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The Belly of Paris: The Food Supply behind Parisian Gastronomy

How did Paris become the Western capital of gastronomy? One critical factor was its unique system of food supply, with a highly centralized central market established in the twelfth-century at Les Halles, where it remained until 1970, when the last of the markets moved to Rungis.

Economics played a role in its establishment because the bourgeois who controlled the waterways wanted to insure that they tolled every product arriving by riverboat. Because France is geographically composed of a network of rivers, its capital could receive products from throughout the kingdom and even beyond from an early date. As a centralized capital with an international population that rivaled no other on the Continent, Paris evolved a gastronomic culture to match.

This illustrated lecture will examine the history of Les Halles from its establishment until its present-day incarnation at Rungis, with an emphasis on how the market influenced the development of Parisian gastronomy, from the invention of restaurants to that of food journalism. It will also examine how the market shaped the city's culture more generally as evinced through Émile Zola's 1873 novel, *The Belly of Paris*, and other sources.