



Transfer–Taste–Consumption: France and the Habsburg Empires in the Early Modern Period

Paris, German Historical Institute Paris (GHIP), Wednesday, March 26, 2025–Friday, March 28, 2025

Cooperation of the GHIP within the framework of the PHC/OeAD/WTZ project “Travelling artefacts, taste, and consumption. The early modern Habsburg monarchy from a transcultural perspective (TravArt).” Universities of Salzburg and Klagenfurt; Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna; Universities of Amiens, Caen, and Reims

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In its heyday in the 15th century, the Burgundian court made a decisive contribution to the development of a European court culture. It had a lasting cultural influence, particularly in France and at the Habsburg courts and not least in the area of art and luxury goods and their subsequent transfer. It also influenced taste development and consumption. The planned conference at the German Historical Institute in Paris will focus on comparative examinations of these developments and transfer processes, which extended far beyond court culture narrowly defined.

The conference, which will mark the end of an Austro-French cooperation project that has so far dealt primarily with exchange and transfer processes from an intra-Habsburg perspective, will broaden the focus to include France in its relations with the Habsburg empires. Foregrounding the French-Habsburg opposition in politics in the early modern period will open a comparative perspective. That perspective will, on the one hand, allow for examining two competing (courtly) societies in their different global embeddings through their material culture and consumption. On the other hand, it will also enable examining the conditions and possibilities of transfers between the two great powers (and neighboring areas).

Due to its many connections to Central Europe and the Iberian Peninsula, the Habsburg monarchy and its centers were politically, dynastically, economically, religiously, and culturally linked to many European and non-European regions in a unique way. Relations with Italy, the Netherlands, and several territories in the Holy Roman Empire were particularly close, as were relations with Spain—which also established links with the Americas and other colonies—due to the family ties that existed until 1700. At the same time, it had diverse relations with France and the Ottoman Empire, despite numerous wars and fundamental rivalries, that always facilitated the exchange of goods and the circulation of tastes.

The conference will analyze early modern transfer processes that developed between the late 15th and the late 18th century. Using the example of taste and consumption, participants will examine the type and extent of the mutual influence of cultural forms of expression as well as the underlying transfer and exchange processes.

The mediation processes of selection, appropriation, and adaptation can be traced particularly well, for example, in transitions, such as those of coffee and tomatoes, from luxury good to mass product because the Habsburg Monarchy, on the one hand, offers researchers examining consumer behavior interdependent spaces and territories while France, on the other, offers a centrally structured space. The conference aims to provide an answer to the question of what linked transfer, consumption, and taste in the Habsburg Monarchy and in France through a comparative discussion.

We invite established as well as young researchers from all disciplines of cultural studies to submit contributions on the transfer of artifacts (in the broadest sense) and on transformations of “taste” and “consumption” in early modern France or the European and non-European possessions of the Habsburgs. Direct comparative approaches are particularly welcome. Particular attention should be paid to cultural translation processes in supra-regional or global contexts in order to trace processes of decontextualization and subsequent recontextualization in a comparative manner.

The following key questions are proposed:

- When, how, and with which products did shifts from luxury to broad consumption occur?
- What are the similarities and differences in consumer behavior between the two great powers with their different global interdependencies, and what can be considered specific? What role does the Burgundian heritage play in this?
- Did the competition between France and the Habsburg Monarchy hinder or promote transfer processes? How did these develop in the 18th century with the Spanish-French-Bourbon axis?

We invite scholars who conduct research on one or more of the topics addressed to submit a title with a draft topic (500 characters) by October 20, 2024. Please send applications to: nmay@dhi-paris.fr.

The conference languages are German, French, and English.