

EATING AND DRINKING

Fernand Braudel

Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) was a French historian and a leader of the Annales School, which focused on social, as opposed to political or diplomatic, histories. His writings include the three-volume Civilisation Matérielle, Économie et Capitalisme, XVe-XVIIIe [Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century]. The selection below is drawn from the first volume of this trilogy (Les structures du quotidien; The Structure of Everyday Life). The many footnotes that cite the source material have been omitted. [The Structures of Everyday Life. The Limits of the Possible, transl. from the French by Siân Reynolds (Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 204-16, 249-60]

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Laying the table

Table luxury included crockery, silver, tablecloths, napkins, lighted candles and the whole setting of the dining-room. It was customary in Paris in the sixteenth century to rent a grand house, or better still gain admittance to one through the paid collusion of the caretaker. The caterer would then deliver the dishes for the temporary host to entertain his friends. Sometimes he settled in until the real owner dislodged him. 'In my time,' said an ambassador (1557), 'Mgr Salviati, the Papal Nuncio, was forced to move house three times in two months.'

There were sumptuous inns as well as sumptuous houses. At Châlons (sur-Marne), 'we lodged at *La Couronne*,' Montaigne noted (1580), 'which is a beautiful hostelry and the food is served on silver plates'.

It must have posed quite a problem to lay a table for 'a company of thirty persons of high estate whom one wishes to entertain lavishly'. The answer is given in a cookery book with an unexpected title, *Les Délices de la campagne* (The Pleasures of the Countryside) by Nicolas de Bonnefons, published in 1654. It is: lay fourteen places on one side, fourteen on the other and, as the table is rectangular, one person at the 'top end' plus 'one or two at the bottom'. The guests will be 'the space of a chair apart'. 'The tablecloth [must] reach to the ground on all sides. There will be several salt cellars and table mats in the centre for the extra dishes.' The meal will have eight courses, the eighth and last, by way of example, being composed of 'dry or liquid' jams, crystallised sweets, musk pastilles, sugared almonds from Verdun, musky and amber-scented sugar...' The maitre d'hôtel, sword at side, will order the plates to be changed 'at least at every

course and the napkins at every two'. But this careful description, which even specifies the way the dishes will be 'rotated' on the table at each course, omits to say how the table should be laid for each guest. At this period he would certainly be given a plate, spoon and knife, possibly an individual fork, [205] but no glass or bottle would be placed in front of him. The rules of propriety remain uncertain; the author recommends a deep plate for soup as an elegance, so that the guests could serve themselves with all they wanted at one time 'without having to take spoonful after spoonful from the dish, because of the disgust some might feel for others'.

The Wedding at Cana, with the table laid for a feast. Painting by Hier-



onimus Bosch. Boymans-Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam.

A table laid in the modern way and our present table manners are the results of many details that custom has imposed slowly, one by one, and in ways that vary according to region. Spoon and knife are fairly old customs. However, the use of a spoon did not become widespread until the sixteenth century and the custom of providing knives dates from the same time – before that the guests brought along their own. Individual glasses for each guest also appeared at about this time. Courtesy formerly dictated that one emptied the glass and passed it on to one's neighbour, who did the same. Or else, when requested, the manservant brought the required drink, wine or water, from the pantry or the dresser near the guest table.

When Montaigne crossed southern Germany in 1580, he noted that 'everyone has his goblet or silver cup at his place; the man serving takes care to refill this goblet immediately it is empty, without moving it from its place, pouring wine into it from a distance away out of a pewter or wooden vessel with a long spout'. This elegant solution economized on the effort demanded of the staff, but it required every guest to have a personal goblet in front of him. In Germany in Montaigne's time every guest also had his own plate, either pewter or wooden; sometimes a wooden bowl underneath and a pewter plate on top. We have proof that wooden plates continued to be used in some places in the German countryside, and probably elsewhere, until the nineteenth century.



Ivory-handled cutlery, seventeenth century, Dutch.

But for a long time before these more or less tardy refinements, guests were satisfied with a wooden board or a 'trencher', a slice of bread on which the meat was placed. The large dish then sufficed for everything and everybody: each guest selected the morsel he wanted and picked it up with his fingers. Montaigne noted that the Swiss 'use as many wooden spoons with silver handles as there are people [note that each guest had his own spoon] and a Swiss is never without a knife, with which he takes everything; and he scarcely ever puts his hand in the dish'. Wooden spoons with metal handles (not necessarily silver) are preserved in museums, together with various types of knife. But these were old implements.

This is not the case with forks. The very large fork with two prongs, used to serve meat to the guests and to manipulate it on the stove or in the kitchen, probably goes back a long way, but the individual fork, with one or two exceptions, does not.

The individual fork dates from about the sixteenth century; it spread from Venice and Italy in general, though not very quickly. A German preacher condemned it as a diabolical luxury: God would not have given us fingers if he had wished us to use such an instrument. We know that Montaigne did not use a fork, since he accuses himself of eating too quickly so that 'I sometimes bite [206] my fingers in my haste'. Indeed he says he rarely 'makes use of spoon or fork'. The lord of Villamont, describing in great

detail the culinary and eating habits of the Turks in 1609, adds 'they do not use forks as the Lombards and Venetians do'. (Note that he does not say 'the French' for the good reason that they did not.) An English traveller at about the same time, Thomas Coryate, came across the table fork in Italy: he made fun of it at first, then adopted it – to the great amusement of his friends who christened him *furciferus* (fork-handler, or to be more precise pitch fork-handler). Was it the fashion of wearing ruffs that led rich diners to use forks? Probably not, since in England, for example, there is no mention of table forks in any inventory before 1660. Their use only became general in about 1750. Anne of Austria ate her meat with her fingers all her life. And so did the Court of Vienna until at least 1651. Who used a fork at the court of Louis XIV? The Duke of Montausier, whom Saint-Simon describes as being 'of formidable cleanliness'. Not the king, whose skill at eating chicken stew with his fingers without spilling it is praised by the same Saint-Simon! When the Duke of Burgundy and his brothers were admitted to sup with the king and took up the forks they had been taught to use, the king forbade them to use them. This anecdote is told by the Princess Palatine, with great satisfaction: she has 'always used her knife and fingers to eat with'. This accounts for the many napkins offered to table-guests in the seventeenth century although the custom had only reached private households in Montaigne's lifetime, as he himself tells us. It also explains the custom of hand-washing several times during a meal, using a jug and bowl of water.

The slow adoption of good manners

Such changes, representing a new code of behaviour, were adopted gradually. Even the luxury of a separate dining-room did not become current in France until the sixteenth century, and then only among the rich. Before then the nobleman ate in his vast kitchen.

The whole ceremonial of the meal meant large numbers of servants in the kitchen and around the guests, and not only at Versailles where the *Grand* and *Petit Commun* were mobilized for the meal or 'the King's meat', as it was called. All this new luxury only reached the whole of France or England with the eighteenth century. 'If people who died sixty years ago came back', wrote Duclos in about 1765, 'they would not recognise Paris as far as its tables, costumes and customs are concerned.' The same was probably true of all Europe, in the grip of an omnipresent luxury, and also of its colonies where it had always tried to establish its own customs. Hence Western travellers thought even less of the customs and habits of the wide world and looked down on them more than ever. Gemelli Careri was surprised when his host, a Persian of high rank, received him at his table (1694) and used 'his right hand instead of a spoon to pick up rice so as to put it on the plate [of

his guests]'. Or read what Father Labat (1728) [207] has to say about the Arabs in Senegal: 'They do not know what it is to eat off tables.' No one found favour with these fastidious arbiters except the refined Chinese, who sat down at tables, ate out of glazed bowls, and carried in their belts the knife and chopsticks (in a special case) that they used to eat with. The Baron de Tort has left a humorous description of a reception in the country house near Istanbul of 'Madame the wife of the First Dragoon', in 1760. This class of rich Greeks in the service of the Grand Turk adopted local customs, but liked to make some difference felt. 'A circular table, with chairs all round it, spoons, forks – nothing was missing except the habit of using them. But they did not wish to omit any of our manners which were just becoming as fashionable among the Greeks as English manners are among ourselves, and I saw one woman throughout the dinner taking olives with her fingers and then impaling them on her fork in order to eat them in the French manner'.

However, an Austrian ordinance of 1624 for the landgraviate of Alsace still laid down for the use of young officers the rules to be observed when invited to an archduke's table: to present themselves in clean uniform, not to arrive half drunk, not to drink after every mouthful, to wipe moustache and mouth clean before drinking, not to lick the finger, not to spit in the plate, not to wipe the nose on the tablecloth, not to gulp drink like animals. Such instructions make the reader wonder at the state of manners in Richelieu's Europe.

At the table of Christ

It is extremely instructive on these journeys into the past to look at pictures painted before these refinements came into use. Meals were a favourite subject [208] with painters – particularly the Last Supper, which has been depicted thousands of times by Western artists; or Christ's meal with Simon, the wedding at Cana, the table of the pilgrims of Emmaus. If we forget the figures for a moment and look at the tables, the embroidered tablecloths, the seats (stools, chairs, benches), and above all the plates, dishes and knives, we can see that no fork appears before 1600 and almost no spoons either. Instead of plates there are slices of bread, round or oval pieces of wood or pewter discs only slightly hollowed: they are the spots of blue which appear on the majority of south German tables. The trencher of stale bread, often placed on a wooden or metal slab, was intended [209] to soak up the juice from the carved joint. This 'bread plate' was then distributed to the poor. There is always at least one knife – sometimes extra large when it is the only one available

and has to serve for all the guests – and often small individual knives. Of course, wine, bread and lamb appear on the table at this sacred feast. And of course the Last Supper is not a lavish or luxurious meal; the event transcends earthly sustenance. None the less, Christ and his apostles eat like Ulm or Augsburg bourgeois; for the scene is almost the same whether it represents the marriage at Cana, Herod's feast, or the meals served to some master of Basle, surrounded by family and attentive servants, or the Nuremberg practitioner painted with his friends at his house-warming in 1593. As far as I know, Jacopo Bassano (1599) painted one of the first forks to figure in a Last Supper.



Giovanni di Francia, The Last Supper (15th Century; fresco), Conegliano, Italy.

Everyday foods: salt

It is time to turn from luxuries to everyday foods. Salt calls us to order very effectively, since this ultra-common commodity was the subject of an essential and world-wide trade. It was essential both to humans and to animals, and for preserving meat and fish; and was all the more important as governments had an interest in it. Salt was a major source of income to states and merchants, in Europe and China alike, as we shall see. As salt was such an indispensable commodity, trade in it overcame all obstacles and took advantage of all facilities. As a heavy good, it was carried by river traffic (going up the Rhône, for instance) and by shipping in the Atlantic. Not a single rock salt mine remained unexploited. It so happened that all the salt-pans of the Mediterranean and Atlantic, needing a sunny climate, were in Catholic countries, while their salt, from Brouage, Setubal and San Lucar de Barrameda, was in much demand among the northern fishermen, who were Protestants. The trade was always carried on, regardless of wars, and to the great profit of large consortia of merchants. Similarly, blocks of salt from the Sahara braved the desert, carried by camel to Black Africa – in return it is true for gold dust, elephants' tusks and black slaves. Nothing is a clearer indication of the irresistible pressure of this trade.

The small Swiss canton of Valais demonstrates the same thing in terms of economy and distances to be covered. Resources and population in these lands flanking the upper Rhône valley were in perfect balance, except for iron and salt – particularly salt, which the inhabitants needed for stock-raising, cheeses and salting. Salt had to cover great distances to reach these Alpine cantons: it came from Peccais (Languedoc) 870 kilometres away, via Lyons; from Barletta, 1300 kilometres away, via Venice, and, also via Venice, from Trapani, 2300 kilometres away.

Essential, irreplaceable, salt was a sacred food ('salted food is synonymous with holy food both in ancient Hebrew and the current Malagasy language'). In the Europe of insipid farinaceous gruels consumption of salt was large (twenty [210] grams daily per person, double the present figure). One medical historian even thinks that the peasant uprisings against the *gabelle*, the salt tax, in western France in the sixteenth century, can be explained by a hunger for salt which the tax thwarted. Furthermore, an odd detail here and there informs us – or fortuitously reminds us – of numerous uses of salt which are not immediately obvious: for example, for making botargo in Provence or for domestic preserving which spread in the eighteenth century: asparagus, fresh peas, mushrooms, morels, artichoke hearts and so on.

Everyday foods: dairy products, fats, eggs

Cheese, eggs, milk and butter would certainly not be classed luxuries. Cheeses arrived in Paris from Brie and Normandy (*angelots* from Bray, *livarots*, and the cheese of Pont-L'Évêque); from Auvergne, Touraine and Picardy. They could be bought from *regrattiers*, those all-purpose retail merchants in touch with convents and the neighbouring countryside. Cheese from Montreuil and Vincennes was sold there 'freshly curdled and drained, in little baskets woven from wicker or rushes', *jonchees*. In the Mediterranean, Sardinian cheeses, *cacio cavallo* or *salso*, were exported everywhere – to Naples, Rome, Leghorn, Marseilles and Barcelona. They left Cagliari in boatloads and sold even more cheaply than the cheeses from Holland, which were invading the markets of Europe and the whole world by the eighteenth century. As early as 1572, thousands of Dutch cheeses were unlawfully reaching Spanish America. Cheeses from Dalmatia and enormous wheels of cheese from Candia were sold in Venice. Cheese consumed in Marseilles in 1543 included some from the Auvergne, where it was so plentiful that it formed the principal basis of diet in the sixteenth century. In the previous century, cheese from the Grande-Chart-

reuse in Dauphine was considered excellent and was used to make *fondues* and cheese on toast. Large quantities of Swiss gruyère were already being consumed before the eighteenth century. In about 1750, France was importing 30,000 quintals of it annually. It was 'counterfeited in Franche-Comté, Lorraine, Savoy and Dauphiné,' and while these imitations may not have been as reputable or as expensive as the original, they were widely sold. Attempts to imitate Parmesan cheese, in Normandy for instance, were however unsuccessful.

Cheese, a source of cheap protein, was one of the great foods of the people in Europe, greatly missed by any European forced to live far away and unable to get it. French peasants made fortunes in about 1698 by carrying cheeses to the armies fighting in Italy and Germany. Nevertheless, particularly in France, cheese had not yet won its great reputation. Cookery books gave it only a small place, describing neither its qualities nor its individual names. Goats' cheese was scorned and considered inferior to cows' or ewes'. As late as 1702, the medical writer Lemery recognized only three great cheeses: 'Roquefort, Parmesan and those from Sassenage in Dauphiné ... served at the most refined tables.' [211] Roquefort at that time recorded a sale of over 6000 quintals every year. Sassenage was a mixture of cows', goats' and ewes' milk, boiled together. Parmesan (like the 'marsolin' of Florence which later went out of fashion) had been an acquisition of the Italian wars, after the return of Charles VIII.

Despite what Lemery says, however, when Cardinal Du Bois was in London on a mission, what did he ask his nephew to send him from Paris? Three dozen Pont-L'Évêque cheeses, and the same number of *marolles* and Bries (as well as a wig). So there were already connoisseurs who favoured certain regional cheeses.

Mention must be made of the great place these humble but nutritionally rich foodstuffs – milk, butter, cheese – occupied throughout Islam as far as the Indies. A traveller noted in 1694 that the Persians spent little; they 'are satisfied with a little cheese and sour milk in which they soak the local bread, which is as thin as a wafer, tasteless and very brown; in the morning they add rice to this (or pilau) sometimes only cooked with water'. But pilau, often a stew with rice, distinguished the tables of the comfortably-off. In Turkey, milk products were almost the sole food of the poor: sour milk (yoghurt) accompanied, according to the season, by cucumbers or melons, an onion, a leek, or stewed dried fruit. Along with yoghurt, mention must also be made of *kaymak*, a slightly salted boiled cream, and the cheeses preserved in leather bottles (*tulum*), in wheels (*tekerlek*), or in balls, like the famous *cascaval* which the Wallachian mountain-dwellers exported to Istanbul and even to Italy. This was a cheese made of ewes'

milk subjected to repeated boiling, like *cacio cavallo* in Sardinia and Italy.

In the East, however, there was one huge and persistent exception: China. The Chinese systematically ignored milk, cheese and butter. Cows, goats and sheep were raised purely for meat. So what was the 'butter' M. de Guignes thought he was eating? It was only used in China to make rare pastries. Japan shared China's repugnance on this score. Even in villages where oxen and cows are used to work the land, the Japanese peasant still does not eat dairy products and thinks them 'unwholesome'; he draws the small quantities of oil he requires from soya.

Milk was consumed in such large quantities, on the other hand, in the towns of the West that problems of supply appeared very early on. In London, consumption increased every winter, when all the wealthy families moved to the capital; it decreased in summer for the opposite reason. But, winter or summer, it was the subject of gigantic fraud. Milk was watered on a wide scale by dairy farmers and retailers. 'A considerable Cow-keeper in Surrey has a pump of this kind, which goes by the name of the *Famous Black Cow* (from the circumstances of its being pointed black), and is said to yield more than all the rest put together.' We may prefer to think of Valladolid a century earlier: the streets were daily thronged with hundreds of donkeys bringing milk from the neighbouring countryside and supplying the town with curd cheeses, butter and cream. A Portuguese traveller praised the quality and cheapness of these products. [212] Everything was plentiful in Valladolid, a capital which Philip III was soon to abandon for Madrid. Over seven thousand birds were sold daily on the poultry market; the mutton there was the best in the world, the bread excellent, the wine perfect, and its supply of dairy products was a luxury in Spain, where such goods were particularly scarce.

Butter remained limited to northern Europe, except for the wide zone where rancid butter was used, from northern Africa to Alexandria in Egypt and beyond. The rest of Europe used lard, bacon fat and olive oil. France clearly demonstrates this geographical division of culinary resources. A veritable river of butter flowed through the lands of the Loire, in Paris and beyond. 'Practically no sauce is made without it in France,' said Louis Lemery (1702). 'The Dutch and the northern peoples use it even more than we do and it is claimed that it contributes to the freshness of their complexion.' Actually the use of butter did not really spread until the eighteenth century, even in Holland. It characterized the cooking of the rich. It distressed Mediterranean people when they were obliged to live in or cross these strange countries; they thought that

butter increased the number of lepers. The wealthy cardinal of Aragon was careful to take his own cook when he travelled to the Netherlands in 1516, and carried a sufficient quantity of olive oil in his luggage.

Eighteenth-century Paris, so well set in its comforts, had an ample supply of butter at its disposal – fresh, salted (from Ireland and Brittany), and even clarified in the Lorraine manner. A good part of its fresh butter arrived from Gournay, a small town near Dieppe where merchants received the butter unrefined and then kneaded it again in order to eliminate the whey it still contained. 'They then make it into large blocks, of between forty and sixty pounds, and send it to Paris.' As snobbery is always with us, according to the *Dictionnaire Sentencieux* (1778) 'there are only two types of butter which the fashionable world dares mention: butter from Vanvre (Vanves) and butter from the Frévalais, in the vicinity of Paris.'



Old woman with eggs, painted by Velázquez in 1618 before he left his native city of Seville. (National Gallery of Scotland)

Eggs were widely eaten. Doctors repeated the old precepts of the Salerno School – let them be eaten fresh and not overcooked: *Si sumas ovum, molle sit atque novum*. And there were numerous recipes for keeping eggs fresh. Their market price is a valuable indicator: eggs were a cheap commodity and their price accurately followed the fluctuations of the economic situation. A statistician can reconstruct the movement of the cost of living in the sixteenth century from a few eggs sold in Florence. Their price alone is a valid measure of the standard of living or the value of money in any given town in any given country. At one time in seventeenth-century Egypt, 'one had the choice of thirty eggs, two pigeons or one fowl for a sou'; on the road from Magnesia to Brusa (1694) 'provisions are not dear: seven eggs can be bought for one *para* (one sou), a fowl for ten, a good winter melon for two, and as much bread as you can eat in a day for the same price'. In February 1697 the same traveller, this time near Acapulco in New

Spain, noted: 'The innkeeper made me pay a piece of eight (thirty-two [213] sous) for a fowl, and eggs were one sou each.' Eggs were an everyday food for Europeans. Montaigne's surprise in the German inns was therefore understandable: they never served eggs there, he wrote, 'except hard-boiled cut into quarters in salads'. Montesquieu, leaving Naples and returning to Rome (1729), was astonished 'that in this ancient Latium the traveller finds neither a chicken nor a young pigeon, nor often an egg'.

But in Europe these were exceptions and not the rule that applied to the vegetarian Far East, where China, Japan and India never made use of this rich and commonplace item of diet. Eggs were very rare there and formed no part of ordinary people's fare. The famous Chinese ducks' eggs, preserved in pickling brine for thirty days, were a delicacy of the rich. [214]

Everyday seafoods

The sea was an extremely important source of nourishment and could have been even more so. Whole regions were barely aware of the existence of seafoods, even when they were close at hand.

This was more or less the case in the New World, despite the huge shoals in the fishing grounds of the Caribbean where boats often made miraculous hauls on the way to Vera Cruz; despite the great wealth of the coasts and banks of Newfoundland, which supplied food almost exclusively to Europe (although barrels of cod reached the eighteenth-century English colonies and the American plantations in the southern states); despite the salmon that swam up the cold rivers of Canada and Alaska; despite the resources of the Bay of Bahia where an influx of cold waters from the south made whale-hunting possible and accounts for the presence of Basque harpooners as early as the seventeenth century. In Asia, only Japan and southern China from the mouth of the Yang-tse-Kiang to the island of Hainan went in for fishing. Elsewhere it would seem that only a few boats, as in Malaysia or around Ceylon, were so engaged – if we except some oddities like the pearl fishermen in the Persian Gulf, near Bandar Abbas (1694) who 'preferred their sardines [dried in the sun, these were their daily fare] to the pearls the merchants bought, as more reliable and easier to fish'.

In China, where fresh-water fishing and fish-breeding yielded large profits (sturgeon were caught in the lakes of the Yang-tse-Kiang and in the Pei Ho), fish was often preserved in the form of a sauce obtained by spontaneous fermentation, as in Tonkin. But even today consumption there is insignificant (0.6 kilograms per person per year). The sea does not manage to penetrate the continental

mass. Only Japan was widely fish-eating. It has kept this characteristic and today is on a par with carnivorous Europe (forty kilograms per person per year and the leading fishing fleet in the world after Peru). The abundance comes from the richness of its internal sea, and still more from the proximity of the Yezo and Sakhaline fisheries, at the meeting point of enormous masses of cold waters from Oya Shivo and warm waters from Kuro-shivo – just as Newfoundland is at the confluence of the Gulf Stream and the Labrador current in the north Atlantic. The meeting of plankton from hot and cold waters helps the rapid breeding of fish.

Europe is not so well provided for but it has many sources of supply at short and long range. Fish was all the more important here as religious rulings multiplied the number of fast days: 166 days, including Lent, observed extremely strictly until the reign of Louis XIV. Meat, eggs and poultry could not be sold during those forty days except to invalids and with a double certificate from doctor and priest. To facilitate control, the 'Lent butcher' was the only person authorized to sell prohibited foods at that time in Paris, and only inside the area of the Hotel Dieu. This led to a huge demand for fresh, smoked and salted fish. [215]

However, fish was not always plentiful around the coasts of Europe. The much-vaunted Mediterranean had only limited resources – tunny from the Bosphorus, caviar from the Russian rivers (choice food for Christian fasts as far afield as Abyssinia), dried squids and octopus, always a providential food for the Greek archipelago, sardines and anchovies from Provence. Tunny was also trapped in the madragues of North Africa, Sicily, Andalusia and the Portuguese Algarve. Lagos was a great shipping point for whole boatloads of barrels of salted tunny bound for the Mediterranean and the north.

By comparison, the resources of those narrow northerly inland seas – the Channel, North Sea and Baltic – and even more those of the Atlantic, were superabundant. The Atlantic coasts of Europe were the scene of an active fishing industry in the middle ages (salmon, mackerel, cod). The Baltic and North Sea have been centres of large herring fisheries since the eleventh century; they were the making of the Hanse and then of fishermen from Holland and Zealand. A Dutchman, William Beukelszoon, is said to have discovered in about 1350 the rapid method of gutting herrings and salting them on the boat where the fishermen could barrel them immediately. But the herring disappeared from the Baltic between the fourteenth and fifteenth century. After that, boats from Holland and Zealand fished on the barely covered sands of the Dogger Bank and in the open sea off the English and Scottish coasts, as far as the Orkneys. Other fleets gathered at these rich grounds. In the sixteenth century, at the height of the conflicts between

Valois and Hapsburgs, herring truces were duly concluded to ensure Europe's continued supplies.

Herrings were exported to western and southern Europe by sea, along rivers, by carriage and by pack animals. Bloaters and red and white herrings arrived in Venice: white herrings were salted, the red were smoked, and bloaters had been bloated, that is slightly smoked and slightly salted. The *chasse-marées*, carriers of fresh sea fish, could often be seen hurrying towards large towns like Paris – poor fellows urging on wretched horses weighed down with fish and oysters. Their cry: 'Herrings fresh last night' can be heard in *Les cris de Paris* by the musician Janequin. In London, eating a barrel of oysters with wife and friends was a minor luxury and one the young and economical Samuel Pepys could treat himself to.

But sea fishing was hardly sufficient to satisfy Europe's hunger. Recourse to fresh-water fish becomes more and more essential as we move farther away from sea coasts, towards the central and eastern continental lands. No river, no stream, not even the Seine at Paris, was without its authorized fishermen. The distant Volga was a colossal reserve. The Loire was famous for salmon and carp; the Rhine for perch. A Portuguese traveller to Valladolid in the first years of the seventeenth century found supplies of sea fish rather deficient and not always of high quality, in view of the time they took to reach the city. There were sole, *escabèches* of sardines and oysters, and sometimes coalfish, all the year round; and excellent dorado came from Santander during Lent. But our traveller was [216] startled by the unbelievable number of magnificent trout coming from Burgos and Medina de Pioseco and sold daily on the market, sometimes so many that half the town, which was at that time the capital of Spain, could be fed on them. Artificial ponds and the fish-breeding on the large estates in the south of Bohemia have already been mentioned. Carp was commonly eaten in Germany. [...]

Chocolate, tea, coffee

At nearly the same time as the discovery of alcohol, Europe, at the centre of the innovations of the world, discovered three new drinks, stimulants and tonics: coffee, tea, and chocolate. All three came from abroad: coffee was Arab (originally Ethiopian); tea, Chinese; chocolate, Mexican.

Chocolate came to Spain from Mexico, from New Spain, in about 1520 in the form of loaves and tablets. Not surprisingly it was in the Spanish Netherlands slightly

earlier (1606) than in France. The anecdote about Maria Theresa (her marriage to Louis XIV took place in 1659) drinking chocolate on the sly, a Spanish habit she was never able to lose, may well be true. The person who really introduced it into France a few years earlier was said to have been Cardinal Richelieu (brother of the minister, he was archbishop of Lyons and died in 1653). This is possible, though chocolate at that time was regarded as a medicine quite as much as a foodstuff: 'I have heard one of his servants say,' reported a witness later, 'that he [the cardinal] took it to moderate the vapours of his spleen and that he got this secret from some Spanish nuns who brought it to France.' Chocolate reached England from France in about 1657.



Drinking chocolate in Spain: The breakfast chocolate, by Zurbarán (1568-1664). Besançon Museum.

These first appearances were discreet and fleeting. Madame de Sévigné's letters mention that chocolate was either all the rage at court or out of favour, according to the day or the gossip. She herself worried about the dangers of the new beverage, having like others got into the habit of mixing it with milk. In fact chocolate did not become established until the French Regency [1715-23]. The Regent made it popular. At that time 'to go to the chocolate' meant to attend the prince's levee, to be in his good books. Nevertheless its popularity should not be exaggerated. We are told that in Paris in 1768 'the great take it sometimes, the old often, the people never'. The only area where it triumphed was Spain: every foreigner made fun of the thick chocolates, perfumed with cinnamon, which were the delight of the inhabitants of Madrid. A Jewish merchant, Aaron Colace, whose correspondence has been preserved, had good reason to settle in Bayonne in about 1727. From this town he was able to watch the Peninsular market while maintaining business connections with Amsterdam and its market in colonial goods (notably cocoa from Caracas, which often made this unexpected detour).

In December 1693 Gemelli Careri offered chocolate to a Turkish Aga at Smyrna, and had cause to regret it. The Aga

'was either intoxicated by it [which [250] is unlikely] or smoke from the tobacco produced that effect, for he flared up at me violently, saying that I had made him drink a liquor to upset him and take away his powers of judgment'.

Tea came with the Portuguese, Dutch and English from China where its use had spread 'ten or twelve centuries earlier. The transfer to Europe was long and difficult: leaves, teapots and porcelain cups had to be imported, together with a taste for this exotic drink, which Europeans had first known in the Indies where tea was very widely used. The first cargoes of tea are thought to have arrived at Amsterdam in 1610 on the initiative of the *Oost Indische Compagnie*.

The tea plant was a bush from which the Chinese peasant plucked leaves. The first small and tender leaves – the smaller the better – produced imperial tea. Tea leaves were dried either by heat from a fire (green tea) or in the heat of the sun (the tea then fermented and blackened to form black tea). Both types were rolled by hand and sent out in 'large chests lined with lead or tin'.



Drinking chocolate in Italy: *La cioccolata* by Longhi (1702-85).

In France, the new drink is not mentioned until 1635 or 1636, according to Delamare, but it was by no means generally welcomed, as a medical student found to his cost: he defended a thesis on tea in 1648: 'Some of our doctors burned a copy of the thesis,' reports Gui Patin, 'and the dean was criticized for having approved it. You will see it and be able to laugh at it.' But ten years later, another thesis, under the patronage of the Chancellor Séguier (who was himself a fervent tea addict) celebrated the virtues of the new drink. [251]

Tea arrived in England by way of Holland and the café proprietors of London who launched the fashion in about 1657. Samuel Pepys drank it for the first time on 25 September 1660. But the East India Company only began to import it from Asia in 1669. In fact European tea consumption did not become considerable until 1720-30

when direct trade between Europe and China began. Until then the major part of this trade had been carried on via Batavia, founded by the Dutch in 1617. Chinese junks bringing their usual cargoes to Batavia also carried a small quantity of rough tea which was the only variety that would keep and survive the long journey. The Dutch for a time succeeded in paying for this tea from Fukien with bales of sage instead of silver. Sage was also used in Europe to prepare a drink, one with highly praised medicinal qualities. But the Chinese were not won over; tea fared better in Europe.

The English very quickly overtook the Dutch. Exports from Canton in 1766 were as follows: 6 million pounds (weight) on English boats, 4.5 on Dutch, 2.4 on Swedish, 2.1 on French; making a total of 15 million pounds, about 7000 tons. Veritable tea fleets gradually grew up. Increasing quantities of dried leaves were unloaded at all ports with 'Indies quays': Lisbon, Lorient, London, Ostend, Amsterdam, Gothenburg, sometimes Genoa and Leghorn. The figures rose enormously; 28,000 'pics' (one picul equals about 60 kilograms) left Canton annually between 1730 and 1740; 115,000 from 1760 to 1770; 172,000 from 1780 to 1785. George Staunton, taking 1693 as the starting point, could infer that 'an increase of four hundredfold' had occurred a century later. In his day it was estimated that in England, 'more than a pound weight each, in the course of a [252] year, for the individuals of all ranks, ages and sexes' was consumed. This adds a final touch to the portrait of this extravagant trade: only a tiny part of Western Europe – Holland and England – had taken to the new drink on a large scale. France consumed a tenth of its own cargoes at the most. Germany preferred coffee. Spain hardly tried it.

Is it true to say that the new drink replaced gin in England? (The English government had taken the tax off gin production to combat the invasion of imports from the continent.) Was it a remedy for the undeniable drunkenness of London society in the reign of George II? Or did the sudden taxation of gin in 1751 on the one hand and the general rise in grain prices on the other favour the newcomer – reputed in addition to be an excellent remedy for colds, scurvy and fevers? Such might have been the end of Hogarth's 'gin alley'. In any case tea won the day and the State subjected it to vigilant taxation (as in the American colonies which later used it as a pretext for revolt). In fact an unprecedented contraband trade brought in six or seven million pounds from the continent every year, via the North Sea, the Channel and the Irish Sea. All the ports and Indies companies as well as high finance in Amsterdam and elsewhere participated in the smuggling. Everyone was in on it, including the English consumer. [...]

Tea was also a success in Islam. Very sweet mint tea became a national drink in Morocco, but it only appeared there

in the eighteenth century, introduced by the English, and did not become widespread until the following century. We do not know much about its travels in the rest of Islam. But it is a remarkable fact that all tea's successes occurred in countries where the vine was unknown: [256] northern Europe, Russia, Islam. Should we infer that the plants of civilization are mutually exclusive? Ustáriz seemed to think so in 1724, saying that he did not fear that tea would spread throughout Spain, since it was only used in the north 'to compensate for the scarcity of wine.' By the same token perhaps, European wines and spirits did not conquer the Far East.

There is a danger that the history of coffee may lead us astray. The anecdotal, the picturesque and the unreliable play an enormous part in it.

The coffee shrub was once thought to be a native of Persia but more probably came from Ethiopia. In any case coffee shrub and coffee scarcely appeared before 1470. Coffee was being drunk in Aden at that date. It had reached Mecca by 1511 since in that year its consumption was forbidden there; the prohibition was repeated in 1524. It is recorded in Cairo in 1510 and Istanbul in 1517; after this it was forbidden and re-authorized at regular intervals. Meanwhile it spread widely within the Turkish Empire, to Damascus, Aleppo (1532) and Algiers. By the end of the century, it had installed itself virtually throughout the Muslim world – though it was still rare in the Islamic regions of India in Tavernier's time.

It was certainly in Islam that coffee was first encountered by such Western travellers as Prospero Alpini, an Italian doctor, who stayed in Egypt in about 1590, or the swaggering Pietro della Valle, who was in Constantinople in 1615:

The Turks [wrote della Valle] also have another beverage, black in colour, which is very refreshing in summer and very warming in winter, without however changing its nature and always remaining the same drink, which is swallowed hot: ... They drink it in long draughts, not during the meal but afterwards, as a sort of delicacy and to converse in comfort in the company of friends. One hardly sees a gathering where it is not drunk. A large fire is kept going for this purpose and little porcelain bowls are kept by it ready-filled with the mixture; when it is hot enough there are men 'entrusted with the office who do nothing else but carry these little bowls to all the company, as hot as possible also giving each person a few melon seeds to chew to pass the time. And with the seeds and this beverage, which they call *kafoue*, they amuse themselves while conversing ... sometimes for a period of seven or eight hours.

Coffee reached Venice in about 1615. In 1644, a merchant of Marseilles, de La Roque, brought the first coffee

beans to his native city, along with some precious cups and coffee-pots. By 1643, the new drug was making its first appearance in Paris, and possibly by 1651 in London. But all these dates refer to the first rather clandestine arrivals rather than to the beginning of a popular taste or public consumption.

In fact it was in Paris that coffee first met with the welcome which made its fortune. In 1669, a Turkish ambassador, an arrogant but sociable man, Soliman Mustapha Raca, who entertained a great deal, offered coffee to his Parisian guests. The embassy failed, but the coffee succeeded. Like tea, coffee was [257] thought to be a marvel remedy. A treatise on the *Usage du café, du thé, et du chocolate* which appeared anonymously in Lyon in 1671, and may have been by Jacob Sporn, listed all the virtues attributed to the new drink:

It dries up all cold and damp humours, drives away wind, strengthens the liver, relieves dropsies by its purifying quality; sovereign equally for scabies and impurity of the blood, it revives the heart and its vital beat, relieves those who have stomach ache and have lost their appetite; it is equally good for those who have a cold in the head, streaming or heavy The vapour which rises from it [helps] watering eyes and noises in the ears, sovereign remedy also for short breath, colds which attack the lungs, pains in the spleen, worms; extraordinary relief after over-eating or over-drinking. Nothing better for those who eat a lot of fruit.

However, other doctors, and public rumour, claimed that coffee was an anti-aphrodisiac and a 'eunuch's drink'.

As a result of this publicity and despite these accusations, coffee made ground in Paris. Pedlars appeared on the scene during the last years of the seventeenth century, Armenians dressed as Turks and wearing turbans, who carried trays in front of them with coffee pot, lighted stove and cups. Hatarioun, an Armenian known by the name of Pascal, opened the first stall to sell coffee in 1672 in one of the booths of the Saint-Germain fair (held for centuries near the abbey on which it depended, on the site of the present Rue du Four and Rue Saint Sulpice). Business was not good for Pascal and he moved to the Right Bank of the Seine to the quai de l'Ecole du Louvre where at one time his customers consisted of a few Levantines and Knights of Malta. He then moved on to England. Despite his failure, other cafés opened. One of these was the Malibar café, with premises first in the Rue de Buci and then in Rue Férou, owned by another Armenian. The most famous was established in the modern style by a former waiter of Pascal's, called Francesco Procopio Coltelli: he was born in Sicily in 1650 and later took the name Procope Couteau. He set up at the Saint-Germain fair, then in the Rue de Tournon, and finally in 1686 in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain. This last café, the *Procopie* – it is still there today – was near the elegant and busy centre of the town at that time (before it moved to the Palais Royal in the eighteenth century) the Buci

crossroads, or more properly the Pont Neuf. He had another piece of luck when the Comedie Française started up opposite his newly opened café. The Sicilian's ability to set the right tone ensured his success. He knocked down the partitions between two adjoining houses, hung tapestries and mirrors on the walls, chandeliers from the ceilings, and sold preserved fruit and drinks as well as coffee. His stall was the rendezvous of the idle, of gossips, conversationalists, wits (Charles Duclos, future secretary of the Academie Française was one of the pillars of the establishment) and beautiful women. The theatre was near at hand and *Procopé* also sold refreshments in a booth there.

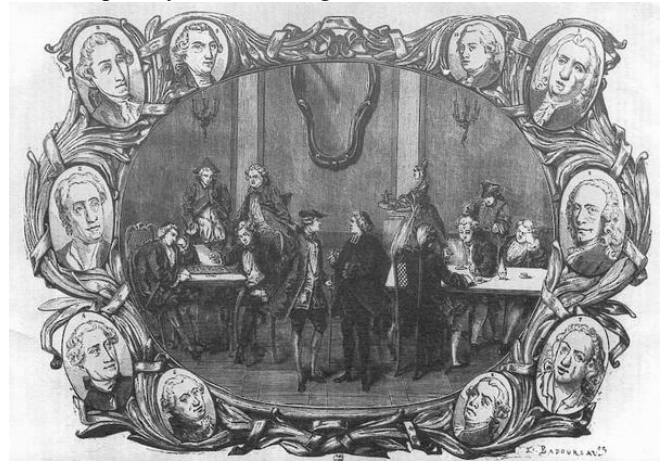
The modern café could not remain the prerogative of one district or one street. In addition the movement of the town gradually militated against the Left [258] Bank to the advantage of the Right, which was livelier, as a summary map of Parisian cafés in the eighteenth century demonstrates – a total of six to seven hundred. The reputation of the Café de la Régence, founded in 1681 in the Palais-Royal square, grew up at that time (later its fame became even greater and it moved to its present position in the Rue Saint-Honoré). The vogue the cafés enjoyed gradually lowered the social status of the taverns. The fashion was the same in Germany, Italy and Portugal. Brazilian coffee was cheap in Lisbon, and so was sugar, which was poured so copiously into it that, to quote one Englishman, the spoon stood up in the cup.

This fashionable drink was not fated to remain limited to the fashionable world. While all other prices were rising, superabundant production in the islands maintained the cost of a cup of coffee almost unchanged. In 1782 Le Grand d'Aussy explained that:

Consumption has tripled in France; there is no bourgeois household where you are not offered coffee, no shopkeeper, no cook, no chambermaid who does not breakfast on coffee with milk. in the morning. In public markets and in certain streets and alleys in the capital, women have set themselves up selling what they call *café au lait* to the populace, that is to say poor milk coloured with coffee grounds which they buy from the kitchens of big houses or from cafe proprietors. This beverage is in a tin urn equipped with a tap to serve it and a stove to keep it hot. There is usually a wooden bench near the merchant's stall or shop. Suddenly, to your surprise, you see a woman from Les Halles or a porter arrive and ask for coffee. It is served in large pottery cups. These elegant people take it standing up, basket on back, unless as a sensuous refinement they want to place their burden on the bench and sit down. From my windows overlooking the beautiful quai where I live [the Quai du Louvre in the neighbourhood of the Pont Neuf] I often see this spectacle in one of the wooden booths

that have been built from the Pont Neuf to the Louvre. And sometimes I have seen scenes which make me regret that I am not Teniers or Callot.

To correct this picture by an awful Parisian bourgeois, it must be said that perhaps the most picturesque or rather the most moving sight was the woman peddlers standing at street corners when the workmen went to work at daybreak. They carried the tin urns on their backs and served *café au lait* 'in earthenware pots for two sous. Sugar was not much in evidence'. It was, however, enormously popular; the workmen 'have found more economy, more sustenance, more flavour in this foodstuff than in any other. As a result, they drink it in prodigious quantities, saying that it generally sustains them until the evening. Thus they eat only two meals, a large breakfast, and beef salad in the evening'; which meant slices of cold beef with parsley, oil and vinegar.



The Café Procope, a fashionable meeting-place, with portraits of some of its famous customers: Buffon, Gilbert, Diderot, D'Alembert, Marmon-
tel, Le Kain, J. B. Rousseau, Voltaire, Piron, D'Holbach.

If there was such an increase in consumption – and not only in Paris and France – from the middle of the eighteenth century, it was because Europe had organized production itself. So long as the world market had depended solely on coffee shrubs around Mocha, in Arabia, European imports had perforce been [259] limited. But coffee shrubs were planted in Java from 1712; on Bourbon island (Réunion) from 1716; on the island of Cayenne in 1722 (it had therefore crossed Atlantic); in Martinique in 1723-30; in Jamaica in 1730; in Santo Domingo 1731. These dates do not apply to production because the coffee shrubs had to grow and spread. Imports of coffee to France from the islands began in 1730. Father Charlevoix writes in 1731: 'We are delighted to see coffee enriching our island [Santo Domingo]. The tree which produces it is already becoming fine ... as if it were native to the country, but it needs time to get accustomed to the soil'. The last to come on to the market, coffee from Santo Domingo, remained the least mentioned and the most plentiful of all: some 40 million pounds were produced in 1789, when Euro-

pean consumption fifty years before was perhaps 4 million pounds. Mocha always headed the list as far as price and quality were concerned, followed by coffee from Java and Bourbon Island ('a small, bluish bean, like that of Java') when its quality was good, then by the products of Martinique, Guadeloupe and finally Santo Domingo. [260]

Careful checks, however, warn us against exaggerating the figures for consumption. In 1787, France imported 38,000 tons of coffee (half of it from Santo Domingo). Of this, 36,000 tons were re-exported and Paris only kept about a thousand tons for its own use. Some provincial towns still did not welcome the new beverage. The Limoges bourgeois only drank coffee 'as a medicine'. Only certain social categories – the postmasters in the north, for example – followed the fashion.

It was therefore necessary to go in search of new markets. Through Marseilles, coffee from Martinique conquered the Levant after 1730, at the expense of Arabian coffee. The *Oost Indische Compagnie*, which supplied coffee to Persia and Muslim regions of India, which had remained loyal to mocha, wanted to sell its surpluses from Java there as well. If the 150 million Muslims are added

to the 150 million Europeans, there was a possible market of 300 million – perhaps a third of all human beings – actual or potential coffee drinkers in the eighteenth century. Coffee had become a 'national commodity' like tea, a means of making money. An active capitalist sector had a financial interest in its production, distribution and success. It had a significant impact on Parisian social and cultural life. The café (the shop where the new drink was sold) became the rendezvous for men of fashion and the leisured, as well as a shelter for the poor. 'There are men,' wrote Sebastien Mercier (1782), 'who arrive at the café at ten in the morning and do not leave until eleven at night [the compulsory closing time, supervised by the police]; they dine on a cup of coffee with milk, and sup on Bavarian cream' [a mixture of syrup, sugar, milk and sometimes tea].

An anecdote illustrates the slow infiltration of coffee amongst the people. When Cartouche was about to be put to death (29 November 1721), his 'judge' who was drinking white coffee offered him a cup. 'He replied that this was not his drink and that he would prefer a glass of wine with a little bread'. [...]