

## **A Tale of Two Families in Fin-de-Siècle Paris**

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Recent work using data on wealth and revenues has, once again, drawn attention to the salience of economic and social inequality in France during the Belle Époque. While research on the implications of these findings for the standard of living, health, life expectancy and so on, are well under way, studies on food practices barely train their focus on disparities between workers, employees and the bourgeoisie.

The shortage of studies on food consumption across the social classes owes nothing to disinterest and much to the dearth of quantitative sources. Turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century France has no surveys that clearly identify their subjects. In order nevertheless to open up an angle on the social differences in food consumption, this paper circumvents the obstacle posed by the absence of large-scale quantitative inquiries by offering an ethnographic description of food consumption in two families. A member of the Le Play school of sociology collected data (income and outlays) on an artisanal family while a statistically-inclined upper-level civil servant dressed an account of his household's revenues and expenses. Both sources date from the 1880s, describe the family composition, and provide a comprehensive list of food purchases.

The description of their consumption differences mobilizes three registers: a first step consists in establishing the food repertoire to gauge the issue of monotony vs diversity in the dishes on the respective tables; the second step looks at the nutritional aspect of the diet in order to assess energy content and uneven access to nutrients (most notably, of course, animal protein); the third step combines insights gained in the analyses of repertoire and diet with the prices paid for the foodstuffs in order to get a clearer picture of the cost and quality of eating (most notably the differences in the prices paid for such basic foodstuffs as bread, wine, and meat).