

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

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HOW TO READ CABBAGE:
STRUCTURALISM,
SEMIOTICS, HISTORICAL
ANTHROPOLOGY

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Svetlana Slapšak: How to read cabbage: structuralism, semiotics, historical anthropology

„The Congolese author Sony Labou Tansi, who wrote that erotics were the art of „good cooking of love“ reminds us of the fact that there is still this ample menu, which we can discover, and that much of the sympathy would be lost until we do it. Cooking of course does not involve only senses, but also interest in anything alive, and the food is more tasteful if those who eat together, are overwhelmed by common benevolence – even if it is temporary:“

(Theodore Zeldin, *The Intimate History of Humanity*, Študentska založba, Ljubljana, 2012, p. 105)

„Why are people ashamed of admitting that they desire love and they are not ashamed to admit they are hungry or thirsty or something similar? Is it so because the majority of desires lie in necessity and if they are not satisfied, death may follow? But love desire is superfluous.“

(Aristotle, *Problemata*, 880a, transl. S. S.)

Our contemporary Theodore Zeldin connected in an elliptic way erotics, love and food consumption, and thus offered an anthropological framework in which we can observe food: interest for all things alive. Zeldin' ellipse outlines, in a way, my own approach to the topic of cabbage and sexuality as defined by rituals and cults: this is not a circular structure in which a central topic is equidistantly connected to possible thematic branches, but rather an ellipse, in which the center can move, and so can thematic branches. On the other hand, the pioneer of European science Aristotle defined the social framework of sexual desire, which can be found „translated“ among other needs on which life directly depends. The procreation there is not related to desire and pleasure: in a system of thought where there is no such thing as the concept of „sin“, Aristotle in a way offers an „elliptic“ division between the focuses of desire/pleasure, and need. Both thinkers, Aristotle and Zeldin, touch the field of politics of desire and pleasure, and of those social configurations where subjects and objects of desire meet in different „translations“, and at crossroads of different cultural inscriptions.

Cabbage consumption defines a certain sexuality, which is conditioned by a certain diet that cannot exist without cabbage – and there, the consumption of cabbage incorporates all previous cultural inscriptions, imaginaries, beliefs, ritual practices, all changing in time, in the dynamics of collective memory, censorship and prescribed rules... Ritual power of any food consists above all in preventing or correcting predestination. Fast for instance, as well as overconsumption

during carnival, are correctives, because they delimit and enclose the sin in a certain chronotope. The cult aspects of cabbage, inscribed in taboos, sayings, metaphors and discursive formulae „translate“ ritual performatives from a distant past to the present - in a synchronous setting into social accommodations, while in diachrony into discursive practices, ranging from the formulae of intimization to the pleasure in text, especially the orally performed text. Due to our fatal relation to the symbolic, determined as it is hierarchically and along prescribed scales of values and significance by the cultural context, we do have a problem with understanding cabbage as something symbolically important and semiotically dynamic. In some languages, „cabbage“ is semantically defined as something simple, vulgar, low, banal. Revealing a crucial semantic node of meanings, which relate to sexuality and gender, their changing nature and the instability of the socially accepted forms of gender and sexualities, is undoubtedly a challenge to our stereotypic notions. I am well aware that such „sexuality“ of cabbage will counter the existing national mythologization both in my country and abroad: Germans are poked as „Krauts“ even today in the Anglo-American world. On the other side, the sauerkraut in German, Slavic and non-Slavic cultures of the Northern and Central Europe has the position of „national food“, with all inscribed imaginary values, stereotypes, etc.

In Roman sources, texts and epigraphic material, cabbage holds a special place in the ideological construct of a simple, manly, rigorous Roman of the elite class of knights (equites), who does not succumb to the luxury and effeminization of the Greek culture, and maintains a strict diet with cabbage as the basic ingredient. Cabbage is conceptualized as the kind of food that creates and reinforces the Roman male identity, from the writings of the declared opponent of Greek culture Cato the Elder to the graffiti on the walls of Pompeii. On the other hand, a glance on the status of cabbage in the Greek culture and cults reveals a multi-facet relation of cabbage and sexuality: Dionysus, a bi-sexual god, does not stand the cabbage, therefore cabbage must not be planted between the vines. Cabbage (or salad) in Ancient Greece diminishes male sexual power. Contradictory statements and beliefs continue in Mediaeval Europe, where cabbage is primarily linked to female sexuality, birth and uterus. In France, newborn babies are still „found“ in a cabbage patch, whilst elsewhere they are flown in by storks...The Mediaeval story about the nun who bit the tail of the devil dwelling in the salad belongs to the comic tradition in which cabbage, rose, reading as a sexualized activity, nuns and friars meet. In Serbian language, a worn-out book is named *kupusara* (cabbage-book). In some context, the relation cabbage-sexuality has „slipped“ into the lower spheres of speech and became a constant reference in obscene discourses, such as in subcultures all over Europe, including the Slavic parts. The uniformity of sexual notions points to commonly shared, probably Mediaeval carnivalesque traditions stabilized in urban subcultures and in the „folk lore“, or rather in the very much imaginary rural cultures as codified and written down in Europe in the 19th ct. In this marked positioning of cabbage between genders, it is possible to read a definite continuity since Antiquity, and up till the present day, accommodations of beliefs related mainly to the rituals of passage (*rites de passage*), and the ideological and narrative framework of great religions.

Although in the long term, cabbage stays in the domain of sexual/comical, the ambition of patriarchal cultures to fix its discursive use remains: sauerkraut reappears in narratives within collective imaginaries and ethnically defined food, mainly of the male population in Northern and Central Europe in the 19th ct.

History of narratives on cabbage thus reveals, through anthropological analysis, a number of ideological scenarios inscribed into cultural practices, transgression of censorship onto the domain of the carnival (where it can easily disappear), phantasms of linking the food and gender and/or ethnic identity. The anthropological history of cabbage connects many lines of European – and other, especially North-American – cultural and identitarian politics; parallel to that, in other scientific disciplines (notably dietetics), cabbage is being constructed as an extraordinarily healthy and even healing food.

How is it possible then to „theorize“ cabbage? Marvin Harris, social anthropologist, has put forward a crucial question pertaining to the symbolism of food: what comes first, messages and meanings or preferences and aversions? Harris is known for the fact that the framework of his research is cultural materialism. His field work in Brazil and Mozambique focused on the production concept of culture, and especially the surplus produced and the ethno-energetic exchange; that led him to a bold comparison with European Mediaeval economies, where he makes distinction between feudalism and manoralism. As an anthropologist he was constantly challenging mainstream scientific thinking – be it with the daring hypothesis that Aztecs practiced cannibalism because of the lack of proteins, or with the hypothesis that the necktie marks the class not involved in physical work. In the book quoted above, Harris tries to prove that all things seemingly arbitrary in a culture have their reason in nutritional value of foods, in ecology and economy of the society in question. In other words, that the „reflection“ on food has, to use the model developed by Claude Lévy-Strauss, more socially motivated rationality than arbitrary and symbolic narration. This strictly pragmatic positioning of Marvin Harris fitted my research very well, precisely because of the extraordinary weight of the ritual data and the narratives related to cult: this kind of balancing the vision was necessary for my work. Harris's reflections on varying reasons and explanations for different nutrition styles in different cultures revealed an aspect previously hidden to me: in those cultures in which cabbage is connected with various gendered and sexual narratives, there is little or no mentioning of lactation. Lactation is otherwise among most powerful narratives, related to different taboos or instructions for consumption of certain kinds of food. At the end of his book, Harris concludes that there is yet another reason for avoiding to think about the modes of nutrition in the frame of the dominant arbitrary symbols: the industry of food uses man's predominant inclination to push the button „yes“, rather than „no“ when desiring food, and that leads us today into new diseases and higher mortality. (1) Recurring to arbitrary symbols will just blur the issue there in our research for the causes of damage done by the modern food industry. Paradoxically, Harris' negative position on considering arbitrary symbols helped me determine the status of cabbage in contemporary politics of nutrition: for its low status, in most countries cabbage does not have the status of surplus produce and does not participate in mass food industry. On the other hand,

it is easy to grow and does not require risky additives in final produce, for instance sauerkraut. In European food production, there is only one major line of growing and international marketing of cabbage – namely the Dutch production for the big Eastern European countries like Poland and Russia, where obviously, the local production is still insufficient for the huge number of consumers. Cabbage generally remains outside social trends and practices about food in the modern world: in Slovenia for instance, it is the third most popular gardening plant. Not part of conflicting trends in food production, cabbage remains firmly in the domain of self-sustainability. In other words, arbitrary symbols can be most productive in our research of the history of cabbage by cultures, because by considering them, we do not block the „political“ positioning of cabbage in the processes of food production.

Harris' argument is conceived in opposition the culinary triangle as formulated by Claude Lévy-Strauss triangle: in fact what we have here are two triangles, the second one being the triangle of recipes – raw, cooked and rotten. The three forms are linked by natural transformation, two of them by cultural transformation. (2) As Claude Lévy-Strauss is above all interested in human behavior, for him the fire is the central element of relevance; the triangle reflects linguistic structure more than social – myth and culture take the function of basic codes. Communication around recipes, the language of cuisine, unlike the everyday language, „translates“ the unconscious; it is not about transmitting messages, but rather about expressing structure. This is the point where the criticism of Claude Lévy-Strauss is taken over by Jack Goody (3), who defined himself as comparative sociologist, not anthropologist. In his – nevertheless – anthropological system, Goody underlined three elements: surplus in food production (characteristic of Eurasia, not Africa), founding of cities as social-cultural centers where the surplus is documented and regulated (administration), and communication systems which make documentation possible. According to Goody, the extraordinary progress of the Greek thinking, science and philosophy is mainly the consequence of the invention of the alphabet, by far the best mechanism of communication. It is interesting how rarely the researchers of the Ancient worlds refer to Goody or discuss his conclusions. According to Goody, the external and the internal tensions in a society are caused by the unbalances in cooking. With the connotation to class, he manages to formulate the model of two basic cuisines –low and high, based on complicated and often conflictual relations of hierarchy and social power. For Goody, this is by no means a simple „code“ such as we could instantly and easily understand if social relations and structures were reflected in food in the same way the complicated symbolic narratives are – for instance around bread.

Mary Douglas put forth new foundations of cultural anthropology by comparing the everyday life of the Western citizens to cultures which had been systematically defined as „primitive“ (4). The most influential is her theory of taboo or of pure and impure, which is the core of her new disciplinary branch – theological anthropology. „Impure“, according to her, defines the position of an object, animal or behavior OUTSIDE the limits of certain classifications. Although by the end of her life she changed her position on kosher food, her argument still remains challenging in determining the domain of pure/permissible. She also maintains that symbolic systems are

inscribed in gender and that they shape the body. This point was important for my research on cabbage. Mary Douglas, who was mostly interested in usage and consumption, paid attention to food sequences through the day, month or year, that is, not only to binary codes within a meal, but also to temporal codes (5).

Cabbage, the topic of my research, is studied almost exclusively in high cuisines according to the classification by Goody. Lévy-Strauss' terminological division to lexemes (culinary terms), gustomes (everything related to taste) and technemes (everything related to processes and techniques) is very important for understanding the use, which may not be necessarily connected to cooking. Cabbage has the status of a magical plant and of the food at the same time, which means that neither pragmatic sociological or anthropological analysis nor structural analysis can cover all of the aspects of its uses, meanings and narratives. Cabbage is linked to unstable and changing sexualities and birth, and defies all codification available in this epistemological field. What remains is to find a better model of interpretation for cabbage. One such model was elaborated in historical anthropology, in a seminal collection on the cuisine of the sacrifice in Greece, edited by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne (6). Members of the first and of the second generation of researchers in the anthropology of the Ancient worlds presented in this collection analyses, which problematize positions of Claude Lévy-Strauss on food and cooking. Cuisine of sacrifice namely calls for different schemes of relations, especially between raw meat, scents of roasted meat, and totally burnt, carbonized meat; plants are divided between those grown by men (cooked/roasted), dried – meant to be burnt as incense and presented as food for gods in sacrifice (smell, aroma), and wild plants (raw). The immortal and the mortal body share the living cooked meat and the dead cooked meat, dried plants and cooked plants.

Sexuality is displaced with the food, disappears and changes, depending on the codes of sacrifice and the consumption of food. The approach of the anthropology of the Ancient worlds points to the uselessness of hypothetical continuities, which we supposedly follow through a distant past and then recognize in modern cultures, mainly because the Ancient man follows different patterns and modes of behavior, which in return require different epistemological approach and different theoretical explanations. Jack Goody, for instance, identified ways of processing food in Roman cuisine that relate to the hierarchy of the social classes in the modern world, but could not identify the same social classes in the Roman context... (7). Analyses proposed by Vernant, Detienne and other contributors point above all to highly codified communication based on food – the language of food. Food consumption is not the only possible point of departure. The status of food, nutrition and cooking refers to the domain of famine and basic needs, but also to many other areas of human communication and performativity. The same way the food is diversified in the practices of sacrifice, also sexuality, typically linked to needs and procreation, can become diversified, unstable and changeable (8).

I also follow here the semiotics of food as developed by Roland Barthes in his re-readings of the French theoretician of gastronomy Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (9). Barthes published his texts on Brillat-Savarin as short essays and, based on the interpretation of this gastronomic

author, proposed the concept of the „protocols“ of food defined by social status and by changes in social status. Reading the classical work on gastronomy, Barthes sketched an exciting panorama of gluttony in our time, where the human body wants to be dry and eternal, and consumes the food which should comply with this goal: drinks that make noise (bubbly) and food that is crunchy. Barthes was wrong in pointing to the advantages of fast-food. As we know today, sweet bubbly drinks and crunchy food, fried potatoes and burgers are responsible for children's obesity and they certainly develop addiction and consequently cause, beside obesity, a huge number of dangerous organic deteriorations. Obesity has become a social and class marker of the poorest in developed countries: rich have enough money for expensive healthy, low calories food, and can provide such food for their „expensive“ children, while the poor are at the mercy of the market, which provides them with cheap bubbly drinks and crunchy food. Until the mighty food industry manages to demonstrate, based on some epochal discovery, that all of its products are healthy - the trend of manipulation we have had for some time on labels and aggressive advertising - food will remain enclosed in obvious social stratification, victim to ideology, morality, religion etc. Back in the 60', Barthes could not predict that we would be living in the last days of free choice, and that the free choice would be determined by ever new taboos and their violation.

The anthropological research of food focuses, besides the techniques, traditions and ritual practices, also symbolic functions and their interactions within culture. In other words, I had to visit the other shore of cultural anthropology, the symbolic and interpretative anthropology, such as the works by Clifford Geertz (10), Victor Turner (11), and by Mary Douglas referred to above. Geertz was by far the most important symbolic anthropologist, the only in his generation to pay attention to the findings of the literary science. By the end of his life, he became skeptical about intercultural understanding and he consequently demanded more effort in learning about other cultures and more involvement in diversity. Geertz observed culture as a system of symbols and meanings shared intersubjectively by the society; the symbols themselves are not the main object of research, the important thing is what they say about the culture they are part of as a generally transferable and recognizable element. For Turner, symbols generate social processes and are important factors – depending on the sequence and context, in changing relations, which adapt to the norms.

„Social drama“ is a concept, which Turner developed to explain social changes and continuities (12). His work was mainly oriented towards researching of liminality in the rituals of passage. This notion was introduced by Arnold van Gennep in his seminal work (13). Turner's concept of „social drama“ has been revived in the contemporary theory of drama: ritual performativity, which he studied, revealed the domain of the symbolical in a new way, as a codification understood by the performers and the public alike, so they can both develop and change it.

Mary Douglas defined the notion of „dirty“ and elaborated an operational conceptual network of taboos. She proposed a difference between „group“ and „grid“: group is crucial to define the

position of the individual inside or outside the society, and grid to define the social role of the individual in a network of privileges, requirements and obligations. It is important for the symbolic and interpretative anthropology to seek for methodologies in other disciplines of the humanities, notably in literary science and more often in hermeneutics. This open road led to the concept that Geertz borrowed from the English philosopher Gilbert Ryle – literally „thick description“ (14). The term has been translated in different ways; I would prefer to retain the original, because it also contains a pinch of irony: a thick description aims at giving a most complete description of a culture in which we research a certain social phenomenon. With this excess of the description, the researcher, unable to identify himself completely with the native culture, admits the colonizing side of his/her own culture, and on the other hand uses the thick description to compose a map, an overview of the culture which the natives cannot recognize themselves: this is exactly Ryle's description of philosophy in relation to other disciplines, because it gives a map of concepts within the structure, which those living inside do not recognize. Plans can be read, but we do not see the spaces which we can guess through the mobility of our body and the gaze. The thick description covers well my method of research of the notions and the symbolic of cabbage, and corresponds to the dialectics of social and cultural changes in which the notions and the symbolic are inscribed. The most prominent part of the „plan“ which I can sketch when I am describing cabbage in different contexts and in historical continuity is sexuality or instability of gender definitions. The relation between sexuality and cabbage appears each time differently in a new grid of relations – privileges, requirements, obligations. Due to the fact that the object of research is not an individual, otherwise crucial for symbolic and interpretative anthropologists, nor a universally cohesive social concept (like a taboo or similar), I tried to understand cabbage as a bearer of symbols which partly preserve and partly change and destroy (forget) different assemblages of meanings. In this sense, cabbage is also a „switch“ of different symbolic flows, a switch on/off mechanism which is activated according to ruling/prescribing ideologies, discursive strategies and narrative frameworks determined by culture. Cabbage therefore cannot be a symbol of something, but a signifying transmitter which is always in transition between everyday practices as the primary object of anthropological research, and the laboratories of social and cultural changes, which are the real area of research of the symbolic and interpretative anthropology. The image which connects all of this is for me the „symbolic prism“. The thick description as methodological procedure should help here to relate all the domains where different symbolic areas in which cabbage appears are activated, with the changes, which Turner would define as social drama. The history of cabbage thus reveals changes in a highly important segment of human life...

Cabbage - the plant at the intersection of multiple formations in the languages of food, and the changing and unstable sexuality, invites us to address a wide range of questions: among the plants of huge communicational and nutritional importance in Antiquity – to mention just wheat, olive and vine (15) – cabbage shows a remarkable diversity of conflicting qualities and

practices. Such semiotic dynamism characterizes cabbage also in later history. If cabbage appears to us „poor“ in its contemporary meanings, this makes the research into its anthropological history even more appealing.

The answer to the question whether we can link „anthropology“ and „cabbage“ is therefore positive: the imaginary of cabbage, semantic history of its denominations, semiotic inventory of cabbage and its presence in rituals and cult narratives open an immense anthropological and historical field in which food, body, sex, sexuality, desire and pleasure meet and cross paths.

Ancient roots of cabbage

1. Cabbage, a European plant

Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) is a European plant growing wild mainly on sandy beaches. Humans started to grow it for food rather early, and by the end of the first millennium B. C. it was grown as a domestic plant all over the Mediterranean. From Europe, it was transported to Asia, where it made a popular food as well. In the last decades, paleobotanical research of charred remains, seeds and pollen from archaeological strata revealed previously unknown aspects of life in prehistoric cultures, and changes of natural habitats through time. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to identify soft plant tissue, although some examples of gelatinized plant remains have been found (16). The discovery of seeds on the Neolithic sites of Cevdat and Kazanluk (5300-4700 B.C.) in Bulgaria did not confirm beyond doubt the presence of cabbage: it is the *Brassica* species, but the seeds found could also be attributed to beet or black mustard (17). Seeds in Cevdat were found in situ, inside the house, which confirms their domestic use. But the unequivocal proof of the presence of cabbage in European prehistoric nutritional systems is still lacking... (18). We do know, however, that it was a popular plant with Ancient Egyptians. The information, however, is not accompanied by a certain word/name for cabbage, and the discussion on the hieroglyph in question is still open (19). If the proposed name is confirmed, it would place cabbage in the time of reign of Ramses III (12th ct. B.C.). The sources which speak about cabbage in Egyptian culture are much younger – this is a late Greek author Athenaeus (2nd ct. A.D.): „That the Egyptians were wine drinkers is clear from the habit that they were serving boiled cabbage at the beginning of the meal – they preserved this habit till today. Many add cabbage seeds to drinks to prevent drunkenness. In places where cabbage is planted between vines, the wines turn dark. Sybarites, as Timaeus says, eat cabbage before drinking.“ (transl. S.S.) (20)

This author also claims that the taste of cabbage in Egypt is worse than the taste of cabbage in Asia Minor or in Greece, and mentions that the seed transported from Rodos grows into sweet cabbage in the first year, but in a year it already degenerates and the plant becomes bitter (21). Archaeologists have found the remains that could be cabbage in the Egyptian tombs from the Hellenistic period. The Egyptian flora and fauna in texts and images was systematically described

and catalogued in Egypt and later at the University of Lyon by a French archaeologist and specialist in Egyptian scriptures Victor Loret: it is his merit that cabbage was detected in the agriculture of Ancient Egypt.

Cabbage was thus known in the whole area of the Mediterranean, but it had a very special position in the Ancient Greek cuisine. Cabbage sprouts were considered a delicacy. Although we do not know which forms of cabbage were in use in Ancient cuisine, the descriptions of tender sprouts laid on top of different kinds of food indicate something similar to Montenegrin raštan (Italian cavolo nero, English black leaf kale). We can also deduce from the descriptions that cabbage was harvested at different stages of growth. Botanists claim that cabbage truly developed in continental Europe. The early European cabbage had a high stalk and a small head, so it looked quite different from the modern cabbage with very low stalk and a huge head. The spread of cabbage throughout Europe was partly natural and partly the consequence of cultural dissemination of a useful nutritious plant. It is almost certain, it seems, that cabbage was transported to the British Isles by the Romans. There are current debates on whether the European species of wild cabbage developed from one stem species or there was some hybridization; another debate examines if the development of cabbage was conditioned by sea birds scattering seeds. The main advantage of cabbage is that it can be cultivated in small spaces and on a variety of soils, that is for the single home or family needs. Other advantages of cabbage are that it can be kept for quite a long time after harvesting, and also as a preserve.

Terminology, onomastics, etymology and semantics of cabbage in Greek and Latin offer a rich area of research. Numerous lexicological varieties keep memories of ritual formulas, while sometimes they are just remnants of forgotten meanings, which Ancient lexicographers could not grasp any more. The basic Greek forms, with a number of varieties, are κράμβη, ράφανος, καυλός, λάχανα (22); Latin forms are brassica, crambe, caulis/colis, olus (holus). There are several varieties in Italian as well, the most common being cavolo, but also capuccio (from Latin caput, „head“), composta (from Latin herba composita), French chou, German Kohl, English cabbage; in Slavic languages, composta gives kabusta (Serbian kupus). (23). Latin brassica supposedly comes from Celtic bresic, preserved in Spanish berza, with the transfer of meaning also the Slavic breskva („peach“) (24). Slovenian zelje takes semasiology from Latin holus and Greek λάχανα, and the universal term linking cabbage and „green“ has found place in other Slavic languages too. However, the direct relation between names and spread of the plant seems problematic: this becomes when we consider the theory according to which the Celts were disseminating cabbage all over Europe – the „Arian“ Celts of course (25). Jacques André for instance, claims that brassica is a pre-Indo-European name, and his claim is based on the Punic burutzim preserved in Pseudo-Apuleius 129 (26). Chantraine (27) does not give a conclusive etymology for any of the Greek names for cabbage, but thinks that ράφανος is the Attic form for κράμβη, which in its turn lost the meaning when special names for beets appeared. The root of the word was probably borrowed. Relations and unusual uses of κράμβη and other words from the same family are interpreted by Chantraine as metaphorical uses because of the pleated leaves of the plant; so Hescychius' gloss κράμβαλα: μνημεία (28) is read as „form of funerary

monument“, probably „urn“. When it comes to plants, he mentions only *Brassica Cretica*, which is known as wild cabbage still growing on Crete – and this means that he does not mention any cultivated species. Ernout-Meillet do not find any etymology for Latin *brassica* (29), but they note that there was an obscene meaning. The base *kramb-* with the same meaning is known in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. André's etymology might lead to a proposition on the African origin of cabbage, which later – also with the help of birds – spread all over the European subcontinent. The Byzantine lexicon *Suida* (39) enumerates a whole series of crucial uses and meanings related to cabbage: for instance, that it is served at the beginning of a symposium, or at its end, as a means against drunkenness, and that Egyptians had been using it for the same purpose. The story of cabbage impeding drunkenness or healing the drowsiness after drinking was obviously current in antiquity...

Metaphors using cabbage spread over a vast field of notions: from Aristophanes, who compared the mouth of a poet to cabbage because his poetry was so dry, wrinkled, cheap and lousy (31) all the way to Petronius, who in *Satiricon* 132 parodies Vergil's *Aeneid* II, 479: in a high epic style a comic hero complains that he could not achieve erection and that his penis was not harder than a stalk of cabbage... In this field of notions the epitheta are dry, wrinkled, soft, cheap, which can be used for sound as well (dry sound, dry laughter). It looks as if we are dealing here with distinct synaesthesia, the mixing of senses, which then spreads in everyday uses, depending on the social and cultural context.

Judging from the diets of which we read in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Homer did not know cabbage. The fact is that Homeric heroes, except for exotic food (*Lotophagi*, who only eat lotus, Cyclopes, who do not know wine, Circe's magic potions, blood for the shadows in the Underworld) and taboos (holy cattle, which must not be eaten by mortals) – live only on meat, bread and wine. This is a truly aristocratic diet. Those who do not eat meat, bread and wine are not human beings. Gods live on a strict diet – only nectar and ambrosia. Thus the food determines the social status of the consumer. Only with the broadening of horizons – through traveling, colonization, Persian wars and the Greek fugitives from the coastal Asia Minor – there emerged an interest for food as defining different cultures and not exclusively linked to rituals: Herodotus in his *Histories*, which mark the beginning of the European anthropology, describes the pattern of nutrition of each of the cultures he is dealing with. Ionian scientists, philosophers and also Ionian women were bringing to Athens, victorious in Persian wars, new ideas and new techniques, and also new fashion and the way of life of the rich Greeks from the cities in Asia Minor. That included complicated preparation of food, special ingredients, and other forms of sociability. Already Theophrastus, Aristotle's pupil and „father of the botany“, made the first classification of cabbage: he differentiated three species (32). Theophrastus also thought that the juice of wild cabbage had healing capacities. Medical authors follow in this belief, especially Hippocrates, recommending cabbage as a laxative, against headache and pneumonia (33). Thus Aristotle, his pupil Theophrastus and Hippocrates believe that cabbage could heal a number of health problems. Are we dealing with a belief taken over by scientists, or a verified practical knowledge? We know that Hippocrates always experimented, checking his medicaments and

practices, and described the results, especially if they differed from case to case. Maybe Aristotle says more in point than the others: in his writings, he is critical to mythological explanations and narratives, rituals do not have importance for him. In his work *Problemmata*, which is a collection of questions and answers, he asks why cabbage heals headache (34). The reasons given are from medical practice, where cabbage is an important laxative, and from the definition of cabbage as „cold“. When a man suffering from headache eats cabbage, the cabbage juices descend into the lower part of the body, where the wine accumulates, and the cabbage itself stops in the stomach and refreshes the body. Wine is „warm“ and emanates a sort of steam, which goes up in the head causing headache or drowsiness. The cooling effect of cabbage works in the opposite direction and prevents headache. Headache is worse than drunkenness, although with headache the man keeps control over himself... The reason lies in the difference between warm and cold: when we have high temperature, we do not feel pain, when the temperature is gone, the pain is back (35). The use of cabbage as a medicine, mentioned by Ancient authors, gives some information about the society: beside healing wounds and scars, cabbage was recommended in healing headache and gout, which were the ailing of the upper classes. The most extensive text on the medical use of cabbage was written by the Greek surgeon Pedonius Dioscorides, in service among the Romans, healing Nero's soldiers (36). Dioscorides excelled in linking his Greek knowledge and his Roman practice. His work was never forgotten, because the Byzantines and the Arabs were using his texts, so he was much better known than, for instance, Hippocrates and his work. Dioscorides wrote extensively on cabbage. He discerns four species and always presents the Roman use of cabbage. For him, cabbage is one of the most efficient healing plants. He even allows for a mixture of cabbage and wine: this „impossible“ mixture is prescribed by Dioscorides in case of snake bite. Although Dioscorides was a military surgeon, which means that his patients were men, he mentions several times the appeasing and healing effect of cabbage in case of painful or irregular menstruation. Generally, the uses of cabbage as food in Ancient cultures are better known when related to upper classes. Peter Garnsey is one of the rare researchers of Ancient nutrition who stresses the endemic famine and undernourishment in the Ancient world (37).

His study on Ancient food is in fact the only one bringing forth precious anthropological data, acquired from archaeological research of graves: they witness of the consequences of diseases, short life span and bodily malfunctions caused by famine and malnutrition.

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Notes:

1. Harris, M., *Good to Eat. Riddles of Food&Culture*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1985, p. 15: »For my part, I do not wish to deny that foods convey messages and give symbolic meanings. But which come first, the messages and meanings or the preferences and aversions?«
2. Harris, M., *ibidem*, p. 248: »This is why this is not moment in history to advance the idea that foodways are dominated by arbitrary symbols.«
3. Goody, J., *Cooking, Cuisine and Class. A Study in Comparative Sociology*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 24.
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