

Zeitschrift: Histoire des Alpes = Storia delle Alpi = Geschichte der Alpen
Herausgeber: Association Internationale pour l'Histoire des Alpes
Band: 13 (2008)

Rubrik: English summaries

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 11.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

English Summaries

Andrej Pleterski, It is easier to laugh on a full stomach

The contribution presents an overview of a typical early mediaeval domestic environment in the South-Eastern region of the Alps. The research is based on archaeological sources, retrograde analysis of written sources and ethnological data. Personal experience and observations during archaeological experiments elicited further valuable data. Combining all these sources, a picture emerged of simple but balanced food: a sensible diet for healthy living. However, the author's thesis claims that the introduction of taxation as well as limited productivity in the region resulted in a deterioration of the population's dietary conditions. As a result, people's health suffered a downturn, too.

Madeleine Ferrières, "To eat the Swiss way". The image of the mountain diet in modern times

In 1593, Paris was in the hand of the *Ligueurs*, who rejected the authority of the protestant King, Henry IV. In the city besieged by royal troops, food is about to run out and the situation is becoming critical, so much so that citizens are "down to milk and curd cheese, like the Swiss". We have no famine yet, but shortages, and in this sense the phrase "Swiss diet" seems to stand for a kind of penury. The article focuses on the sort of image Parisians, or indeed the French in general, used to depict "mountain fare" in early modern times (16th to 18th century). Is this fare considered to be good for one's health? And what sort of status is granted to such emblems of a mountain diet as milk and dairy products? These are typical questions of the history of representations. Far from being static, representations, like customs, evolve. Throughout the modern age, attitudes

to milk and dairy products shifted quite markedly. Thus, the paper begins by analysing the representations people built around the Swiss diet between 1550 and 1600; secondly, it tries to determine how, and why, this “representation” slowly evolved in later periods.

Stefania Bianchi, Homesick for taste and a taste for memories

This contribution is based on an initial assumption that wellbeing is not merely a physiological factor. Homesickness, which includes a yearning for one’s habitual lifestyle, is somehow a *disease*, and thinking nostalgically of a certain dish, fruit, or drink represents one of the symptoms which people express in the letters they write home. And for those who do return home, there is the pleasure of remembering new or even tastier foods, and to assimilate them into one’s habitual diet, thus introducing their relatives and the community itself, in time, to an acquired taste.

Examining the letters of Ticinese emigrants, penned between the end of the 17th century and the early 19th century, we are able to shed light on this as well as other aspects of the historical period, destinations, the sentimental ties binding author and reader and, not least, the social classes concerned.

Clà Riatsch, The stomach of old. Towards a symbolism of eating in the literature of Romansch Grisons

The motto turned publicity slogan, “You are what you eat”, makes it clear that eating is not merely a necessity, a pleasure and a ritualised daily habit, but it is also the most quintessential form in which men *swallow* and *interiorise* bits of the outside world. Hence, the symbolic value of food, adopted in literature to glorify a better and more intensely lived existence, often identified with that of one’s ancestors; yet it is equally used to lend a concrete aura to what is idealised or, again, it is exploited as symbolic retribution. The article illustrates the different facets of food symbolism on the basis of a number of texts from 19th- and 20th-century Romansch literature.

Daniela Perco, Food preservation strategies in the mountains of the Belluno province between the 19th and the 20th century

The traditional preservation of food in the Alpine province of Belluno was part of a relevant socio-economic strategy, not least because of the time constraints of agricultural production (very few months a year) and the consequent need for food to last longer. What contributed to the success of preservation was not simply the adoption of proven techniques, but also the use of a suitable space and the selection of vegetable species able to *keep*. Different areas of the home were assigned to this purpose (from the cellar to the loft) provided they assured the appropriate level of temperature, humidity or ventilation for preserving foodstuffs. The selection of vegetables, too, is done taking into account ripening time. The growing popularity of potatoes in the early 19th century, quite apart from their nutritional value, was due to the preservability of certain varieties. The look and taste of preserved goods might vary, and in some cases it could be due to mould or parasites. On the whole, however, no appreciable repercussions were noticed on the health of mountain dwellers.

Marie-Christine Bailly-Maître, Lucie Martin, Estelle Herrscher, Patrick Hervieu, Eating high in the mountains in the 13th and 14th centuries. The village of Brandes (Huez-Isère): comparative contributions from archaeology, texts, archaeobotany, and anthropology

The archaeological site of Brandes provides us with a rather extraordinary opportunity to study the development of a mediaeval mining village very high up in the mountains of Oisans (French Alps) during two centuries. It is very unusual for excavations to present an image of an entire village in the final moments of its activity, which is associated with the population buried in the village churchyard. The aim of our paper is to build a summary picture of the typical diet of the miners' community of Brandes based on a diversified set of data, including archaeological remains, faunal bones, botanical records as well as the anthropological series excavated since 1979. First, through the analysis of archaeological remains and faunal bones we draw a possible picture of victual provisions and eating habits for the Brandes community. Secondly, results of carpological tests on macro-remains sampled in different locations of

the site allow us to formulate hypotheses concerning the kinds of vegetables consumed and/or cultivated. Thirdly, using dental and alveolar remains, we focus on the type of food gathered by humans in order to reconstruct their past dietary behaviour.

Manuela Canabal, Farming and food at the start of the 19th century in the Western Alps. Popular practices and learned prevention in the struggle against a wheat disease

Early in the 19th century, wheat bunt was quite common and caused considerable damage to European agriculture. Caused by a microscopic parasite, the disease changed the kernel into a black malodorous mass. Wheat yield decreased as a result, and so did the quality of the bread baked with that flour, a contributory factor in the famines of the *Ancien Regime*. Many scholars studied wheat bunt, trying to identify causes as well as possible cures, to put an end to the economic and social damage it generated. However, they seem to disagree on whether the consumption of infected wheat was dangerous for man's health. A comparison between farming practices of the alpine population bordering on Lake Geneva and the prophylactic measures proposed by the educated elites illustrates the role of wheat in mountain agriculture and diet. It is thus possible to assess the importance of this cereal in the *Léman* department.

Sylvain Sick, Small size and goitre: two endemic diseases of alpine populations under the First Empire

On being conscripted to join the *Grande Armée* campaigns, every year from 1798 and 1813, men of all age groups in the *new French* departments (*Léman* and *Mont-Blanc* in particular) underwent health checks. Health officers' reports clearly evince characteristics peculiar to each Department and obvious differences in districts and cantons. *Léman* inhabitants appear taller than their *Mont-Blanc* neighbours, more subject to goitre. Geography and health are obviously correlated. The paper concentrates on these two endemic problems: small size and goitre, and their connection with food quality, also claiming that production, diet, geography, and urbanisation mingle to create differences and deficiencies. Geneva's archival records for the *Léman* department and the

departmental archives of Savoie (Chambéry) for the *Mont-Blanc* department provided us with evidence of health average and statistics for the two districts. Sources unanimously confirm that small size, caused by late development, and a goitre condition, caused by iodine deficiency and a malfunction of the thyroidal gland, are two important reasons for reform in the Empire armies.

Rodolfo Taiani, Food: the unknown factor

Between the 18th and the 19th century, medical police theoreticians contributed to prepare a “map of disorders”, for use in monitoring and preventive action aimed at safeguarding public health. This concept was also applied to the food sector.

The ensuing theoretical framework, however, based mainly on Hippocratic/Galenic principles, turned out to be so inflexible that it biased the judgement of the institutional and professional watchdogs keeping an eye on the population’s behaviour. Most of the documentation examined (produced during the first half of the 19th century and relating to Trentino) seems to highlight the degree of their sensitivity to given situations theoretically labelled as at risk, rather than characterising the concrete and objective gravity of a condition or, more simply, its existence.

Emanuela Renzetti, Polenta and ...

The contribution presents the results of a survey on traditional food in the district of Primiero (Vanoi and Cismon Valleys), intended to reconstruct the typical diet of the local population. In-depth research into eating habits was conducted to find out whether the traditional diet might indeed hold the secret of prevention or at least containment of the damaging consequences of pellagra. From many oral-history accounts collected, it would appear that *polenta* was indeed the staple nourishment, while the impact of the disease (whose occurrence is reported in many official documents) does not seem to be entirely correlated.

Marie-France Vouilloz Burnier, Beneficial and detrimental effects of water on health. The example of Valais in the 19th and 20th centuries

Water was an important public health issue in 19th- and 20th-century Valais. Poor iodine content in water caused the appearance of disorders like goitre and cretinism. Against these, physicians used to prescribe diverse but usually ineffective remedies. It was not until early in the 20th century that iodine was added to cooking salt, with very positive results. Proximity of water supply pipes to cesspools, for example, caused typhoid fever outbreaks. Essentially, the remedy was to sanitise water catchments, and to assure plenty of varied, wholesome food and drinks to the populations. The medical body in Valais considered water to be a health factor; they discovered that Saxon water, containing substantial amounts of iodine, had some therapeutic properties for skin diseases. Similarly, Sembrancher water contained fluor and magnesium, both of which are very important to fight tooth decay. This hypothesis was borne out by the observation that rates of dental decay in the population of Sembrancher were very low despite poor oral hygiene.

Simona Boscani Leoni, Medicine in letters. Problems and practices as read in correspondence between Swiss doctors in the 18th century

Letter writing between medical doctors in the early modern age was crucial in two ways: it acted as an early alarm bell for particularly contagious diseases, and was instrumental in facilitating exchange of information on the evolution of the disease, its symptoms, the use and efficacy of the drugs administered, and generally on the choice of therapy. The letters provide evidence of the preparation of medicines and of the widespread practice of distance consultation. The paper focuses on epistolary exchanges between Swiss physicians in the 18th century, more particularly on the network of the celebrated Zurich physician and naturalist, Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672–1733) with two of his colleagues, Basle professor Theodor Zwinger III (1658–1724), and a former student of Scheuchzer's, Laurenz Zellweger (1692–1764). It highlights two aspects of these letters: the relation between sickness and health, and, secondly, the organisation of public healthcare.

Christine Tourn, Food and Drugs. The views of the “charitable apothecaries” in Geneva at the end of the 17th century

During the early modern period, Geneva developed as a major medical marketplace, where both drugs and practitioners converged from the alpine region and further afield. Both practitioner and merchant, the apothecary stood as an important though neglected actor in this market. Shop inventories provide information on the products sold by apothecaries, a particularly interesting finding for the history of food and drugs. In the 17th century, a thriving series of popular medical books under the title *L'Apothicaire charitable* (The Charitable Apothecary) provided further information on apothecaries' trading, healing, and counselling practices. They describe the medical virtues of foodstuff and herbs, and the art of mixing remedies in a domestic laboratory or a kitchen. Three authors living on the edge of the alpine area contributed to this particular genre: Osée Baccuet (1670), Jacob Girard des Bergeries (1673) and Jacob Constant de Rebecque (1683). The paper examines their galenical conception of nourishment and their opinions on three (then new) exotic commodities: chocolate, tea, and coffee.

Sonia Zanier, “Le lait tarit”. Milk is drying up. Health and social motivations in the considerations of the medical association of Geneva (1713–1715) on the risks of drinking the milk of sick cows

A group of medical doctors from Geneva created the *Société des médecins de Genève* (Geneva Medical Association), the first of its kind in Europe. Local authorities sought the *Société's* advice on a delicate health matter. Cattle in the Savoie were afflicted by an epizootic bug called *surlangue* or *chancre volant*, which was dangerously spreading as far as Geneva.

At that time the typical attitude in cases of contagious diseases of any kind was to totally forbid the purchase and consumption of all products at risk. But such measures worried the authorities because of the social liability involved: milk and cheese, even more than meat, were a staple diet and income for the lower rungs of the population. In these circumstances, the Association was able to show its *public utility*. Quite apart from any strictly medical considera-

tion, it was the wish of the 14 members of the association to obtain political recognition and approval. In view of this, their study led to the recommendation that it was all right to consume milk from sick cattle.

Maria Heidegger, Nutrition in institutionalised psychiatry. The case of the mental asylum in Hall in Tirol 1830–1914

This paper examines the eating conditions in asylums through the example of the provincial asylum for the insane in Hall in Tirol, founded in 1830. The study briefly reviews the question over the 1830–1914 period, when the institutionalised treatment of madness was undergoing radical changes. “Nutrition” and institutional care, administration, local government authorities, medical and scientific interventions, and national objectives were obviously interconnected. The latter became apparent when the erection of the second institution in the Italian-speaking part of the country was politically enforced. But first and foremost this paper illustrates the daily organisation of food based on local administrative records and early descriptions of the asylum. In addition, it analyses medical reports and contemporary papers about food rejection and force-feeding of the mentally ill. The case of Anna K., who had to be force-fed for over 20 years, sheds light on psychiatric practices concerning food in asylum medicine as well as methodological problems.

Katarina Keber, Beware of unripe fruit! Healthcare and nutrition in Carniola at the time of cholera epidemics

In this article, cholera epidemics, which affected the Carniola region five times in the 19th century, are the occasion for observing healthcare conditions during the epidemics, and offer us clues for a reconstruction of the dietary habits of the local population. Material from the health authorities’ provincial archive for 1855 shows, on the one hand, an inadequate healthcare staff-to-patients ratio; and, on the other, the efforts of the authorities to increase the number of physicians. Policies adopted by the provincial authorities demonstrate that even the initial measures undertaken to limit the epidemics related to nutrition. While in the early stages of epidemics, the authorities merely recommended to the population a healthy and *correct* lifestyle, including a wholesome diet, in

the advanced stages the district authorities, assisted by physicians and clergy, organised warm meals and the distribution of hearty beef soup, meat and bread to the most vulnerable. Adequate and strong food represented a preventive measure, a sort of a *cure*, which did not really heal but made the population more resistant and decreased the number of infections.

Leere Seite
Blank page
Page vide