

## RESEARCH

# Food Policing in Early Modern Danish Towns

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This article explores the efforts of early modern authorities to provide food security in three different Danish towns in order to understand the goals and methods of early modern food policing. As in other European countries, urban authorities were expected as part of the regulation called 'the police' to control the guilds and fix the prices on bread, meat, beer and other life necessities in order to avoid scarcity among the urban poor. In 1682–83 the Danish king established a police force in Copenhagen and the other market towns. The goal of the metropolitan police was to increase the population of the capital and thus increase the military-fiscal power of the absolutist state, by providing food security and even a comfortable life. In practice, the vigilant policing of bakers, butchers and brewers proved difficult. The positive economic effect of food policing was doubted early on and was reduced as a means to avoid food riots at the end the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In a major provincial market town like Aalborg, the food trade was policed in a similar manner by the town council and the police, but especially the intermediate trade proved difficult to stop. In a tiny, agrarian market town like Sæby, food policing was more a question of feeding the poor with the town's own products.

**Keywords:** Food-provisioning; Early Modern Period; Denmark

## Introduction

Urban food security was one of the core concerns of the early modern police, as Steven Kaplan has shown in his studies of the policing of the grain trade and the bakers in 18<sup>th</sup> century Paris. According to his studies, the food trade was policed for two main reasons. First of all to avoid famines due to scarcity and price rises in the early modern subsistence economy, where most of the income of the households was spent on food. Secondly to avoid food riots, because of a constant sense of insecurity and tendency to believe that shortages were not caused by bad harvests, but by speculative traders. Food riots were also fuelled by the notion called 'moral economy' by the English historian E. P. Thompson; the idea that it was the moral obligation of the authorities to keep the market supplied with a sufficient amount of foods at a just price and of a good quality. The authorities would failed to do so, would be accused of plotting with rich merchants to starve the poor (Kaplan, 1982; Kaplan, 1984; Kaplan, 1996; Thompson, 1971).

The notion of moral economy also existed in early modern Denmark as a deep-rooted scepticism towards merchants and 'unchristian' profit seeking (Henningsen, 2008). As Lars Henningsen has shown in a study of grain trade regulation during times of dearth in Southern Jutland 1698–1847, food riots did not occur until the 1780s, when the government became reluctant to harm the agrarian

economy with export bans and price regulation. However, in the politically turbulent 1790s, this liberal policy of laissez-faire was abandoned to avoid food riots and wasn't resumed until the 1830s (Henningsen, 1981). The absence of serious food riots in Copenhagen in the period 1789–1820 has also been ascribed to government intervention in the provisioning of foods and other life necessities (Blüdnikow, 1986: 7–12).

This article is a contribution to the understanding of food policing in the early modern period from the viewpoint of a police historian. In it I present some examples of how food was policed in three different Danish towns during the early modern period and discuss if the regulation differed according to the size and the status of the town. It is my assumption that such differences in food policing could reveal basic differences in the rurality and self-sufficiency of the towns, which would be expected to be greater in smaller towns (Elkjær, 2008: 283). The three cases are the capital Copenhagen, where the population grew from 41.000 in 1672 to 100.975 in 1801, the largest provincial town Aalborg, where the population went from 4181 to 5579 inhabitants in the same period and one of the many small market towns Sæby, where the population dwindled from 670 to 517.

## The early modern concept of police

To understand food policing in the early modern period, it is necessary to understand the early modern concept of police. Unlike today, the word 'police' did not refer to a body of policemen responsible for the maintenance of law and order. The word derives from the ancient Greek

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**Figure 1:** Location of the three towns (map drawn by the author).

word *politeia* and entered the European languages in the Renaissance through the works of Aristotle. The early meaning was very broad. In continental Europe the term ‘good police’ (Danish: *god politie*, German: *Gute Policey*, French: *bonne police*) referred to the good, public order and the good government and constitution of a town or a state. In a more narrow sense ‘the police’ referred to a specific legislation—the so-called police ordinances—and the police matters they regulated. The police concerned everything from religious observance to prostitution, gambling, taverns, public security, extravagant festivities, vagrancy, sanitation, the maintenance of streets and bridges, the water supply, fire prevention and the regulation of the guilds and the trade, including food provisioning. (Maier, 1966: 116ff; Knemeyer, 1978; Simon, 2004: 111–120; Iseli, 2009).

In Denmark the word ‘politi’ was used for the first time in the town law of Christian II from 1522. In article 81 the burgomasters and aldermen of each market town were ordered to come to Copenhagen each year “to do police” about “circumstances and defects” in their towns and tell the king about their decisions (Andersen, 1991: 76). Before this time, this type of by-law was known as ‘circumstances’ (Danish: *Vilkår*, German: *Wilküre*), as they dealt with new problems related to urban life that were

not covered by customary law. Typical problems were sanitation and fire hazards due to population density, but most important was the moral regulation of the new market economy, including restrictions on luxury consumption at weddings, funerals and other feasts that threatened the subsistence of the households (Jacobsen, 1991: 415–420).

A recent study of royal police ordinances in Early Modern Sweden by Toomas Kotkas, shows that almost two thirds of this legislation dealt directly with the economy such as the regulation of agriculture and the urban trades (Kotkas, 2014: 40, 59–71, 99–100, 131–150). Among German-speaking historians, it has been discussed, whether the motive behind the many royal police ordinances was to discipline the subjects in order to increase the power of the emerging state, or meet the demands of the subjects for welfare and security (Iseli, 2009: 115–135). Studies of contemporary discourses about ‘good police’ show a gradual change of motives during the early modern period. In government treatises of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the goal was solely to maintain an established moral and social order threatened by new disorders. However, in the mercantilist writings of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a political economy emerged where police ordinances became seen as a way to increase the power of the state and the general welfare

(Simon, 2004; Kotkas, 2014: 21–33, 189–208). Other studies of the enforcement of the police ordinances on a local level show that even during absolutism this legislation was adapted to local circumstances and needs (Landwehr, 2000; Iseli, 2003; Holenstein, 2003).

The Danish police ordinances has been studied by the legal historian Ditlev Tamm, who has edited a register with a total of 3297 Danish police ordinances as part of a German research project on the early modern police ordinances (Tamm, 2008). Tamm puts great emphasis on luxury and confessional disciplining, but the stated aim of the 'police' in the earliest ordinances is to improve the economy of the realm and especially the towns. In the Copenhagen Recess from 1537, Christian III orders peasants in the countryside to plant pots and orchards, arguing that the realm would be fertile enough, if 'good order and police' prevailed as in other countries (Kolderup-Rosenvinge, 1824: 186). This passage shows that the king wanted his realm to be self-sufficient, and was motivated by dynastic competition. It is also clear that police was predominantly about the promotion of the towns and the market economy. The preamble of the Copenhagen Recess from 1540 states that the king has consulted representatives from the towns about the widespread violation of urban trade privileges, in order to improve the police of the realm and preserve the market towns (Kolderup-Rosenvinge, 1824: 198). In the important Kolding Recess from 1558—known as *the Recess*—the burgomasters and aldermen of the market towns are ordered to maintain 'good order and police' in the market towns 'so that there would be skilled artisans, and each could get for a reasonable price pots, salt, steel, cloth, boots, shoes and other things, that the inhabitants of the land might need, and ought to be for sale in the market towns' (Secher, 1887: 38). From this it can be concluded that the 16<sup>th</sup> century idea of 'police' is close to the concept of 'moral economy'—the obligation of the authorities to provision the market with goods and services at a 'reasonable' price.

In the early period 'police' also related to the tradition of republican government in the towns. In the dictionary *Glossarium Juridico-Danicum* from 1641, 'Politij' is defined as 'the government of ordinary burghers in the market towns' (*gemeen Borgerlig Regimente i Kiøbstæderne*). The term 'borgerligt regimente' or 'regimen civitatis' refers to a rule based on the consensus of the burghers (Schreiner and Meier, 1994). A good example of this is a set of police ordinances or 'vilkår' for the market town of Randers from 1609. According to the title page, the burghers have of their own free will, agreed with the town council to submit themselves to these rules issued in accordance with the Kolding Recess from 1558 (Kousgaard Sørensen and Meyer, 1965: 33). However, during the reign of Christian VI (1588–1648) the tendency to centralize the police legislation began, which was to culminate in 1682, when Christian V appointed a police master to enforce the royal police ordinances in Copenhagen. The focus of the new police was on Copenhagen and especially the capital's supply of bread, meat and beer.

## Feeding the capital

As most market towns Copenhagen possessed a common that provided pasturage and milk for the inhabitants. In 1795, as many as 2202 horses and 1427 cows lived inside the town gates (Matthiesen, 1924: 19). However, to feed a city the size of Copenhagen, provisions had to be brought in from far way. Most of the grain and meat came from the islands of Zealand, Lolland and Falster, but the capital was also provisioned with goods from further away such as salted herring from Aalborg or salted lamb from Iceland (Callisen, 1807: 370ff.).

In order to avoid scarcity, the food trade was regulated in the earliest town laws of Copenhagen. In the town law of Eric of Pomerania from 1422 only residents are allowed to buy from the peasants at the market until 10 a.m. where a flag would be hoisted. There was an iron collar on the market place to punish forestallers, who had been found guilty in intermediary trade (Danish: *forprang*), which was thought to raise prices (Hjorth-Nielsen, 1926: 27). Price regulation is first heard of in the town law of Christopher of Bavaria from 1443, which contains penalties for bakers who bake bread of a lesser weight than ordained by the municipal authorities, in accordance with the actual price of grain (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD I: 171). The Copenhagen Recess of 1540 contains such a scale, whereby the price of bread and beer is fixed in accordance with the prices of grain and hops. The Recess also fixes the salaries of different occupations, so that a carpenter and a mason could afford six kilos of rye bread a day, whereas a day labourer could only buy three (Ladewig Petersen, 1981: 144–147). A set of municipal police ordinances from before 1590 contains the first known tariffs on bread, beer and meat. The bakers and the brewers are ordered to provide bread and beer of a good quality and sell it in accordance with an annual tariff set by the town council in accordance with 'the times'—the annual harvest yield and prices on hops and grain. The town bailiff and the treasurer were to control the shops of the bakers each week, while the brewers were to control the quality of the beer among themselves in turns. The intermediary trade with fowl, bread and coal by female pedlars (Danish: *hokersker*) is strictly forbidden. Those who use false weights and scales are to be flogged at the market place (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD II: 440–447).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Crown took an increased interest in the development of the capital. Christian IV was involved in the policing of the capital such as urban planning, the establishment of trading companies and manufactures and the regulation of the guilds and prices. An example of his involvement in food policing is, when he threatened to imprison the town bailiff for his passiveness towards female bread sellers in the streets in 1637 (Gamrath, 1980: 53). The interference of the Crown in the policing of the capital increased with the introduction of absolutism in 1660 after a disastrous war with Sweden. In 1672, Christian V appointed a commission to consider how the prices on bread, beer and meat in Copenhagen could be reduced, as 'good police' would not only benefit 'the common man', but also promote manufactures and the commerce (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VI: 602–03). In the mercantilist discourse food policing was not only a





**Figure 2:** Dutch copper of Copenhagen from 1611 (Copenhagen City Archives). The image is free to use and available at: [http://starbas.net/av\\_ill/1/511A1611\\_4.jpg](http://starbas.net/av_ill/1/511A1611_4.jpg)

way to maintain moral order, but also a way to stimulate economic growth.

Shortly after the introduction of absolutism, work had begun on a law book to replace the regional laws. In 1683 Christian V issued Danish Law, but according to the foreword ‘changeable laws and ordinances’ ‘concerning the police’ had been left out, because the king wanted ‘the justice’ in his new law book to last forever. Instead the king had appointed a police commission in 1681 to work out a *politiordning*—a complete set of new police ordinances to be published in a separate book. The police commission worked out an impressive amount of police ordinances, but never succeeded in completing the promised *politiordning*. This is not strange given the changeability and broad scope of ‘the police’. A draft from 1711 is divided in four parts about the police concerning the realms (Denmark and Norway) in general, the countryside, Copenhagen in specific, Copenhagen and the market towns in general. The largest part concerned Copenhagen with 13 chapters about the maintenance of streets and canals, the promotion of manufactures and commerce, lanterns, watchmen, fire precaution and so on (Dübeck, 1983).

The composition of the police commission reveals the focus on the capital. Of the 11 members of the police commission, the king had appointed four from the Copenhagen town council: The president, a burgomaster and two aldermen. Today the archive of the commission as part of department of commerce is found in the Copenhagen City Archives. The commission was instructed to deal with everything concerning the police in general, but specifically how ‘this town’ could prosper

primarily by means of ordinances and privileges for the guilds, but also ordinances about fire precaution, water supply, the price of food and salaries, excessive consumption and good order in the houses and streets in and around the capital (DNAC, DC, C46C, no. 83. Instruction 29.10.1681). The commission defined the goal of making such an order in Copenhagen as a state, where the inhabitants could ‘with ease’ find food and other necessary commodities. However, to promote the manufacture and commerce even more, the commission added a mercantilist proposal to ‘populate’ the capital by a combination of religious tolerance and tax exemption for new buildings. This would increase the royal revenues and military security, because the capital was expected to defend the king, like it had during the Swedish siege of Copenhagen in 1659 (CCA, PK5, no. 1, 12.12.1681 and no. 27, 19.10.1684).

In 1744, the Danish-Norwegian philosopher Ludvig Holberg wrote that the purpose of ‘a rational police’ was to increase the population and the splendour of a town (Holberg, 1744: 246–47). In his governmentality lectures on the police, Michel Foucault mentions similar ideas about the Paris police established by Louis XIV in 1667. The police was not only responsible for ‘the preservation of life’, but also ‘the goodness of life’. According to a French dictionary, Paris had become the largest city in the world due to the perfection of the police. In other words, ‘to police and to urbanize’ was the same thing (Foucault, 2007: 333–337). In a recent study of early modern population policies, Justus Nipperdey traces the idea that the state should stimulate population growth back to

16<sup>th</sup> century Italy. The 'population police' gained ground after The Thirty Years War as a way to rebuild German states, such as the successful reception of French Huguenots in Prussia in 1685. The idea to increase the population by sanitary reforms did not emerge until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so the only way in the world of limited goods was to attract immigrants (Nipperdey, 2012). In the Danish case, the focus on growing the capital meant that population of Copenhagen more than doubled during absolutism.

According to the instruction of the police commission, in Copenhagen the town council and the town bailiff should continue to administer the police. In addition four 'under bailiffs' had been appointed in 1658 to prosecute police offenses such as underweight bread and intermediate trade (Hjorth-Nielsen, 1933: 48; Skall, 1983: 36–38). Because of the size of the Copenhagen town council, it was proposed to appoint one of the burgomasters and one of the aldermen to be responsible of the police. However, the members of the town council in the police commission wanted the commission to enforce its own police ordinances, because of the many jurisdictions such as the military and the navy, where the municipal authorities had no judicial authority (CCA, PK5, no. 4, 05.03.1682). Instead, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1682, the king appointed a 'police master' to administer the police in Copenhagen and thus created the first independent police authority in Denmark. In 1683, the police master received his first instruction authorizing him to collect fines without any preceding trial and confiscate property, but no job description (Koch, 1982: 41–42, note 73). His tasks weren't defined until 1691, where he received a new instruction that would define the job of the Danish police for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The instruction was divided into 12 chapters on religious matters, holidays, morality, vagrants, luxury, market places, streets, water supply, market trade, the guilds, fire precaution and public transport (Koch, 1982; Stevnsborg, 2010: 15–18; Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VII: 354–364). Police cases were to be settled by the police master in a police chamber at the town hall and could be appealed to a new police commission, which was to supervise the Copenhagen police. In the following I will focus on the efforts of the new police to ensure the provisioning of Copenhagen with bread, meat and beer.

### **The police of baker, butchers and brewers**

The largest part of the work of the police commission consisted in working out a new set of ordinances for each guild. The old, 'self-made' guild laws were replaced with royal ordinances for each guild, where the monopoly of the guild was reaffirmed in return for obligations to supply the market with products of a certain amount, quality and price. According to the commission 'the most important' was the ordinance of the bakers guild issued in 1683 (CCA, PK5, no. 23, 15.06.1683). In return for the protection of their privileges, restrictions on the number of bakers and the import of bread, the bakers were obliged to bake 'good bread and bread of impunity', well-baked and tasty, and not to mix wheat and rye. To make sure that the dough would have enough time to rise, the apprentices

and the journeymen had to come home on Sundays and holidays no later than 6 p.m. unlike the normal curfew 10 p.m. To prevent the poor from being wronged, every quarter-year the town council should work out at tariff on the different sorts of bread, based on the current market price of wheat and rye. In the guild ordinance a tabula, where the expenditures and profit of the bakers was included in the calculation, showed the weight of bread the consumer was entitled to get for a shilling according the market price of a barrel of wheat or rye. The police master was to search the shops of the bakers for underweight and 'incompetent' bread each fortnight and search their lofts for mouldy grain every quarter-year. The mouldy bread and grain would be confiscated for the workhouse, as it was considered good enough to feed orphans and vagrants (The bakers guild ordinance of 23.06.1683 in Hjorth-Nielsen, 1933: 79–87). On one hand, the bakers as the rest of the burghers in the capital resisted the surveillance of the new police, making it necessary to issue an ordinance against resisting the house searches of the police on April 29, 1684. On the other hand the frequent adjustment of the tariff was an improvement for the bakers, who had complained that the tariff set by the earlier commission in 1672 had not been adjusted to rising costs since then (Hjorth-Nielsen, 1933: 47). Because of the frequent price changes, on July 28, 1684, the police master was ordered to have the tariffs on bread and meat printed and posted on public places in the capital (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD, VII: 79). In his instruction from 1691 he was also ordered to make an inventory of the stocks of grain, barley and other commodities 'necessary for the subsistence' of the capital, so that potential shortages could be avoided in time. In this way the bakers' trade was to be policed on a regular basis unlike the grain trade, which would only be regulated in times of dearth.

In accordance with the German-speaking research in the enforcement of police ordinances in general, and Stephen Kaplan's studies of food policing in Paris, the actual 'police of bakers' became much more irregular and pragmatic, than the ordinances might suggest. The tariff was to be negotiated every quarter-year by the town council, the police master, four prominent burghers, the town broker, the alderman of the bakers' guild and two master bakers. This turned out to be difficult and was further complicated by the bad harvest of 1683. On the first meeting in August, it was decided to keep with the old tariff, as the harvest had not yet been threshed. In October, the town broker and four merchants delivered a proposal for a tariff, but the bakers delivered another, complaining that there was uncertainty about the price. The town council and the police master replied that they could complain to the king, but moderated the tariff in order to stimulate the grain trade and not to ruin the bakers. In January 2, 1684, the bakers applied for higher prices, but it was decided to retain the old tariff, as the king had imported a large quantity of grain the last summer. It was also decided to let the police master check the supplies of the bakers (CCA, MC1, town hall meetings 27.08, 03.10 and 11.10.1683; 02–03.01.1684). To increase the supply of grain, the king lowered the tax on imported grain, but in July he forbade the bakers to buy directly from the ships, as the merchants





**Figure 3:** Prospect of Aalborg from 1768 (After Erich Pontoppidan. Den Danske Atlas, vol. 4, København 1768). Available (and free to use) at: [http://dendigitalebyport.byhistorie.dk/koebstaeder/prospekter/1024x768/73\\_prospekt2.jpg](http://dendigitalebyport.byhistorie.dk/koebstaeder/prospekter/1024x768/73_prospekt2.jpg)

had complained about this during the negotiations about the last tariff (CCA, MC659, police protocol 17.05.1684; Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VII: 76. Royal order 01.07.1684). In this way the price of bread was negotiated and the stock of grain monitored to avoid scarcity. In 1691 the king ordered each household to store enough rye for a half year to increase food security even more (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VII: 45. Royal order 02.05.1691). In 1735 the Danish mercantilist Otto Thott proposed to establish public granaries, which would make it possible to fix the price of grain (Glamann & Oxenboll, 1983: 176). Such a system was introduced in Prussia, but despite several plans never realized in Denmark (Collet, 2010: 234–252; Christensen, 2001: 332–342, 367–394).

In the instruction from 1691, the role of the police master was reduced to enforce annual tariffs on bread, meat and beer set by the town council, and to report on the stocks of grain and barley each year. The enforcement of tariffs seems to have been irregular and triggered by rumours of rising prices due to speculation and not bad harvests, as was the case in the 1690s. In 1696 the head of the chancellery, Mathias Moth, entered the police commission and launched a campaign against a recent rise in the prices of all kinds of food. The alderman and the masters of the baker's guild were summoned for the commission and admonished to obey their guild ordinance and to bake 'good, healthy and tasty bread'. The commission checked samples of bread confiscated by the police and fined bakers whose bread was underweight, ill-baked or mouldy. As in France, the best wheat was reserved for the capital, in this case the wheat from Lolland, but the bakers complained of the grain being mouldy this year. The commission has this confirmed by the regional governor, who

sent some samples and affirmed that rain had spoiled the harvest, so the customs duty of imported grain was lifted that year (CCA, PK6, police commission assemblies 04.02–30.04.1696). Finally the police master was ordered to inquire in the shops of the bakers each morning, because most bakers continued to bake incompetent bread (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VII: 497. Royal Order 29.11.1696). This does not seem to have been implemented for long, because in his reports to the king, a newly appointed police master mentioned a series of police raids in the bakers' shops as an extraordinary measure to improve the quality of bread (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD V: 792–799. Police reports 08.03–09.08.1705). During the Great Northern War, the police master was ordered not to control the stocks of the inhabitants in order to avoid panic, but the uncertainty made him fear that the capital would run out of food in the winter of 1716 (Christensen, 1919–20: 329–331). As dearth would always be seen as the cause of human vice, it could also be attributed to lack of policing. In 1703 the king ordered the town council to consult the police commission about the annual tariff, as the current tariff was a burden to the public (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VII: 699. Royal order 06.03.1703). In 1726, the king ordered the town council to appoint two respected citizens to accompany the police officers on weekly inquisitions at the bakers and the brewers, as 'you cannot completely trust the police in these affairs' (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VIII: 680. Royal order 21.06.1726).

The butchers and the brewers were policed in a similar atmosphere of insecurity and distrust, because the basic diet consisted of bread, meat and beer. In the butchers' guild ordinance of May 5, 1683, the butchers were obliged to provide the capital with all kinds of meat at

a fixed tariff. It was strictly forbidden to sell beef from oxen below a certain weight, to mix it with the meat from cows or sell it in pieces below a certain weight. To be able to provision the capital, the Copenhagen butchers were allowed to buy cattle all over Denmark, but without the use of middlemen. In 1698, the butchers from Odense on Funen complained about the Copenhagen butchers buying up all the cattle on the island, probably because of the dearth in 1698 (Hjorth-Nielsen, 1926: 53–59, 69). In 1691, the butchers petitioned the king for a new tariff because of rising prices on cattle, and the town council was ordered to adjust the tariff to the circumstances 'some times' each year (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VII: 371. Royal order 15.12.1691). During the campaign against rising prices in 1696, the police commission admonished the butchers to sell good and healthy meat at lawful prices. The commission also fixed the price on lamb, which was not regulated in the guild ordinance, based on information from the regional governors on the cost price of lamb. When the butchers complained about the inquisitions of the police and the latest tariff, they were told to leave the guild, if they were not satisfied with the conditions. At the same time, small adjustments of the tariff in the favour of the butchers were also made, especially the price of the finest cuts of beef and calf, which was not part of the diet of the poor (CCA, PK6. Police commission assemblies 27.02–28.05.1696). The vigilant policing of the butchers did not calm the public and seemed to reinforce the distrust of the guild. In 1705 the police master wrote of an inquisition in the stalls of the butchers, that he had found nothing unlawful 'against all expectation and rumour' (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD V: 794). In 1718 the butchers were reported to sell above the tariff, but again a police inquisition disproved the rumour (Christensen, 1919–20: 352).

The importance of beer as a part of the diet in the towns, where water was unhealthy to drink, is seen in the great effort the police put into a campaign against 'incompetent beer' after the issue of the brewers' guild ordinance of March 26, 1687. The prices per barrel of three sorts of beer were fixed, so the magistracy was supposed to fix the quality of each kind of beer according to the cost of malt and other expenditures. Fearing that competition might result in fewer brewers and less beer, the brewing was distributed in equal turns among the brewers. The brewing in turns was to be controlled by an office at the guild house and to be coordinated with the customs office, so that they only allowed the right brewers to import malt, upon which there was a duty. Controllers appointed by the magistracy checked the quality of the beer and branded the barrels with approved beer, before they were delivered to the customers. The police was to prosecute and fine offenders against this intricate system, which occupied the newly established police court a lot, until the king abolished the system in 1690. It was, however, reintroduced 1739–1805 (Glamann, 1962: 99–185; CCA, MC659. Police campaign against 'incompetent' beer and not brewing in turns 11.10.1687–16.07.1689).

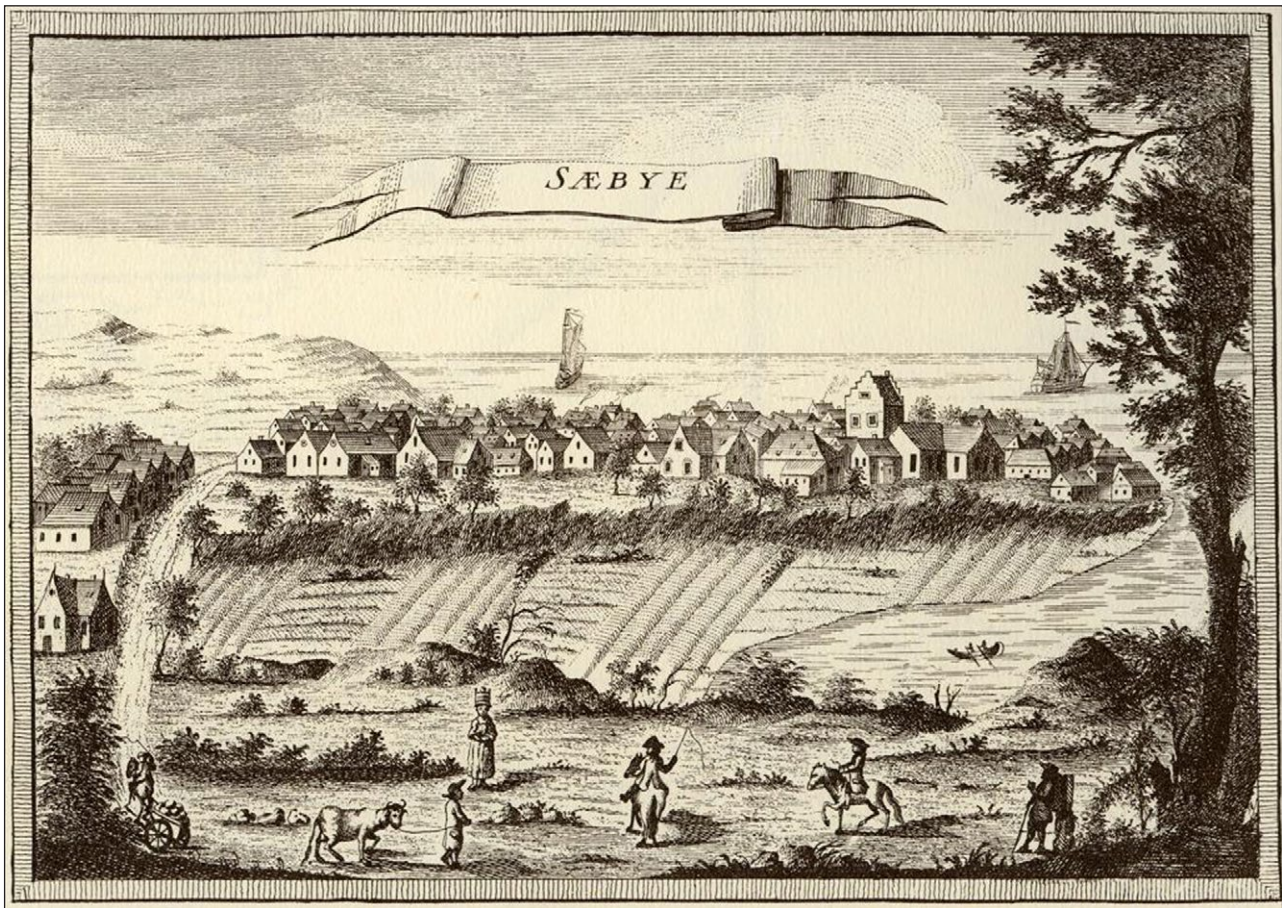
The protection of the police from competition outside and inside the guilds resulted in petitions from less 'necessary' trades. In 1693, the king was reluctant to approve

of the proposal of the police commission for a guild for the sugar bakers, spice traders and ironmongers (CCA, PK6, police commission assembly 24.03.1693). In 1695, the police commission rejected the petition of the distillers and maltsters, as 'such people' did not need a guild. In 1697 the police commission proposed that the bakers be given pre-emption on the yeast of the brewers in order to prevent shortages and ill-baked bread, because the distillers had bought up all the yeast. The commission even considered how the number of distillers could be brought down, because unlike beer they considered spirits harmful to the health and the mind of the common man. They also injured the trade of the butchers by buying up pigs from the countryside in order to fatten them on the draff (CCA, PK6, police commission assemblies 19.02.1695, 23–26.03.1697).

### **Towards laissez-faire**

In the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, economic thinkers and learned government officials began to question the necessity of guilds and of policing the trade. In 1683, the police commission turned down a proposal of the police master for an ordinance against intermediary trade with foods, like fowl and fish in the countryside. The argument against the proposal was that country trade was much more convenient and lucrative for the peasant. However, the commission agreed to assign a square for the female pedlars who sold these products in the streets of Copenhagen to avoid thefts and immorality (CCA, PK5, No. 30. Proposal of 08.11 and reply 28.11.1683). During the campaign against rising prices in 1696, the police commission established guilds for fish and fowl traders to control the price and avoid intermediary trade. The female pedlars, typically soldiers' wives, were excluded from the trade and given work in the spinning house (CCA, PK6. Police commission assemblies 19.02, 19.03.1696, 23.04.1697). However, in 1702 king Frederic IV abolished the guild of the fish traders, because it had abused its monopoly to double the prices (DNAC, Danske Kancelli, D21–3: Royal order of 07.03.1702). Maybe because of experiences like this, the king ordered the police commission to revise the guild ordinances in 1703, and in 1713 to consider the abolishment of the guilds to attract immigrants, after a plague had decimated the population of the capital with a third. In their deliberation from 1714, the commissioners agreed that the monopoly of the guilds was problematic, but feared that the alternative would be worse. In the opposite state of 'polypoly' they imagined the capital being filled with a mob of unskilled workers, who would outcompete each other and be impossible to discipline without aldermen (Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VII: 700–701. Royal order 13.03.1703; Nielsen, 1872–1880, KD VIII: 399–400. Royal order 23.10.1713; DNAC, Danske Kancelli, D113–7 Project for a new guild ordinance 18.05.1714). In 1673, the German mercantilist Becher had put forward this theory of the destructive forces of 'polypoly' as a response to the proposal of the police thinker Seckendorff to introduce freedom of trade as in the Netherlands in order to increase the population (Nipperdey, 2012: 288, 313).





**Figure 4:** Prospect of Sæby from 1768 (After Erich Pontoppidan. *Den Danske Atlas*, vol. 4, Kobenhavn 1768). Available (and free to use) at: [http://dendigitalebyport.byhistorie.dk/koebstaeder/prospekter/1024x768/62\\_prospekt.jpg](http://dendigitalebyport.byhistorie.dk/koebstaeder/prospekter/1024x768/62_prospekt.jpg)

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the metropolitan population was increasingly seen as a security threat and less as a fiscal and military resource, due to the problems of provisioning. In 1724, the French king Louis XIV issued a decree against the further growth of Paris, fearing that the police would not be able to provision more than 500.000 inhabitants (Garrioch, 2002: 127). In 1751, the president of Copenhagen proposed a harsher ordinance against vagrancy to fight crime and immorality, but the government's legal advisor still saw the population as a resource, and warned against scaring the necessary work force of day labourers away from the capital (DNAC, Danske Kancelli, D21–105, 397–400. von Rappe to the king 26.04 and deliberation of Luxdorph 10.06.1751). However, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century food policing was less about attracting workers and more about preventing famines and food riots. In 1764, the police master issued a denial of rumours that accused him of allowing the butchers to sell meat above the tariff, fearing that the capital was on the brink of a riot (DNAC, Danske Kancelli, D101–75, 535. Police poster 01.05.1764 and statement of police master Horn 02.08.1766). For the same reason, food policing was especially strict in the decades after the French revolution, where food riots were rare in Copenhagen. During the dearth of 1800 the police master was authorized to confiscate newspapers, which undermined the public trust in the government by describing it as a famine (Blüdnikow, 1986: 7–12). In Copenhagen the meat and bread tariffs survived for most of absolutism and weren't abolished

until 1826 and 1841 (Hjorth-Nielsen, 1926: 114; Hjorth-Nielsen, 1933: 150).

### Feeding a major market town

Aalborg was the largest provincial town in Denmark, but small in comparison with Copenhagen and went from being approx. 10 to 20 times smaller during absolutism, as 'the police' of the government concentrated on growing the capital. Aalborg is situated in Northern Jutland at the largest Danish fiord, the *Limfjord*. Its wealth came from the export of grain to Norway and oxen to Germany, but especially its monopoly on the salting and export of herring from the *Limfjord*. The town was provisioned to a greater extent than Copenhagen by foods from private gardens and the town's common lands, which were used for both farming and grazing (Tvede-Jensen & Poulsen, 1988: 80–81). Thus in 1817, one of the leading merchants noted among his possessions 6,5 hectares of land, two horses, 7 cows, a plow and a harrow (Knudsen, 1932: 11).

Despite some degree of self-sufficiency, the food trade as well as the use of the common was regulated by police ordinances to avoid scarcity. In 1548, king Christian III ordered the magistracy of Aalborg "to do police in the town, so that everyone could get at a reasonable price the work of artisans and anything else, which can be rented, bought and paid, and to post it on the door of the town hall, with penalties for each offense (Pontoppidan, 1970 (1769): 116). A collection of municipal police ordinances



begun in 1549, testifies to the importance of food policing according to the standards of the moral economy. Most of the ordinances regulate the trade and are especially concerned with fighting *forprang*—the speculative trade with foods such as butter, eggs, bread, apples, nut, grain and so on. As in Copenhagen, women are typically accused of buying up the products of the peasants outside the town gates and selling them for a profit in the streets and not on the market place. Some ordinances are particularly concerned with a local form of intermediate trade called *sildekrejll*—the buying of herring from fishermen and selling them from boats at the beach or in the streams of the town. The ordinances also contain tariffs with fixed prices on different kinds of bread, meat, beer, wine and the services of public servants. The town council should also negotiate with foreign merchants on behalf of the local merchants about the price of imported goods like salt and wine and grain to avoid competition leading to price rises (Wulff, 1868–69). Food riots were rare probably due to the abundance of herring. However, during the dearth of 1624 a ‘riot’ occurred, when 300 artisans accused the town council of allowing the export of malt and grain to some Dutch ships, in violation of a royal export ban to avoid scarcity. The reaction shows that it was considered a serious crime just to imply that the authorities disregarded the moral economy. The leader was sentenced to death and 40 artisans to lose their fortune and honour (Tvede-Jensen and Poulsen, 1988: 293–306).

In 1683, the authority of the Copenhagen police master was extended to all the Danish market towns. In 1685, he ordered the town council of Aalborg to work out a new tariff on bread in accordance with the bakers’ guild ordinance, as he had received complaints from the poor about ‘disorders’ with the bread prices in Aalborg. According to these rumours, the bakers continued to charge the same price for bread as after the dearth of 1683–84, where an unusual high mortality rate testified to the sufferings of the poor (DNAV, D1–122. Rasch to town council 05.09.1685; Poulsen and Christensen, 1990: 54–55). The focus of the new police on feeding the capital is seen in recurring complaints about the salted herring from Aalborg being sold in Copenhagen, in barrels of lesser measure than the size ordained in the ordinance of May 1, 1683. This ordinance had for the first time introduced a uniform measure for weights and scales for the whole country. In 1691, the police master wanted the king to prosecute the Aalborg town council for deliberate non-enforcement of the ordained measures on herring-barrels (DNAC, Danske Kancelli, C9–48, 362–3. Claus Rasch to the king 28.10.1691). In 1718, the burghers of Copenhagen repeated this complaint to the police commission, but in a petition to the king the burghers of Aalborg asked to be allowed to retain the customary barrel size due to the scarcity of wood for bigger barrels in Northern Jutland. On June 9, 1719, the king responded with an ordinance on the size of herring-barrels, ‘in particular at the *Limfjord*’, which met the requests of the Aalborg burghers (DNAV, D1–128, 400. Police commission to Aalborg town council 23.12.1718 and petition of the burghers of Aalborg to the king 02.01.1719). In a

similar way the police commission granted an exemption from the butchers’ guild ordinance in 1686. A proprietor had complained that the deputy of the Copenhagen police master had confiscated some meat being sold in Aalborg by his peasants, as a violation of the butchers’ guild ordinance of May 5, 1685. Besides violating the monopoly of the Aalborg butchers’ guild, the meat was from oxen below the weight prescribed in the guilds’ ordinance. Concerning the last rule, his main argument was that it could not be applied to Northern Jutland, where most people lived of fish, and could not afford the meat from the oxen fattened for export to Germany. The police commission ended conceding to the argument that the peasants from this particular village had a customary right to sell meat in Aalborg, and that they could offer meat at a cheaper price than the towns butcher’s guild (Wulff, 1891–93: 442–448).

From 1701, the town bailiffs of the market towns were to function as police masters under the supervision of the regional governors and the Copenhagen police commission. However, this does not seem to have been implemented in Aalborg until 1730, where the town council agreed to grant the salary for two police officers, but only to enforce a new Sabbath ordinance (DNAV, D1–132, 868–69. Resolution 17.05.1730). In 1752 and 1760, the town council agreed to increase the grant to the police master, who was instructed to focus in particular on the illegal trade outside the town gate and water pollution (DNAV, D1–137, 731–39. Resolution 10.10.1752). It was still the main focus of the police to secure the supply of food, drinking water and other life necessities. In Aalborg peasants were traditionally only allowed to sell their products on two market days, Wednesday and Saturday. During the dearth of 1782, the commander of the town’s garrison asked the regional governor to repeat the old market day ordinance. In this way, his poor soldiers would be able to buy the necessary provisions in small quantities instead of now, where wholesale traders would only sell in large quantities and for ‘immense profits’. The town council replied that the high prices were not caused by greed, but by dearth, and doubted if the police was able to enforce the ordinance (DNAV, B.OD-206. Moltke to Levetzau 23.08 and reply of the town council 03.09.1782). The repetitive publishing of market ordinances testifies to the difficulty of food policing. In 1813 the regional governor issued the last market day ordinance repeating the old complaints of hawkers and female pedlars at the town’s gates, preventing peasants from bringing their products to the markets (Wulff 1879: 291–292). In Aalborg, food policing was also used to prevent popular unrest in the age of revolution. During the dearth of 1795, an anonymous notice in the local newspaper accused speculators of having caused the rising prices, and called upon his fellow citizens to gather in front of the town hall to demand rye at a just price. As there had been some serious food riots in Southern Jutland, the regional governor arranged with the town council and the merchants to provide the needy with rye below the market price, but only because he feared a riot (DNAV, D1–168. Pentz to the town council 12.06.1795).

### Feeding a small market town

Sæby was a small port situated on the coast to the north of Aalborg. Despite its status as a market town, it looked more like a village with one storey half-timbered houses, half of them with thatched roofs, and the streets were not paved. With a population of 500–600 inhabitants it was approximately ten times smaller than Aalborg, and 200 times smaller than Copenhagen. The burghers were not organized in guilds, but subsisted on a mixture of agriculture, fishing and trades. The most important trade was the production and sale of the spirits called *brændevin*, which was an urban monopoly. In this way Sæby resembled many other tiny towns in Denmark. During absolutism, the population dwindled because of the decline of the harbour and competition from the nearby navy port of Fladstrand (present-day Frederikshavn). The recession in the trades increased the importance of agriculture, and fortunately Sæby was blessed with many lands as a former convent town. As a part of a municipal reform in 1683, the town council was abolished in Sæby and other small towns, where the town bailiff (Danish: *byfoged*) was to take over all the administrative tasks, including the police (Ørberg, 1970: 70ff.).

A sign of the low level of social differentiation is that not until 1746 did the bailiff appoint a privileged baker, who in return promised to bake bread to the poor, who were not able to buy grain or bake themselves and sometimes lacked bread in times of dearth. Before this time, three to four burghers had from time to time baked and brewed for the poor, but not regularly and not at all after an increase in the customs duty on grain, so that the poor pestered the bailiff daily about this problem (Ørberg, 1970: 95). Fish was more important than meat in the diet of the poor towns of Northern Jutland. In 1761, six burghers complained to the town bailiff about local fishermen selling loads of fish to non-resident traders, but refusing to sell fish for the subsistence of the poor. To restore 'good order and police' the bailiff had the regional governor issue an ordinance ordering the fishermen to sell fish to the poor 'at a reasonable price' and not sell to non-residents before 10 a.m. (DNAV, D29-44. Resolution 10.12.1761). In 1774, two merchants were prosecuted for bringing money out of the country by importing fish from Sweden. The theme of moral economy was also present in the case, as the merchants were also accused of exploiting the poor by selling cheap, but rotten fish in addition to the mercantilist argument that fish should not be brought from abroad, but the *Limfjord* 'for the good of the country' (DNAV, B.OD-197. Meldal to von Osten 18.04.1774).

In the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the authorities tried to improve the economy of Sæby with 'good police'. In 1773, the parish vicar sent a proposal to the regional governor to fight poverty in Sæby, mainly by lowering the prices on food and to prosecute illegal country trade with much more vigilance (DNAV, B.OD-197. Muus to von Osten 01.06.1773). In 1785, a newly appointed town bailiff began a serious attempt to improve the police with new police ordinances and to enforce them, he appointed his brother as police deputy and two day labourers as police officers. His police ordinances show that in a small, agricultural

economy like Sæby, food policing was mostly about feeding the town with its own resources. Examples are ordinances against overgrazing on the common, against selling manure to peasants, because it was needed for the town's lands—its 'most important resource' and a repetition of the ban to sell fish to non-residents before 10 a.m., where a flag was to be hoisted on a newly erected flag pole. The landless inhabitants opposed the restrictions on grazing as a violation of their customary rights. One of their protests against a plan to lease part of the common reveals a rural mentality, as they referred to a paragraph in Danish Law against changes in village customs without the consent of all the peasants. On the other hand, the bailiff's description of the protesters as rebellious vagrants and beggars who did not contribute to society, reflect the increasingly negative view of the urban poor of the elite towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Mührmann-Lund, 2013: 34–57). This conflict between the landless inhabitants and the elite was also present during the so-called 'Sæby riot' in 1818. Here a crowd of inhabitants prevented the police and later the military from arresting a dean, who was accused of writing seditious petitions for the poor. A written statement of a shoemaker, who led the rioters, show that the crowd was not only motivated by sympathy for the dean, but also a general distrust in the rule of the town bailiff. Among other things he was accused of neglecting the police administration and even suspected of embezzling the means from the lease of the town land for poor relief and the maintenance of the church (Mührmann-Lund, 2009).

### Concluding remarks

From the three cases of Copenhagen, Aalborg and Sæby it can be concluded that food policing was one of the most important tasks of the early modern police. It was the responsibility of police authorities to ensure that the market towns were supplied with a sufficient amount of bread, meat and beer of a good quality and most importantly at a just price in accordance with the moral economy. This was done by a strict regulation to avoid intermediate trade that was thought to drive up prices. Peasants were only allowed to sell their products at the urban market place on certain days and only to consumers before 10 a.m. The price of agricultural products was not regulated, but the prices of processed foods like bread, meat and beer were fixed regularly in accordance with the fluctuating market prices on the raw products. Only during times of dearth did the authorities also regulate the grain trade, although a state granary to fix the prices was planned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The importance of food policing seems to indicate that the early modern police ordinances and police authorities were not meant to discipline the subjects, but rather met a popular demand for welfare and security. However, the governmental rationality of food policing changed in accordance with the changes in the concept of 'good police' from being a way to uphold the moral economy of local societies in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to being part of a mercantilist political economy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This is seen in the focus on the provisioning of Copenhagen during absolutism, which was meant to increase the



population and promote economic growth in order to increase the military-fiscal power of the king. This meant that differences in the food policing of the three towns were not only affected by the size and the rural landscapes of the towns, but also changes in their status due to this policy.

The common lands of Copenhagen provided pasturage for a considerable amount of cows and horses, but as a city with 50–100.000 inhabitants, the capital was dependent on food supplies from all of Denmark. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the municipal police ordinances regulated the price and quality according to the moral norms of society. On top of this, it was the ambition of the royal police administration, established in the 1680s, not only to provide food security, but also to improve the living standard in the capital in order to attract talented immigrants with the mercantilist objective of increasing the military-fiscal power of the absolutist state. This meant that grain of the highest quality from the island of Lolland was reserved for the capital, that butchers from Copenhagen were allowed to purchase cattle all over Denmark and that the size of herring barrels from Aalborg was a matter of high concern for the Copenhagen police. The earliest police records show how the police authorities policed the bakers, the butchers and the brewers with great severity, but also that the effects of this policy was doubted early on. Thus the experiment with establishing guilds for fish and fowl traders in order to control the prices did not have the expected outcome of lower prices. In the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the political elite lost faith in the utility of regulation, but food policing continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily as a way to avoid food riots and political insecurity during the age of revolutions.

The degree of 'rurality' was higher in Aalborg, which was the biggest provincial market town, but had a population 10–20 times smaller than that of the capital. The common lands were not only used for grazing, but were also farmed, as were the many cabbage gardens in town. However, the municipal police regulation of the food trade reveals a high degree of dependency on foods from the surrounding countryside. The focus of the absolutist police on the provisioning of the capital is seen in the effort of the Copenhagen police authorities in the case of the herring barrels from Aalborg being smaller than the size ordained in the ordinance on scales and measures from 1683. However, as was the case with the implementation of police ordinances in other absolutist states, the size of herring barrels was adapted to local standards in ordinance of 1719. The concern of the police master for the price of bread in Aalborg show that the Copenhagen police authorities also wanted to improve food security in the provincial towns. Thus in 1686, the police commission was willing to make exemptions from its own butcher's guild ordinance, when it did not fit the regional patterns of food consumption such as the lack of a market for high quality meat in Northern Jutland. As in the capital, in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the authorities seem only to have resorted to regulation to avoid food riots, as was the case during the dearth of 1795. The repetitive publication of market day ordinances might also have contributed to this

loss of faith in regulation, which also came to an end in Aalborg in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In comparison with Copenhagen and Aalborg, the food policing of Sæby reveals a high degree of 'rurality'. Here food policing was more about regulating the use of and trade in the town's own natural resources in order to ensure the survival of the poor, rather than regulating the trade in foods from the surrounding countryside. During absolutism, the police administration of the small towns became the responsibility of the royal town bailiffs. This did not mean that food policing became less about upholding the moral economy of the community. The town bailiff as well as the regional governor responded to the complaints from the community with regulations that sought to provide the poor with bread and fish at 'just' prices. However, the mercantilist policy of national self-sufficiency overruled moral economy in the case of illegal import of cheap fish from Sweden, although food quality was also the issue. Parallel to the development in the other towns in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the attempts of a town bailiff to reform the police and especially his abolishment of customary grazing rights caused social tensions between the urban elite and the many landless town-dwellers. The riot in 1818 was to a great extent caused by this fight over the scarce resources of the town.

To sum up, food policing was established in the medieval towns as a reaction to the new economic behaviours that were considered selfish and immoral by the communities. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, absolutist rulers, as the Danish king, sought to use food policing to stimulate economic growth especially in the capital in order to increase the military-fiscal power of the state. However, the new royal police administration remained adapted to local needs and motivated by the social norm of moral economy. However, it would prove impossible to control the food trade in minute detail, so in practice food policing was irregular and pragmatic. In the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the elite began to question the utility of the mercantilist market regulation, but the fear of food riots and social tensions seems to have meant that the trade as well as the production of food in the towns was not subject to liberal reforms until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the food policing of early modern Danish towns does not seem to differ from that of French and English towns studied by Kaplan and Thompson. However, further research in this important part of early modern policing might reveal some national differences.

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### Competing Interests

The author declares that he have no competing interests.

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