane, saffron, orange, aubergine, rice, and spinach, which spread to Europe from the Peninsula. Muslims also introduced pasta to Spain and Italy, and the Catalan word *fideus* (noodles), from *fidâwsh*.

One of the traits of Muslim cuisine is that pork is prohibited, being considered an impure animal. Although alcohol is also prohibited, it is pork that disappeared completely from the Islamic diet and became a symbol of Christian identity, being the only of the three religions of the Book that consumes it.

6 BARCELONA HAD TO IMPORT GRAIN FROM ARAGON OR LLEIDA

Medieval era: growth... and fall

Between the 11th and 13th centuries there was significant population growth. Famines did not disappear, but the greater reach of trade allowed for a better redistribution of food.

Despite this, the situation developed into a huge crisis: *Lo mal any primer* (The bad first year, 1333) was the first in a series of poor harvests, those of 1347 and 1374 being of particular note. In 1348 the plague arrived in Catalonia, which doubled up with the famine to produce disastrous consequences. The horsemen of the apocalypse took over inland Catalonia, cutting the population by between one and two thirds.

Innovatively for Europe, in 1374 Peter the Ceremonious dictated the *Ordinatio super aforamento grani*, an extraordinary law aimed at avoiding speculation and the unnecessary hoarding of grain.

The situation did not improve in the 15th century. The population fell drastically and inflation on the price of food shot up. Famine, war and death took over Catalonia and their consequences dragged on until the 17th century.



Pottery bowl (Escudella d'orelletes).
History Museum of Girona

7 MEAT ALMOST DISAPPEARED FROM THE DIET, ONLY THE POWERFUL COULD EAT IT

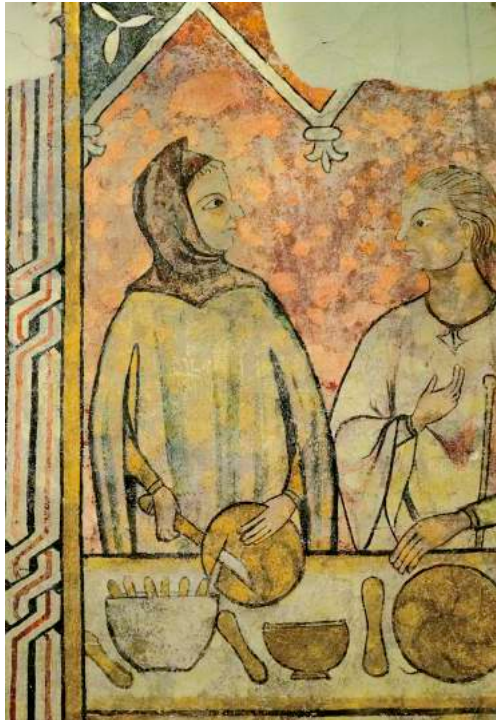
16th and 17th centuries: the famine continues

Lo any 1530 fou en tota Catalunya tal la fam y pestilencia que era compassió. (In the year 1530, famine and pestilence was so great in Catalonia it inspired compassion)
Pere Gil, Geografia de Catalunya (1600)

Throughout the 16th century, the population slowly recovered. However, with no advances in agricultural technology, as the population recovered, crises resurged. The most devastating was in 1647, the worst harvest of the century, followed by an outbreak of the plague in 1648, which ravaged a population weakened by the Catalan Revolt.

Cereal constituted more than 80% of the diet of the lower classes. Slowly, new crops from America, especially corn and potato, began to provide important nutritional supplements. Other American products, such as chocolate, became a symbol of sophistication among the upper classes.

Famine never went away despite cities stockpiling grain to ease price increases and avoid popular uprisings.



Pia Almoina's Fresque. Museum of Lleida



Social tension and an empty stomach

Visca la terra i muiren els traidors! (Long live the land and death to traitors!)

There were repeated popular revolts throughout the modern era, with the same root cause: famine cause by cyclical agrarian crises.

In 1640, the Catalan Revolt, which began as a revolt against the Spanish *Tercios* (military units), who were fed by the people, ended up as a political revolt against a government that did not respect the historical rights of the Principality. In 1687, in the revolt of the *Gorretes*, farmers once again marched on Barcelona to protest to the viceroy about the occupation of the troops. Other more local revolts, like the bean revolt in Manresa in 1688, or the riot of the poor in Valls in 1694, both benefited from the 1687 revolt.

A tense climate ran throughout Catalonia and prepared it for the war of spanish Succession



Pottery bowl (*Escudella*).
History Museum of Girona



Oil Measure (*Mallal*).
History Museum of Girona

8 PRODUCTION IN CATALONIA WAS SO HIGH THAT ALL AVAILABLE LAND WAS TILLED

18th century: recovery

Famine and typhoid ravaged the people of Terrassa, with ten to fifteen deaths registered every day, a shocking number if one considers the population of Terrassa at that time.

Baltasar Ragón, on the Peninsular War

After the war of Spanish Succession, Catalonia was devastated; although the population and agriculture recovered over the course of the century, famines did not disappear.

Vineyards grew quickly due to the external demand for aguardiente in England, France and America, where new forms of distillation were gaining popularity in detriment to traditional spirits. Reus became the export capital for this product.

It was due to the capital generated by aguardiente that industrialization could take place in Catalonia in the 19th century.

Towards the end of the century, agrarian production began to stagnate, and once more harvests began expanding into non-arable lands. The price of wheat increased once more, and the crises of the turn of the century again brought famine, which, together with the Peninsular War (1808-1814), proved disastrous in some areas of Catalonia.

Famine and revolution

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, social tensions exploded violently when the popular classes went hungry.

In 1789, as in France, there was a great subsistence crisis due to the increased price of wheat. The poor harvests of 1787 and 1788 and the increase in the price of bread caused a popular revolt in Barcelona and other cities.

Once more, the backdrop was a famine that continued to attack the most vulnerable popular classes. Riots continued through the 19th century, and grew in strength, becoming truly revolutionary struggles, parallel to those occurring throughout Europe.

The most well-known example is what are known as the *bullangues* (turmoils), a series of violent clashes led by a popular mass that demanded political and social reform, and which lasted from 1835 to 1845.

The first riot was a burst of anticlerical fury that took place in Reus and Barcelona

In the final one, known as the *Jamància bullanga* (1843), the most radical republicans used the popular classes to try to gain power.



9 “LA CUNYERA CATALANA” (THE CATALAN COOK) WAS THE FIRST RECIPE BOOK WRITTEN IN CATALAN IN THE LATE MODERN PERIOD

Industrialization... and yet more famine

The 19th century was one of change and expansion throughout Europe. In Catalonia, the money from aguardiente was invested in factories. A significant proportion of peasants moved to the city, resulting in the emergence of the urban proletariat.

In Spain, however, subsistence crises were accompanied by cholera epidemics, which expanded lethally throughout cities. During crises, protectionist policies that taxed grain imports seriously affected the population as prices shot up, and imports eventually had to be allowed in, as was the case in Barcelona and Tarragona in 1825, and in practically all Catalan ports in 1857.

Infrastructures began to be created that allowed for intensive and irrigated agriculture, such as La Infanta canal (1819) or Ugell canal (1861). Despite the nutritional improvement of the second half of the century, the consumption of protein continued to be practically non-existent, with diets dominated by bread, potatoes, and pulses.

Barcelona was known as the city of bombs

The new social movements

Si un die l treball ens falte, i amb ell el pa, abans de morir de fam, ens jugarem la vida ls dos per menjar-ne, com dret i tenim a pesar de les lleis, a pesar dels jutges sense justicie

(If ever one day we are wanting of work, and with it bread, rather than starve to death we will risk our lives to eat, as we have rights despite laws, despite judges without justice.)

Felix Cortiella, Els artistes de la vida (The artists of life), 1898

Industrialization led to large masses of workers with gruelling hours and low salaries. Malnutrition cast a shadow that followed the workers.

With the *bullangues* (turmoils) in Barcelona, a workers' spirit began to emerge among the working classes, and in 1840 the first workers' association was created, the Weavers' Society. In Catalonia, the labour movement leaned towards the radical wing of anarchism, and there were outbreaks of violence.

In the 20th century, the violence continued. As well as Tragic Week, there were waves of union and employer violence: this was the era of *Pistolisme* (the practice of hiring thugs to deal with unions and workers' uprisings).

The escalation of violence ended swiftly with the end of the Civil War, when workers' leverage disappeared: the widespread lowering of salaries imposed insane conditions on workers.

10 THE GREAT CHEF IGNASI DOMENÈCH WROTE BOOKS SPECIFICALLY FOR COOKING UNDER THESE HARSH CONDITIONS

The Civil War and the post-war period

(...) la meva germana em deia, “¿què no veus que estem afamats?”, “¿què no has patit prou gana?”, “¿què no veus que si no ho agafes tú, s’ho quedarà un altre?”

(...) my sister said to me, “Can’t you see we’re starving?”, “Have you not gone hungry enough?”, “Can’t you see that if you don’t take it, someone else will?”

Alícia Guidonet. Memoria oral y alimentación: estrategias de supervivencia durante la Guerra Civil española y la postguerra. 2011.

Despite the fact that during the 20th century society was no longer limited by cyclical agricultural crises, the Civil War left a profound mark on Catalonia’s economic, political and social trajectory.

Throughout the War, Catalonia was deeply affected by food shortages, especially grain, and by the increasing number of refugees. A shortage of food meant a huge increase in refugees arriving in Catalonia.

Things did not improve at the end of the War due to the general political situation. Purchasing power decreased and prices kept going up. Rationing cards were made, although it was often necessary to find food on the black market in order to eat.

Famine was so engrained in Catalan society that tragicomic and emblematic images appeared, such as Carpanta, the poor starving man who never got to eat.

The 20th century: the two sides of the coin

Industrialization completely took over the food industry: speed of transport, the ease of conservation of food thanks to cold storage, mechanization, the use of chemical fertilizers, and even genetic modification. All of these tools and resources have allowed us to produce quickly and efficiently.

Although we produce enough to feed the entire world population, the reality is that today there are more people going hungry than ever, as global production networks distribute food unevenly. There have been various food crises since the beginning of the century.

In Catalonia, since the economic crisis of 2008, 27% of children have been living under the poverty line, while 25% of children in this country suffer malnutrition from the abuse of eating junk food. Alongside increasing obesity, we find a world of eating disorders and miracle diets. Anorexia, bulimia, and reverse anorexia are spreading throughout the Western world, which tries to achieve beauty standards unattainable for most of the population.



There are no seasons: we can consume foods from anywhere in the world at any time

**Fragment of a meal offered
to the poor and pilgrim**
Pia Almoina's fresco
1330 - 1345
Museum of Lleida

MHG Carrer de la Força, 27 - 17004 Girona
Tel. 972 22 22 29 - museuhistoria@ajgirona.cat

www.girona.cat/museuhistoria

@mhistoria_gi   

@Gironamuseum  

Opening Times


Tuesday to Saturday, 10.30 to 18.30 h.
Sundays and bank holidays, 10.30 to 13.30 h
Closed on non-bank holiday Mondays
Free entrance


**Girona
Cultura**



X Xarxa de Museus
d'Història i Monuments
de Catalunya

**M H
C A T**

 Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de Cultura

 Museu d'Història
de Catalunya