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Food and Cravings/Desires

‘Craving Identity: Irish Diplomatic Dining’

Abstract

For centuries, food has been used by nations to display wealth, cement alliances, reinforce power hierarchies and to impress, not only the local population but in particular, foreign visitors. From medieval times to the warring factions of Renaissance Italy, through the gargantuan feasts of Louis XIV and Catherine de Medici, the coronation of Charles I and the French banqueting campaign of 1847, food has defined the social, cultural and political position of a nation’s leaders (Baughman, 1959; Young, 2002; Strong, 2003; Albala, 2007, 2011; De Vooght and Scholliers, 2011).

After eight centuries of British rule, the Irish Free State emerged in 1922 as a new constitutional being and entered a political landscape which had itself undergone significant transformation as a result of revolutions in agriculture, social structure, transport and politics. Starting in the 1920s, this paper will examine how Irish leaders established diplomatic protocol and ceremony around important guests and visiting dignitaries by focusing on three state events: the Eucharistic Congress (1932), the visit of American President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1963) and Queen Elizabeth II (2011). The paper will explore how the meals were devised, how issues such as venue, invitations, menu creation and table settings were decided, and how orders of procession and seating arrangements were laid down. It will also examine policy regarding the use of Irish food. The paper will further examine the material culture of Irish State dining in terms of the tableware, linen, silver and glassware used by the State and the transmission of Irish material culture to Irish missions abroad.