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Meat and its Meaning: Foodways in Late Medieval London, 1350-1500

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Black Death which decimated as much as half of the English population in its initial outbreak had a more positive consequence: an increase in meat availability and consumption, especially for those previously denied it. [1] This economic trend has been well-attested by historians and social scientists for decades. Wilhelm Abel's ground-breaking research into late-medieval Germany illustrated the higher level of meat production and consumption in 'an age of low population and deserted villages after the Black Death'. The later work of Fernand Braudel similarly asserted that from 1350 to 1550, there was favourable increase in living standards where meat 'abounded in quantity and variety' beyond the elite table.[2] More recently, Chris Woolgar has identified this period as transitioning from an economy where 'increasing amounts of meat, to the point of excess, might be available, at least some of the time'.[3] Using this apparent upsurge in meat-eating as context, this paper will assess both the abstract ideas surrounding the foodstuff in the late Middle Ages while also employing London as a case study to ascertain the involvement of meat in experiences of urban life. Thus, the paper's analysis will aim to address what meat *meant* to the city-dweller and in the broader medieval consciousness – in both literal and symbolic senses – by considering the following: (1) What social mores, attitudes, debates and patterns of eating (or 'foodways') existed around meat consumption? (2) How did meat present, interact and function within the physical and sociocultural landscape of late-medieval London? (3) Did late medieval meat consumption really reflect an improvement in living standards following the Black Death, as commonly asserted by historians? By drawing these three strands together, this thesis aims to demonstrate and advance the case that meat and its various connotations were a central feature of medieval identities and intimately entrenched in the character of the late medieval city, but not entirely reflective of a post Black Death change for the better.

Meat is of particular interest in this study because of its enduring significance in both late medieval, and indeed modern food cultures, certainly taking on a more prominent role following the dramatic societal upheaval of the mid-fourteenth century.

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[1] R. Horrox (ed.), *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 3.

[2] S. Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*, 2nd edn (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 44-47.

[3] C. Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England 1200-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 66.

However, in existing works on medieval food, meat has warranted perhaps a chapter or two or the occasional article but has rarely been the sole subject of an entire historical study. Of course, this is not to deny the more extensive work on meat and its meanings in the social sciences with works such as Nick Fiddes' monograph *Meat: A Natural Symbol* reflecting the efforts of sociology and anthropology in particular. Yet even these studies have until more recently been focused on either past non-European cultures or the modern day; often more abstract and less historically grounded in scope.[4]

Hence the need for a study of this kind to not only synthesise previous approaches and works into a coherent discussion of meat in fourteenth and fifteenth century city life, but also to reiterate meat as having meaning far beyond its ability to nourish. As we shall witness and explore in greater detail, meat was (and is) continually embedded in a complex series of sensibilities regarding health, status and morality among many others which will be explored in further detail. Of course, this cultural power could be said of any ingredient and in our late medieval context, David Stone seems entirely justified in deeming grain as 'towering over any other foodstuff' – at least in a quantitative sense – comprising the majority of calorific intake for villein and noble alike.[5] However, a vital distinction between the role of grain versus meat has been posed by Mark Dawson. While grains were a mundane 'food of necessity', meat was very much the 'food of choice', more revealing of medieval preferences and desires in dietary lifestyles.[6] In other words, meat was in essence more special. Furthermore, meat as a concept possessed a unique ambivalence and dual-character. For example, while officially condemned by early monastic rule and frequently paralleled with carnal sin, meat was conversely and simultaneously held in high social esteem as a material aspiration for the poorer classes as well as being regarded as a key staple of nutrition. In assessing paradoxes of this kind throughout, this paper also hopes to illustrate how the meaning of meat was constantly subject to great tensions, contradictions and double standards.

Late medieval London serves as the geographical focus of this study because

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[4] P. Caplan (ed.), *Food, Health and Identity* (Oxford: Routledge, 1997), xi, 1-28

[5] D. J. Stone, 'The Consumption of Field Crops in Late Medieval England' in Woolgar, C. M., D. Serjeanston and T. Waldron (eds.), *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.

[6] M. Dawson, *Plenti and Grase: Food and Drink in a Sixteenth-Century Household* (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2009), 82.

of its greater and more thorough documentation as well as its position as a key trading centre, administrative capital of the kingdom and the most populous city in England – approximately 50,000 following the Black Death.[7] While the City of Westminster and City of London comprised separate localities in this period, this study will consider them together in its discussion of the urban environment. For all intents and purposes, the immediate areas around the official boundaries of London will also be considered as part of the metropolitan whole. Given that towns seemed to enjoy a greater concentration and variety of meat in comparison to its hinterlands and the wider countryside, a study of meat is best placed in this urban experience and the life of the medieval city-dweller.[8] This is further justified by the fact that the high and late Middle Ages were 'the period of most intensive medieval urbanisation'.[9] Moreover, the lack of self-sufficiency in the towns – the inability to feed themselves – made the trade in food all the more prominent, therefore worthy of analysis, relying on imports and the provisions of the surrounding regions.[10] This thesis will consider meat as grouped into three broader systems of meaning, which will be analysed in turn. Chapter 1 will address meat in relation to religion, morality and spiritual health. Chapter 2 will consider meat in regards to class, status, wealth and trade; in a way more geared towards the socioeconomic realities of London life and social conventions more generally. Chapter 3 will focus on meat and its often damaging role in the collective environmental welfare of the cities. Given these various contexts, the work that follows draws from a range of source material including monastic *regulae* and customaries, medical and culinary recipes, contemporary fiction, legislation and some recent archaeological evidence. In particular, this paper will make use of the detailed official records of London affairs. These include the City of London Letter-Books, Plea and Memoranda Rolls, the Assize of Nuisance and various memorials of London life. Of course, there are immediate difficulties with the late medieval source material relating to urban food culture. The relative scarcity of sources compared to more modern histories threaten an imbalance in social representation. That is, many accounts we have of households, cookbooks and grand feasts inevitably pertain to the societal elite. Furthermore, a majority of the

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[7] M. Murphy, 'Feeding Medieval Cities: Some Histroical Approaches' in M. Carlin and J. T. Rosenthal (eds.), *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe* (London: Hambledon, 1998), 119.

[8] Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, 45.

[9] R. J. Magnusson, 'Medieval Urban Environmental History', *History Compass*, 11 (2013), 190.

[10] M. Carlin, 'Fast Food and Urban Living Standards in Medieval England' in Carlin and Rosenthal (eds.), *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe,* 27.

source materials concerning London provide the formal, official records of food production and consumption. This would seem to limit us to a top-down perspective with little room or ability to assess medieval introspection on meat eating and the more subjective issues of taste. However, attempts can be made to overcome this. For example, while primarily legal texts, the London collections provide a far more complex picture of the presence and role of food, including meat, in the city if read in a certain way. In reflecting the various activities of London victuallers for example, especially butchery, these official documents can demonstrate not only the economic and financial elements of the late medieval meat trade – including prices, location and operation of markets – but also its environmental implications and consequences for public health and city infrastructure. Indeed, the role of butchers, cooks and poulterers provides the best vantage point through which to gauge the presence and distribution of meat in London, and will therefore feature heavily in this discussion. When compounded with the other sources, more universal rather than London-specific, this kind of reading gives further weight to the idea that late medieval meat was never *just* about meat.

At this point, it is worth briefly considering the language adopted in this study and how we can place the semantics of 'meat' in their proper historical context. Until around the fourteenth century, 'meat' was essentially synonymous with any kind of nourishment and thus not necessarily the same as flesh.[11] Inevitably, this definition of meat will be narrowed to mean the flesh provided by animals. Even this category, as we will soon realise in our analysis, became further differentiated between quadrupeds and birds given the conscious distinction in much medieval theology between four-legged creatures and birds, with the latter conceived on a different day of Creation.[12] A similar division was apparent in how butchers and poulterers comprised separate specialised professions in the medieval world and will thus be treated as such. While meat has been invariably connected with dairy – contemporarily termed as 'white-meats' – it has not been possible to address this in as much detail given the limits of word count, with milk and cheese perhaps meriting a thesis of its own.[13] The same omission applies to the role of other animal by-products such as wool, tallow and leather. These all comprised subsidiary trades stemming from the management of

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[11] N. Fiddes, *Meat: A Natural Symbol* (London: Routledge, 1991), 3.

[12] Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England*, 6.

[13] P. Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005), 42-43.

livestock intended for food and thus can appear only briefly if at all in our discussion of meat's commercialisation in the city.

While attempting to draw out the intricacies of meat in particular, this study has benefited from and contributes to a well-established body of work around both medieval diet and understandings of the medieval city. Food and urban life have been popular areas of research for some time and have undoubtedly offered valuable insight into daily life in the Middle Ages. Discussions of dietary lifestyles and medieval towns date back to works of antiquaries and enthusiasts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and some later).[14] With diet, this earliest tradition would tend to focus on collections of medieval recipes – such as Samuel Pegge's compilation and editing of *The Forme of Cury* – and the lavish feasts and banquets of the medieval elite.[15] This was perhaps reflective of of how high dining and the records of the noble household are where the greatest concentration of culinary sources lay. While accounts of outlandish and eccentric feasts have undoubtedly entertained us and form much of our popular image of medieval dining, they raise this issue that most sources of this time reflect the habits of the upper classes. Moreover, later works of this kind, such as Edward Mead's *The English Medieval Feast* (1930), that were once accepted as the key authority on medieval diet, have now become somewhat discredited. His unsubstantiated claims and faulty assumptions such as that much meat was heavily spiced by crooked cooks as a means of obscuring its spoiled flavour have led to these criticisms.[16]

Perhaps to distance itself from these more aristocratic histories of food, and the symbolic elements of feasts, a twentieth century tradition of social and economic historians considered food in relation to factors such as living standards, wages, demography and agricultural statistics.[17] In effect, this scholarly shift saw a return to the mundane and arguably a more inclusive and universal picture of medieval dietary patterns. (examples) Later developments in the mid to late twentieth-century took a more qualitative outlook, revisiting the symbolic potential of food, viewing it as embedded in cultural systems of meaning, assessing its role in everyday life and the

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[14] 'Introduction' in C. M. Woolgar, D. Serjeanston and T. Waldron (eds.), *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 3-4

[15] K. Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain Through Its Cooking* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 56-57.

[16] Carlin and Rosenthal (eds.), *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe,* 101-102

[17] Woolgar, Serjeanston and Waldron (eds.), *Food in Medieval England*, 3-4.

medieval experience. As Woolgar outlined in his recent work *Culture of Food in England 1200-1500,* the aim of the cultural historian of medieval food was to redress an academic balance as 'historians have underplayed the cultural aspects of food in contrast to [socioeconomic] examinations of its production and provision'.[18] Around this 'cultural turn' in the humanities and social sciences, the concept of 'foodways' emerged – taken here to mean the intersection of cultural, social and economic practices relating to food production and consumption; the culture and tradition underpinning historical understandings of food.[19] At a similar time, the 'material turn' also had a profound impact on dietary and urban studies with understanding of medieval towns transformed by a wealth of archaeological discoveries from the postwar period onwards, though published analyses of animal remains to assess dietary patterns only really took hold from the 1970s onwards. Nevertheless, this new source material complemented the wide variety of textual evidence pertaining to medieval towns and was again indicative of a growing interdisciplinarity at this time.[20]

More recently still, there has been a renewed interest in studies of environmental history and the development of physical spaces: a trend that this work will certainly continue in its consideration of urban surroundings as the setting for meat and its cultural reception. Additionally, in continuation of the later methodologies relating to diet and urban life above, the paper will employ 'foodways' as an analytical framework to explore the late medieval meanings of meat. This will ensure that our study into late medieval food culture and city life recognises the interplay between the economic, social and cultural in the formation of behaviours in relation to food.

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[18] Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England 1200-1500,* 4-5

[19] J. Darnton, 'Foodways: When food meets culture and history', *Michigan State University Extension*, https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/foodways_when_food_meets_culture_and_history [accessed 16 February 2019].

[20] G. Rosser (ed.), *Towns in Medieval England – Selected Sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 1-3.

CHAPTER 1: RELIGION AND MORALITY

Given that what and how one ate continually came with a 'high moral and spiritual charge' in the Middle Ages, it seems only right to devote an entire chapter to the relationship between meat and religion – perhaps the most prominent marker of medieval identity and lifestyle.[21] We shall begin by assessing how meat was originally conceived by a variety of theoretical stances in early Christian theology, specifically its definitional debate, its perceived moral dangers and the importance of abstinence in diet while also referring to the ambivalent relationship between faith and medicinal views. To assess these themes in the later medieval period, we will consider how notions of sin and virtue around meat manifested in daily life and religious observance, for laity and clergy. To follow, we will specifically consider the presence of meat in the monastic lifestyle, exploring the discrepancies between official religious rule and the realities of consumption and will focus specifically on the Benedictines at Westminster Abbey to root this in our broader study of meat in London.

The *Rule of St. Benedict*, the sixth-century text that served as an influential and longstanding monastic model for the medieval West, clearly stipulated that 'all abstain entirely from eating the flesh of four-footed animals'. While there is little explanation of any intrinsic negative quality of flesh-meat itself in the text, the *Rule* made frequent condemning parallel between meat consumption and 'over-indulgence', stating that 'frugality shall be observed in all circumstances'.[22] The argument here then was a moral and spiritual one, drawing inevitable connections between food and sin, specifically gluttony and lust – 'pleasures of the flesh'. While there may have been variation amongst early Christian writers on this matter, the virtue of abstinence and corrupting influences of food appear to have been widely held in theology, albeit in subtly different forms. Bazell has identified that this moral case for abstinence from meat and resisting excess more generally, was on the rationale that 'bodily discipline [was] an effective means of training the soul'. Moreover, as a 'potent and forceful stimulant of lust', the resistance of meat was an implicit expression of sexual restraint.[23] One need only look at meat's etymology (*carnis*) to recognise an explicit

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[21] Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England*, 6.

[22] Benedict of Nursia, *St. Benedict's Rule for Monasteries*, trans. by L. J. Doyle (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1948), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/50040/50040-h/50040-h.html [accessed 17 March 2019], 58.

[23] D. Bazell, 'Strife among the Table-Fellows: Conflicting Attitudes of Early and Medieval Christians toward the Eating of Meat', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 65 (1997), 76.

connection with carnality and sexuality.[24] Meat and sexual imagery continued as a common theme even in later works and literature with a highly apparent biblical influence. Specifically, the episode of the 'original sin' demonstrated Eve's apparent embodiment of flesh, sensuality and gluttony towards the forbidden fruit. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* also made comparison between women and meat, albeit through reflections on his characters. For example, The Merchant's Tale character January states 'tender veal is better than old beef' in explaining his preference for a young wife.[25] Thus, theological understandings of meat were ultimately focused on the benefit or harm to the immaterial state of the body, with Christianity in essence regarding modesty and restriction in diet as fundamentally righteous.[26]

Yet, we must not regard these foundational Christian views of as wholly negative towards *meat* per se. Indeed, these original strictures over meat seemed to have been concerned less with what was eaten but rather in what quantity and manner; a view expressed by Augustine whose theories on dietary discipline were more focused on 'appetite for *any* food' rather than 'elimination of specific impurities'.[27] This being said, later medieval social commentaries such as that of the mid-fourteenth-century alliterative poem *Wynnere and Wastoure* negatively employed meat as a typical expression of immoral excess. The piece presented a dialogue that reflected the various socioeconomic problems under Edward III's reign, with various references to food as part of lifestyle. The 'Winner' voiced the interests and traits of the rising mercantile class – the 'new rich' – wealthy through strong work ethic, financial prudence and frugality. The 'Waster', conversely, represented younger nobles and perhaps more widely the military class, relishing in pomp, decadence and self-indulgence, freely spending and squandering their estates on a life of luxury.[28] While the 'Waster' frequently attacked his opponent's miserliness and apparent lack of charity, the 'Winner' mocked and expressed disgust at the vast amounts of rich food, especially meat, at the Waster's table. He claimed 'It tortures my heart to see the board o'er-spread with blazing dishes' of 'bucktails full broad…venison with the fruments,

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[24] Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England*, 6.
[25] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales (Oxford World's Classics)*, ed. and trans. by D. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 249.; Carlin and Rosenthal (eds.), *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe* (London: Hambledon, 1998), 23.
[26] Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England*, 6.
[27] Bazell, 'Strife among the Table-Fellows', 79-80.
[28] I. Gollancz (ed.) *A Good Short Debate Between Winner and Waster* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1974), preface.

and pheasants full rich.' There was an array of both flesh-meat and birds on this noble's table, with enough to provide every guest with 'six men's share'.[29] The fact that *meat* had been effectively singled out as the main point of contention in this scene demonstrates its literary meaning, at least, as an epitome of gluttony and hedonism, above any other foodstuff. In a similar vein, albeit more clerical in tone, the writings of Dominican preacher John Bromyard regarded the pattern of elite consumption as 'lavishly wasteful, commenting in particular on the visual demonstration of wealth through food, with meat made especially prominent in this.[30] (tensions) While seemingly critical, even damning, of the vices associated with meat, this kind of moralising discourse against greed and dietary excess was contradicted by social conventions around wealth, with explicit visual displays of grandeur practically expected of the rich. Here there is a clear tension between issues of faith versus issues of social class and power around meat – a complication that we shall revisit.

As we have seen, resistance of meat was theoretically a psychological and spiritual undertaking, not merely a physical act – with bodily wellbeing apparently supplementary to that of the soul. However, the religious meanings of meat were not without complications, as we have seen their apparent tensions with ideas around wealth. While understandings of spiritual health and physical health were largely inextricable from one another, meat did reflect some divergence and difficulties raised between the two concepts. Many late medieval dietetics were governed by understandings of the four humours according to Galenic theory, and while condemned by the Church for its sexual potency, meat's 'hot' and 'moist' elemental properties were interpreted more positively in medical works, useful for promoting fertility and combatting male impotence.[31] This might even implicitly have introduced connotations of meat with masculinity and virility more generally. In this way, meat's carnal properties had two seemingly opposed meanings – one morally compromising and one empowering. In addition, the apparent readiness to incorporate flesh-meat and animal by-products into contemporary medicine reiterated its beneficial properties for physical health. Various fourteenth-century medical recipes, for example, heavily

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29 Ibid., lines 325-367

30 Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England*, 177.

31 C. M. Woolgar, 'Group Diets in Late Medieval England' in Woolgar, C. M., D. Serjeanston and T. Waldron (eds.), *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 198; Bazell, 'Strife among the Table-Fellows', 77.

relied on animal fats for both healing properties and cosmetic purposes. One collection in its prescribed 'ointment for wounds' instructs 'Take virgin wax and fresh sheep's fat [tallow], and honey and May, butter and old swine's grease'. A later remedy to 'make the face white and soft' required 'fresh grease of a swan, and hen grease and the white of an egg roasted'. In addition, potions for sleep often included 'the gall of hare', alternatively boar or sow.[32] Despite the apparent concerns over vice, even the Benedictine rule actively conceded and prescribed that 'the use of meat be granted to the sick who are very weak, for the restoration of their strength' while also excepting old men and children from the 'rigor of the Rule with regard to food'.[33] Therefore, there was an acknowledgement of meat as a necessity, even beneficial, revealing another underlying tension; in this case, between the divine implications of meat and its physical medicinal attributes.

Despite this conceptual conflict, the interrelationship between faith and meat resonated well into the later Middle Ages not least in the religiously determined dietary cycle of feasting and fasting. This pattern of observance dictated a ritual avoidance of meat on Fridays, Saturdays and Wednesdays as well as on saint's days, during Lent and Advent - times in which fish would often serve as substitute.[34] The fact that these periods of late medieval fasting typically concerned denial of meat and dairy suggested that these foods were still imbued with great spiritual concern. Moreover, this pattern allowed meat to symbolically serve as a permanent structure in the medieval calendar, even framing the medieval experience of time. This 'important gastronomic rhythm' coupled with that of seasonal availability demonstrates how meat's status and consumption were both spiritually and agriculturally determined – defined by temporal factors.[35] Bruce Campbell has even highlighted how the these two determinants of meat eating were brought together with the Church's instruction of ritualised feasting and fasting making a 'Christian virtue out of economic necessity'.[36] Even the London meat and fish markets operate along religious lines with mayoral rulings from 1360 dictating that 'fishmongers should have their stalls in the place aforesaid for the sale

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[32] 'Medical recipes of the fourteenth century', *English Historical Documents – Volume IV,* 1191-1193.
[33] Benedict of Nursia, *St. Benedict's Rule,* 55.
[34] C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c.1200 -1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.
[35] I. Mortimer, *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England* (London: Vintage, 2009), 168-169.
[36] B. M. S. Campbell, 'The Land' in R. Horrox, and W. M. Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England 1200-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 181.

of fish on fish-days, and butchers their stalls for the sale of meat on meat-days'. However, disputes still emerged at this time over the butchers rights to sell meat even on fast-days and on the eves of religious festivals, with one petition complaining that they had been effectively ousted from their stalls by the fishmongers contradicting ancient custom.[37] While certainly contentious, these controls nonetheless illustrated the intimate link between the religious significance of meat, and its denial, and the urban commercial world. Overall, despite the supposed expansion of meat consumption as a result of the demographic changes of the Black Death, it was still very much kept within religious and seasonal boundaries – more suggestive of continuity rather than mass improvement from conditions before 1350.

Of course, levels of observance likely differed according to order and rank; more influential in the monastery than for the general consumer for example. Woolgar has estimated that a typical secular noble household would abstain from meat for around half of the year in total whereas clerical households extended this further.[38] Despite this continuity, the morality around meat was by no means static throughout the Middle Ages with the monastic diet in particular having diverged from the original Rule of St. Benedict. Indeed, the prescribed vegetarianism of the Benedictine model was effectively undone by a papal constitution on diet in 1336, permitting the consumption of meat on four days of the week. Perhaps as a consequence, growing concerns over monastic excesses spurred a literary and satirical tradition, mocking the hypocrisy of the luxurious lifestyles of those who apparently avowed themselves to poverty.[39] Geoffrey Chaucer's literary portrayal of the Monk in *The Canterbury Tales* epitomised the increasing laxity towards the earlier Benedictine regime, as the character 'let old precepts slide' with his love of hunting and appetite for 'fat roast swan'.[40] The preference for swan here alludes to the great definitional debate and confusion over meat amongst medieval theologians with Benedict's forbiddance of flesh from quadrupeds implicitly permitting that of birds.[41] Since the Rule provided no all-encompassing category of meat, it likely allowed for a great deal of interpretation

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[37] 'Folios xci - c: March 1360-1 –', *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: G, 1352-1374*, ed. by Reginald R Sharpe (London, 1905), *British History Online* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/volg [accessed 2 February 2019].

[38] Woolgar, *The Culture of Food in England*, 7.

[39] M. Heale, (ed.), *Monasticism in Late Medieval England c.1300-1535* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 17.

[40] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, 7-8.

[41] Bazell, 'Strife among the Table-Fellows', 82.

in diet – a flexibility that the late medieval monks appeared to use to his great advantage. While certainly a caricature, Chaucer's social commentary here acknowledged that the dietary habits of the late medieval clergy were far more liberal than their predecessors. William Langland similarly expressed criticism of the 'four orders of friars preaching to the people for the benefits of their bellies'; another clichéd image of the corpulent and decadent monk.[42] Of course, we must be cautious in our use of literary sources, both here and throughout. While they undoubtedly had meaning beyond the fictional characters presented on the surface, they nonetheless reflected an author's individual agenda and to take their writing as 'proof' would be incorrect. Moreover, the works of the prominent medieval writers – Chaucer, Langland, Gower – tended to reflect the perspectives at court level, those of an intellectual and societal elite. Conversely, their utility is derived from the social commentaries they provide and their reflection of various societal norms and behaviours, perhaps even with a 'London-oriented view' that we can use to our analytical advantage.[43] These texts' use of food in particular as a form of characterisation is particularly telling of meat's place in the later medieval existence.

To assess the presence of meat in the late medieval monastic diet more closely and whether such literary characterisations as above had weight, we will specifically focus on the customaries of Westminster Abbey – a religious community of great significance and connections in the city. Barbara Harvey's detailed studies of the monks of Westminster Abbey have revealed their substantial consumption of meat products and fish, estimated at around 47% of total food expenditure per annum, valued at £271.[44] Indeed, much of the abbey's interaction with city life came as a consumer as well as through charity and almsgiving. Their substantial purchase and use of meat and fish, as well as other foods, brought decent custom to the tradesmen of the City of London as well as those in the more immediate vicinity of Westminster. As such, Harvey has asserted that the monastery served as a key contributor to the urban economy. From this we receive the impression that the monks dined heavily with their level of meat consumption frequently compared by Harvey with that of the

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[42] William Langland, *Piers Plowman (World's Classics)*, ed. and trans. by A. V. C. Schmidt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2.

[43] M. Ormrod and P. Lindley (eds.), *The Black Death in England* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 11.

[44] B. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100-1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 37.

nobility and upper gentry.[45]   Recent archaeological studies of monastic skeletal remains have noted the prevalence of various 'occupational diseases', such as Forestier's disease, associated with conditions such as obesity and diabetes. Gilchrist and Sloane have drawn clear links between these findings and the rich diet of meat and dairy among the Westminster Benedictines.[46] Related research on monastic skeletons from other London monasteries – including Merton Priory, Bermondsey Abbey and St. Mary Graces – reflects a similar picture whereby monks aged over 45, compared with their secular counterparts, were approximately 'five times as likely to develop obesity-related joint disease'.[47] Of course, this is not proof that monks died from overindulgence in meat, but their apparent higher frequencies of weight-related disease certainly suggests a lifestyle distanced from the Benedictine ideal; reflecting yet another double standard towards meat. Of course, the dietary practices of Westminster Abbey still retained a certain decorum, considering eating meat as irregular and thus physically isolated consumption of it to the misericord, as opposed to the refectory where all other regular food was permitted.[48] Nevertheless, the quantity consumed and various expedients to evade certain religious restrictions on diet imply that meat was simultaneously treated by clergy with suspicion and fondness.

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[45] Harvey, *Living and Dying in England,* 1-6.

[46] R. Gilchrist and B. Sloane, *Requiem: The Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain* (London: Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2005), 212-213.

[47] M. Whittock, *A Brief History of Life in the Middle Ages* (London: Robinson, 2017), 107.

[48] Harvey, *Living and Dying in England,* 51.

CHAPTER 2: WEALTH, CLASS AND TRADE

Despite the apparently plentiful supply of meat following the Black Death, this trend did not have a total equalising effect. While no longer a luxury monopolised by the rich, the quantity, quality and type of meat consumed continued to demarcate wealth and social standing, even reinforcing hierarchy, as expenditure on meat inevitably corresponded to one's status.[49] Therefore, to explore this with greater nuance, this second chapter will address the relationship between meat and social class in terms of disparity between elite and poorer diets, traditions and expressions of wealth and economic restrictions and representations of wealth. All of this will be considered in tandem with the trade in meat, specifically through the presence of butchery in the capital – the primary provider of meat.

London presented a complicated picture because as well as being densely populated, the city was socially diverse housing both the very affluent senior clergy and nobility alongside the very poor in addition to a substantial and varied mercantile class. The city's social stratification was thus greatly distanced from the more simplistic tripartite model of society – peasantry, clergy and military – with an increasingly prosperous and specialised commercial group differentiating it from the traditional agrarian hierarchy.[50] Indeed, the dichotomy between apparently sensible yet selfish merchants and libertine feckless aristocrats in the *Winner and Waster*, as discussed above, is obviously a simplification. The same applies to polarisation between urban laity and clergy. Indeed, there was substantial overlap as we have seen with the Westminster monks whose outward social emulation of high secular society – conscious or otherwise – perhaps revealed how class could supersede faith in certain aspects. Also, this pattern is a call to not regard laity and clergy as separate in the city. Given this complexity, the food demand of the capital was both immense in scale and variety, in accordance with drastically wide-ranging tastes and incomes.[51] This range reminds us that the urban lifestyle and experience, especially with regards to obtaining and consuming meat, was by no means homogenous.

The effects of the Black Death certainly lessened the contrast between the foods of aristocratic households and the wider populace and witnessed a shift in what

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[49] Dawson, *Plenti and Grase:* 82.
[50] Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages,* 20-22.
[51] Murphy, 'Feeding Medieval Cities', *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe,* 119-120.

meats became more common. Elite anxieties over newfound accessibility to meat were clearly reflected in the sumptuary law of 1363 which aimed to control and limit the consumption of meat for grooms and servants to once a day 'according to their estate'.[52] The short-lived nature of this legislation though perhaps revealed that meat had become too widely available to be an effective means of social control and exclusion. In addition to amount, elite diets were also differentiated by a preference for younger animals – such as veal and lamb – enabled by a specialist urban trade in finer meats.[53] Moreover, we cannot overlook the reservation of various animals for meat for hunting – a further form of social exclusivity, effectively restricting the consumption of game, hares, deer and boars for example to the monarchy and nobility. Phythian-Adams has identified hunting grounds as areas of 'highly specialised rituals' around meat, with a strictly sequenced pursuit and killing of the animals. The meats were effectively rendered high-class by the fact that they were gifted among and within the elite rather than sold commercially.[54]

This link between meat and noble ritual was also apparent in other practices. Chaucer's Squire as having 'carved before his father at the table' reflects a few possible interpretations of meat and its symbolism.[55] First, and perhaps most obviously, is the idea that the skilled preparation of meat was traditionally the remit of vassals, servants and kitchen staff – in essence, social inferiors – and reflected a willing servitude. Indeed, carving of meat was a conventional household duty of many medieval squires. However, as an alternative to ideas of servitude, this scene perhaps alludes to meat as a marker of masculine respect, familial bond and perhaps inheritance. The carving of meat serves an acceptance that the squire may assume the responsibilities of the knight at some point. Moreover, the carving of the lord's meat in particular provided exclusive invitation into his inner circle, allowing one 'to attend the festivities after dinner'.[56] In this way, preparing meat might be seen as both an expression of subservience and of higher rank; even an opportunity for social mobility.

Of course, these practices related to the elite minority and realising the

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[52] "A sumptuary law (against excessive apparel), 1363', *EHD – Volume IV,* 1153-1154.
[53] Woolgar, 'Meat and Dairy Products', 101.
[54] C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ritual constructions of society' in Horrox, and Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, 374.
[55] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales,* 5.
[56] C. Taylor, 'The Squire' in S. Rigby (ed.), *Historians on Chaucer: The 'General Prologue' to the Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 64.

perspectives and attitudes of the urban poor has proven challenging, due to the social concentration of the source material in the experiences of the elite. Langland's critical depiction of the 'beggars hungry for handouts [bustling] about eagerly until their stomachs and their scrips were stuffed to bursting' with their 'guts gorged' portrays a sense of increased wellbeing for even the poorest in later medieval society; indicative of dietary improvement to the point of gross excess.[57] However, a more realistic route of insight into the lower social classes of the city is through analysis of London's 'fast-food' business and the prevalence of cookshops. This vending of 'fast-food', as Carlin contends, was in fact intended to serve the urban poor especially given their lack of cooking equipment and facilities.[58] Moreover, it seemed that meat – as prepared and marketed by cookshops, piebakers – comprised a great proportion of London's developing service economy 'catered especially to visitors and travellers'.[59] In contemporary literature we receive an impression of London's sale of hot meats of this kind at street level with Piers Plowman's vision of the city cooks crying 'Hot pies, hot pies!' or the calls of the victuallers of 'hot sheeps feet' and 'ribs of beef, and many a pie' at in the fifteenth-century poem *London Lickpenny.*[60] Both illustrated the availability and immediacy of warm ready-made meat products, presumably for instant consumption.

Inevitably, price was a major determiner of access to certain meats in spite of falling food prices and wage increases during the later half of the fourteenth century.[61] Pork was habitually the meat of the poorer man and peasantry with many townspeople keeping pigs of their own as we shall see in the following chapter.[62] On an even lower level than this was offal – likely the cheapest option of meat for the poorest.[63] Though as obtainability widened, beef became more common fare with London's heightened demands requiring mass transportations of cattle from surrounding counties to the city markets. In essence, London's surrounding lands or 'outer ring', including the counties

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[57] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* 2.

[58] Carlin, 'Fast Food and Urban Living Standards in Medieval England', 27-32.

[59] M. Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), 173.

[60] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* 7; 'London Lickpenny, early 15th century' in *EHD – Volume IV,* 1079-1080.

[61] M. E. Mate, 'Work and leisure' in Horrox and Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, 285.

[62] Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England,* 28.

[63] C. Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain, 850-1520* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 314.

of Kent and Essex, were devoted to servicing the city's needs and feeding its population.[64] This is not to say however that meat became entirely affordable, with high pricing as another major point of contention with the city's butchers. The sale and cost of lambs in particular came under fire with a series of complaints in 1376, for example, that 'butchers sold lambs at too high a price, viz., 18*d.* and 20*d.*' The subsequent ruling by the mayor and aldermen was that the butchers 'would not sell their best lambs for more than 10*d.* and others for more than 8*d.*, under penalty' – a decision reinforced by a later 1384 ordinance capping the maximum sale price of lamb at 8 pence. Overpricing was even punishable by jail as, for instance, Richard Bole, a butcher, was 'committed to prison for asking too high a price for his meat' in a 1392 sentence – by no means an isolated incident.[65]

In correlation with the increase in meat availability and consumption, there was a 'boom' in butchery from the late fourteenth century onwards. Indeed, Rosser has raised the claim that the demand and growing prosperity of butchers at this time was enabled by 'personal living standards [rising] in proportion to losses in population'.[66] In line with Rosser's evidence from medieval Westminster, Carlin has made similar claims about the 'rise in butchering at Southwark' from the mid-fourteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries.[67] As the Black Death rendered 'much more livestock available per capita', there was a stronger trade in livestock which subsequently supported the expansion and specialisation of urban butchery.[68] Geographically, the butchers were almost exclusively based at three sites: Eastcheap, The St. Nicholas Shambles and The Stokkes.[69] The market and stalls at Stokkes, where meat was chiefly sold in London, were contained in a permanent stone building as opposed to the more minor, temporary street markets. The same arrangement was made for Poultry and Leadenhall markets, also dealing in meat products. These fixed staples of London trade illustrated the degree of control from the municipal authorities over the

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[64] Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England,* 38-39.

[65] 'Folios li - lx: Nov 1376 –', 'Folios clxxxi - cxc: Sept 1384 –' and 'Folios ccxxi - ccxxix: Oct 1387-', *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H, 1375-1399,* ed. by Reginald R Sharpe (London, 1907), *BHO,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/volh [accessed 2 February 2019].

[66] G. Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200-1540* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 138, 242.

[67] Carlin, *Medieval Southwark,* 185.

[68] C. Woolgar, 'Meat and Dairy Products in Late Medieval England' in C. M. Woolgar, D. Serjeanston and T. Waldron (eds.), *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 90-91.

[69] 'Folios xci - c: March 1360-1' in *CLB: G*, ed. by Sharpe (London, 1905), *BHO*

relationship between food and urban space, dictating not only the strict locations of markets but also their business hours, pricing and food quality.[70] Furthermore, the sheer complexity of the London market system and the fact that 'there was no single market for most commodities' here reflected the sheer scale of food provision, and by implication meat consumption, in the city.[71] We might also conclude that the permanency of the meat market physically entrenched the food in the physical layout and geography of London. In terms of toponymy, the various place names accorded to meat sale and trade in London, and similar larger towns, reflect the influence of meat on the urban geography. 'Poultry' and the derogatory 'Bochersbrigge' (Butchersbridge) in London, are but two examples of this.[72]

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[70] Hammond, *Food and Feast in Medieval England*, 42-43.

[71] R. Britnell, 'Town life' in Horrox, and Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, 138.

[72] 'Folios ccxxi - ccxxx: Feb 1368-9-' in *CLB: G*, ed. by Sharpe (London, 1905), *BHO*

CHAPTER 3: URBAN ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Medieval towns have been continually framed and stereotyped as areas of squalor, filth and disease – an image given further weight by the devastation in the wake of the Black Death.[73] This description certainly bears some truth though we must recognise that the issue of environmental welfare was not overlooked by late medieval city authorities. Indeed, the substantial sensibility to unsanitary urban conditions and the unclean associations of meat – both before slaughter and after – reveal a great deal.[74] This chapter will therefore focus on meat's environmental impact and implications for the safety of the city surroundings. Specifically, this section will evaluate three major urban nuisances linked to the meat trade: swine management, food poisoning and the harmful practices of butchers, especially in pollution of the city's waterways.

Nick Fiddes has termed meat a 'natural symbol', reflective of a raw power and human dominion over nature.[75] Conceptually, the eating of meat does imply a supremacy and order; a 'standardised worldview' of control and leadership over the natural world, consolidated in Christian belief and theology.[76] However, here there is another contradiction in framing the meaning of meat. While the actual farming and killing of animals for food suggests control, the difficulties in managing urban swine apparently running errant presented a different impression. The co-existence of humans and animals, both livestock and domestic pets, was a reality of late medieval London life as cattle, horses and pigs had a 'continual presence' in the city, not least in the urban markets.[77] Indeed, as Rosser has suggested, the demands for meat from Westminster Abbey and Palace 'sufficed to populate the meadows of Westminster with cattle, sheep, and pigs in droves'.[78] Pigs are of particular interest here given that they were kept exclusively for pork – providing no other by-products such as wool or milk – and seemed the most problematic for city living. Thus, we are presented with two images of the pig: one as an economic commodity and agricultural product vital to food

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[73] Magnusson, 'Medieval Urban Environmental History', 189.

[74] G. T. Salusbury-Jones, *Street Life in Medieval England* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975), 72.

[75] Fiddes, *Meat: A Natural Symbol,* 2.

[76] A. Pluskowski, 'The zooarchaeology of medieval 'Christendom': ideology, the treatment of animals and the making of medieval Europe', *World Archaeology*, 42 (2010), 201.

[77] D. Jørgensen, 'Running Amuck? Urban Swine Management in Late Medieval England', *Agricultural History*, 87 (2013), 430.

[78] Rosser, *Medieval Westminster,* 138.

production, the other as a 'notoriously damaging' urban hazard if roaming free.[79] London ordinances from 1278 explicitly proclaimed:

> 'that no pig be henceforth found by the streets or lanes of the City or suburb, nor in the ditches of the City; and if found they shall be killed by whoever finds them, and the killer shall have them without challenge or redemption for 4 pence from the owner. Whoever wishes to feed his pigs, let him feed them in the open away from the King's highway [or] in his house, under heavy penalty'[80]

However, various subsequent records in the London Assize of Nuisance revealed the continued threat and damage posed by city swine. A case from 1365 saw a baker, Gilbert Lyrp, accused of failing to prevent his 'various animals', including oxen, cows and pigs, from 'constantly break[ing] down the walls' of his neighbours, with their excrement apparently rotting the foundations. In the same year, William Baldewyne, a tanner, 'entered into a bond of £100 to the Commonalty that he would not in future rear pigs in the City' having also paid a fine of 20s. and made to remove his pigs from the City of London.[81] Even certain attempts to curtail pigs from wandering the streets were themselves brought before the Assize. Complaint was made, for example, against a John de Besseville for his construction of 'pig-sites and privies above the [Walbrook] watercourse' apparently to the detriment and 'damage of the whole City' and its water supply.[82]

The apparent comfort of hot readily prepared meat products – with cookshops in essence providing medieval equivalents of a take-away – had a more dangerous meaning too.[83] There was a certain awareness of the threat of food poisoning at the hand of meat victuallers. For example, a 1365 charge against poulterer John Russell,

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[79] Jørgensen, 'Running Amuck', 429-430.

[80] 'Folios 110b - 135b', in *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: A, 1275-1298*, ed. by Reginald R Sharpe (London, 1899), pp. 207-230. *BHO,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/vola/pp207-230 [accessed 2 February 2019].

[81] 'Roll A 10: (ii) 1365 ', in *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London: Volume 2, 1364-1381*, ed. by A. H. Thomas (London, 1929), 29-50. *BHO,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/plea-memoranda-rolls/vol2/pp29-50 [accessed 21 March 2019].

[82] 'Misc. Roll. FF: 3 Aug 1358 - 2 Feb 1369 (nos 502-549)' and 'Misc. Roll DD: 5 Nov 1339 - 15 Dec 1346 (nos 349-399)' in *London Assize of Nuisance, 1301-1431: A Calendar*, ed. by H. M. Chew and W. Kellaway (London, 1973), *BHO,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol10 [accessed 21 March 2019].

[83] R. Holt and G. Rosser (eds.), *The Medieval Town – A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540* (London: Longman, 1990), 79.

accused him of selling 'thirty-seven pigeons unfit for human food', confirmed by a group of piebakers and cooks. Consequently, Russell was sent to the pillory whereby the offending meat was burnt beneath him – the standard punishment for such crimes.[84] An earlier London case in 1348 saw the questioning and subsequent punishment in the pillory of John of Renham – and an apparent accomplice Agnes la Ismongere – 'for they had exposed for sale, in divers places in the City of London, putrid and stinking meat; in deceit, and to the peril of the lives, of persons buying the same, and to the scandal and disgrace of the Mayor, Aldermen, Sheriffs, and all the Commonalty, of the city aforesaid'.[85] What is immediately apparent in these types of cases is that they are treated as a *city-wide* shame and threat to public health and dignity. Indeed, the fact that sentencing of the perpetrators of rotten meat, such as those above, were attended by 'an immense number of the Commonalty' reflected the extent of popular outcry.[86] Rather than isolated cases causing illness in a few customers, the practices of selling 'carrion' was regarded as a systemic issue that threatened to bring the traders in meat into disrepute, affecting individual health, collective health and status and reputation. Thus, improper practices around meat were deemed a far-reaching issue, with both physical and symbolic consequences for the city.

From a more literary perspective, cooks were regarded in a similar vein to the butchers – as they too were purveyors of meat in some form. The Host's condemnation of the Cook in the *Canterbury Tales* illustrates a number of common accusations around the profession:

> 'many's the stale pasty, drained of gravy, and warmed-up Jack of Dover pie you've sold, that's been twice hotted up and twice left cold'…
> 'Many's the pilgrim who has been worse for the parsley stuffing in your fatted goose, and has called down upon you heaven's curse, because your cookshop's always full of flies'… [87]

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[84] 'Folios cxxx - cxl: Sept 1364 –', *CLB: G*, ed. by Sharpe (London, 1905), *BHO,*
[85] 'Memorials: 1348 – Punishment of the Pillory for selling carrion' in *Memorials of London and London Life in the 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries*, ed. H T Riley (London, 1868), 240-244, *BHO,* http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/memorials-london-life [accessed 2 February 2019].
[86] Ibid.
[87] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales,* 112.

There was of course a factual basis to this cook's alleged reheating of pies and pastes – typically containing meat – to the detriment of public health, as this crime was certainly reflected in a number of official complaints. One petition from the guild of cooks itself in 1475 demanded that 'no one of the craft shall bake, roast, or boil flesh or fish two times to sell, under penalty' – chastising those individuals who had attempted to disguise putrefied meat as fresh produce.[88] This is not to say that all cooks should be regarded as indicative of the negative consequences of meat in the city as we must show awareness that the actions of a minority damaged the reputation of the entire profession, with the petition above likely a conscious desire of the gild to disavow themselves from the criminals usurping their trade. Nevertheless, we might claim that while increased purchasing power and access to meat might be viewed as positive and socially uplifting, it was clearly fraught with physical dangers. Interestingly, the Cook here had a contradictory portrayal, with Chaucer acknowledging his culinary skill – 'he could roast, and seethe, and boil, and fry' – while also reflecting his lack of hygiene.[89] Perhaps the purchase of meat in the city was met with similar mixed feeling.

In the cities in particular, butchers seemed to attract great derision on legal, moral and environmental grounds – a 'constant bone of contention' with the municipal authorities.[90] Many of the efforts for urban sanitation in London seem to have been directed at the public nuisance and 'present abuses' of butchers.[91] As Rosser has asserted, 'butchering was a recognised challenge to health in all towns, and all borough courts attempted to regulate it.'[92] Various writs, petitions and ordinances condemned their practices of 'carrying offal through the streets to the river' and casting it in, as well as 'the noisomeness arising from butchers…throwing entrails on the pavement'.[93] Some responses to this included orders during the reign of Richard II which forbade 'the slaughtering of beasts by butchers within the City' and later dictated that 'entrails of beasts were not to be thrown into the Thames'. This issue of meat waste disposal was clearly a continual problem and threat to the city however given that around eighty years later, Edward IV issue a similar writ to the mayor and sheriffs of London 'to keep

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[88] 'The offences of cooks, 1475', *EHD – Volume IV,* 1101-1103

[89] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales,* 12.

[90] Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, 241-243.

[91] 'Folios cxxx - cxl: Sept 1364 –' in *CLB: G*, ed. by R Sharpe (London, 1905), *BHO*.

[92] G. Rosser (ed.), *Towns in Medieval England – Selected Sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 187-188.

[93] 'Folios xxi - xxx: Sept 1354 –' and 'Folios ccxli - ccli: Jan 1369-70-' in *CLB: G*, ed. by R Sharpe (London, 1905), *BHO*.

the river free from filth, under penalty' – explicitly reiterating the earlier legislation of the 1390s.[94] The butchering industry was also attached to a series of subsidiary urban trades in other animal products, with skinners and tanners posing similar environmental threats, as their waste was also freely dumped in the Thames.[95] These close connotations between meat and illness were engendered by the 'dangerously close proximity' of the animal trades' sewage and drinking water.[96] This entire challenge to the public and environmental health of the city was further complicated however by realising the necessity of the butchery trade. There had to be some exemptions made to ensure that the city was well catered with meat. Thus, various pieces of legislation made allowances such as that the proclamation forbidding the slaughtering of animals in the city did not apply to the butchers of Eastcheap and The Stokkes. Similarly, for the St. Nicholas Shambles, there was the threat of 'arrest and imprisonment of any one found disturbing the said butchers and their servants in execution of their duties' as they were granted a new 'suitable locality' for depositing entrails by city authorities.[97] What we see from this is an ambivalence and uncertainty towards meat and its associated trade. Indeed, there was an awareness that meat as a substance was an environmental pollutant as well as a spiritual one. Yet as with the medical concessions made by the religious view, the impact of meat was perhaps again regarded as a necessary evil; an unavoidable occupational hazard for a craft that was integral to keeping the city fed. Additionally, while limitation of meat waste in the waterways was vital for public welfare, it also incurred additional costs for the butchers in turn increasing meat prices with various petitions made against ordinances forbidding slaughter in the city grounds complaining that the restriction meant 'the price of meat had been unduly enhanced'.[98] Thus, management of meat in the city was in this sense a precarious balancing act between environmental improvement and affordability. As with the cooks, the butchers embodied a double standard and their apparent role in the urban world was simultaneously beneficial and harmful. Moreover, the legal responses to these health risks revealed how meat – figuratively speaking –

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[94] 'The dumping of rubbish in the streets and the Thames, 1472', *EHD – Volume IV,* 1101-1103
[95] Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, 147.
[96] Whittock, *A Brief History of Life in the Middle Ages*, 114.
[97] 'Folios xxxi - xl: Feb 1354-5-' and 'Folios cclxxxi - ccxc: Sept 1371-' in *CLB: G,* ed. by R Sharpe (London, 1905)*, BHO.*
[98] 'The dumping of rubbish in the streets and the Thames, 1472', *EHD – Volume IV,* 1101-1103

was a channel through which to exercise municipal control for the sake of peace and order.[99]

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[99] Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, 314.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the question of what meat *meant* to medieval people, especially those in the cities, is a highly subjective one. Given the boundaries of this thesis, it has not been possible to provide a comprehensive narrative of meat in the medieval world, with each chapter worthy of an entire thesis in its own right. Nevertheless, this work has provided various interpretations of medieval meat and its societal presence by presenting a selection of contemporary concerns and considerations, ranging from the less tangible and conceptual to the more practical. Clearly, there was no single meaning to meat and the attribution of multiple meanings simultaneously was entirely possible, even when subject to enormous tensions contradictions and double standards. While early theology touted the virtues of abstinence and moral dangers of meat and its sensuality, it was accepted even actively prescribed as physically nourishing and restorative. Similarly, both religious and secular condemnations of excess and gluttony – often focusing on meat in particular – were counteracted by the desirability of meat and aspiration to a rich diet, with the Westminster monks in particular mirroring the dietary lifestyle of the gentry and nobility. A further contradiction was that while meat, including the rearing and commodification of animals and trade in livestock, was an implicit expression of dominion over animals, the urban nuisance of pigs demonstrated a more uncontrolled element. In addition, the vilification of butchers for their pollution of the rivers and streets with their waste was balanced with the acknowledgment that they were integral to the provision of food for the city; an urban necessity whose harmful waste disposal was in some ways merely regraded as an inevitable and unavoidable by-product. On many levels, it would seem that meat was highly problematic both spiritually and physically for the medieval population and yet continually desired with *elective* vegetarianism as a rarity.

In regards to 'foodways', meat served to connect various aspects of medieval (city) life. One example of its interconnected nature might be that the trade in meat via butchery had an adverse effect on the city environment and public health which in turn incurred a legal response that, in restricting the butchers, drove up prices. Another is that of the Westminster monks who as well as being a prominent religious community, were a substantial consumer whose demand ensured ample provision of reared animals for meat. Through the lens of meat, economy, power, environment and religion were all interrelated. Moreover, meat was central to the character of London, and cities

more generally, in its shaping of and presence in various urban spaces. Meat indirectly affected the waterways, albeit as a pollutant, while also forming much of the produce in the cookshops and markets, to name three.

Finally, we can attempt some conclusion over the role of the Black Death in improving living standards. As Jim Bolton has warned, measuring standards of living for the late Middle Ages has been a 'notoriously inexact science' owing to the sparse and highly interpretative evidence base, and meat alone cannot be a gauge of improved life quality given the plague's multiple other consequences.[100] Nonetheless, it is clear meat consumption remained subject to physical and immaterial restrictions and we must thus be cautious of a tendency to assume and even overstate the idea that the wellbeing of medieval townsfolk improved dramatically from the 1350s onwards. The Black Death had an undeniable role as an agent of socioeconomic and cultural change but meat, specifically *good* meat, was still highly prized. Meat was as ever a matter of seasonal produce and availability with yields in the countryside having a knock-on effect for the towns and cities. Also, the fact that meat even posed a physical danger to the city population somewhat undermines the notion of social improvement. This is of course in addition to the restrictions of class and religion.

Perhaps the one constant we can draw then is that meat and its meaning(s) were frequently contentious and conflicted.

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[100] J. Bolton, 'The World Upside Down' – Plague as an Agent of Economic and Social Change' in Ormrod and Lindley (eds.), *The Black Death in England,* 55.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BHO	British History Online
EHD	English Historical Documents
PMR	Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London
AN	Assize of Nusiance
LA	Liber Albus
LB	Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London
MLL	Memorials of London and London Life