

**Food in World History:
Guidelines for short paper assignment #3: What did they eat?**

Investigate the contents of someone's meals in the past.

This assignment is built around using primary sources. Find some historical document or documents that tell us what some person or group of people ate. The source itself should not be a book about food. It might be a diary, a travel account, an inventory or account book, or a menu. You may use a work of fiction, provided it was written in the time being described. Ethnographies are also acceptable, but if the ethnographer has already analyzed eating practices, I do not want you simply to regurgitate the analysis.

The point is to ferret material out that will help reconstruct a meal, or food preferences, or food sources and methods of provision, for a particular time, place, and person or group of people, then to use this for your own historical analysis. Here are a few that might work:

What did Samuel Pepys eat in London in the 1660's?

What did Korean peasants eat under Japanese occupation in the 1920's?

What appeared on the banquet table of the Tokugawa shogun in the 18th century?

What did they eat for breakfast at Versailles?

What did Union or Confederate soldiers survive on at the front? How did it get to them?

What did Proust like to eat beside madeleines?

What might you have been served at Washington's finest restaurant in 1900?

Royals and aristocrats may work well, since their daily lives are generally well documented.

Once you've found some morsels, set them in historical context. Tell us what it meant that sailors in the Royal British Navy atehardtack and drank ale, or that an early 19th-century Frenchman ate roasted turkey, etc. This is likely to require that you also do a little secondary reading around your primary text. The *Cambridge History of Food* and the *Oxford Companion to Food* may have some leads for you. But it is just as likely that some historical work about the person or period but not specifically about food will prove valuable.