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BOOKS

Meals on the move

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Moveable Feasts: the incredible journeys of the things we eat_

Sarah Murray *Aurum Press*, 336pp, £10.99 ISBN 1845132343

Most of us know about how food is whizzed around the globe these days in order to satiate a market that demands mangoes in December and strawberries all year round. Yet this is nothing new: evidence suggests that, even in Roman times, food was sent on treacherous journeys to satisfy the appetites of the wealthy.

In an account that reads more like a history book than an environmentalist tract, Sarah Murray examines various food transportation schemes that have made the headlines, from the Berlin aircraft food-runs that secured a cold-war victory to the dabbawalla lunch system in India and the compact meals that sustain US troops on the front line.

While civil-war soldiers may have chewed on sowbelly, modern-day battlefield nourishment has come far, with one proposal in the pipeline claiming to deliver nutrients through the skin, much like a nicotine patch.

Murray argues that the trend for equating the distance travelled by food with damage to the environment does not provide an accurate picture of its carbon footprint. It is frequently transported by sea, using carbon-efficient vessels. And bearing in mind our appetites, it is unrealistic to think that food transportation can simply be abolished.