

Call for papers : the Dutch-Belgian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies' annual conference  
Deadline: November 23, 2015

## "FLAVOURS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY"

Brussels, 10-11 March 2016

Confirmed keynote-speakers:

Viktoria von Hoffmann (Université de Liège) & Mark Jenner (University of York)

In this year's upcoming annual conference, The Dutch-Belgian Society for 18th century studies will be focusing on the role played by *taste and smell*, in a century when both theoretical discourse and daily routine were strongly influenced by sensualist ideas. It appears, however, that in the prevalent hierarchy of the senses, taste and smell often took a less prominent position, since 18th-century thought was for a long time primarily defined in purely visual terms (Smith).

Whereas one almost evidently ascribed a mental, and even spiritual dimension to vision and hearing, smell and taste were related to a more bodily, material and animalistic dimension. Despite its status as *sensorialité basse* (von Hoffmann) the concept of "taste" was in fact often subject to social debate in many different fields of interest. Apart from its metaphorical meaning as "aesthetic judgment" – as Voltaire developed it in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* ("The taste, the sense by which we distinguish the flavour of our food, has produced, in all known languages, the metaphor expressed by the word 'taste' – a feeling of beauty and defects in all the arts"), the concept of (culinary) taste was also discussed from a medical, scientific, religious and philosophical point of view. Research on taste also appears to be an interesting way of reconsidering some of the dominant debates – such as the debate on nature *versus* culture – in 18th-century thinking. Whereas the central position of Paris as the capital of good taste and culinary innovation has been thoroughly discussed in recent work by Spary (2012) and von Hoffmann (2013), the question remains as to the perception of taste in other, surrounding regions. For instance, how was taste discussed in the Low Countries and what were the specific fields of interest it was most related to? Furthermore, to what extent was taste considered a contribution to the definition of a local, regional or even national identity? To what extent were taste – and culinary habits in general – considered a matter of importance in other parts of Europe and how did their specific approach relate to the prevalence of French taste?

For a long time, the sense of smell as well carried with it an animalistic connotation (Corbin). Odour perceptions were seen as volatile and, as a consequence, thought to have only superficial effects on human beings. Until recently the idea of a gradual deodorization of society prevailed in the historiography, with the double implication that scents were increasingly pushed into the background, simultaneously becoming less relevant in society. Pioneers in the field, such as Corbin, situated the start of this deodorization process in the second half of the eighteenth century. Allegedly, it has continued into the present day and is connected with both the growing attention for hygiene and the distancing from human corporality. However, recent publications, from Jenner and Smith amongst others, call this theory into question. Not only modernity introduced numerous new odours; also fighting stench was already common practice. The question remains then how people in the eighteenth century dealt with the olfactory reality, what place smell and stench occupied in

the many fields of society (private, professional, medical-scientific, government policy), and how smell or specific smells were perceived.

The organizers intend to publish the contributions afterwards.

### **Possible research topics to address:**

- The perception of specific tastes or taste in general.
- The perception of specific odours or smell in general. Common attitudes towards (a specific) smell or stench.
- The degree to and way in which taste and smell were associated with one another, or with the other senses.
- The way in which smell on the one side, and taste on the other, have been represented in art and literature.
- Medical or scientific theories and developments in relation to taste and smell.
- Methodological reflections with respect to research into smell and taste in the eighteenth century, such as reflections about taste and smell as physical or cultural phenomena.
- The role of taste and smell in the process of (local, regional, national) identity formation.
- The influence of the “culinary revolution” (the import of overseas products) on the eighteenth-century range of tastes and smells and on their perception.

### **Practical information:**

The organization welcomes papers in either English or Dutch. Candidates are invited to submit a title and abstract of 300 words maximum **before November 23, 2015**. These, accompanied by the affiliation, preferred language (Dutch or English) and address data of the candidate can be sent to [Beatrijs.Vanacker@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:Beatrijs.Vanacker@arts.kuleuven.be) and [Klaas.VanGelder@UGent.be](mailto:Klaas.VanGelder@UGent.be). Candidates will be informed regarding the acceptance of their proposals by the end of November.

### **Scientific committee:**

Kornee van der Haven (Universiteit Gent)  
Inger Leemans (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)  
Peter Scholliers (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)  
Jan Herman (KU Leuven)  
Beatrijs Vanacker (KU Leuven)  
Klaas Van Gelder (Universiteit Gent)

**Literature:** A. CORBIN, *Le miasme et la jonquille. L'odorat et l'imaginaire social, 18<sup>e</sup>-19<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris 1982); M. JENNER, 'Civilization and Deodorization? Smell in Early Modern English Culture' in: *Civil Histories. Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford 2000) 127-144; M. JENNER, 'Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and their Histories', *American Historical Review* 116/2 (2011) 335-351; M. SMITH, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting and Touching in History* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 2007); E. SPARY, *Eating the Enlightenment: Food and the Sciences in Paris, 1670-1760* (Chicago 2012); V. VON HOFFMANN, *Goûter le monde. Une histoire culturelle du goût à l'époque moderne* (Brussels 2013).