International Historical Conference

Table and Diplomacy
from the Middle Ages to the present day

Paris – 3, 4, 5 November 2016

Call for Papers

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Registered within the framework of the programmes of Labex EHNE ; UMR IRICE ; EA 6294 LÉA ; the UNESCO Chair in the Sauvegarde et valorisation des patrimoines culturels alimentaires (Safeguarding and Enrichment of Cultural Food Heritages) and IEHCA.

A meal served to soldiers on the plain of Simmering, supper with Tsar Alexander, a banquet at the Kaunitz Palace, gastronomic splendour at Talleyrand's receptions – the facts are known. As Charles-Joseph de Ligne recounted in his Mémoires, the table played an essential role during the Congress of Vienna. Referred to here as a prominent feature of the cycle of diplomatic talks which determined the reconfiguration of Europe in around 1815, culinary staging and presentation actually belongs to a long, multifaceted, and multicultural history of diplomatic practices. Instances are to be found in the history of the Numidian kings, in the banquets given before going on Crusade in the Middle Ages, and at the court of the Emperor of China as well as in the structure of state dinners and present-day international meetings, such as the G8 or G20. It will also be postulated that all civilisations - whether they be Amerindian, African, or Asian, from Mediterranean or barbarian Europe, Levantine or Ottoman, Arab-Islamic or Indian, or in the immensity of the Pacific and Oceania – have assimilated the need to do this. The importance of the meal as a mediation tool brings into play the art of the cook and the serving of drinks, sometimes the elegance of the setting and the tableware, and also at times the unlikely simplicity of a makeshift shelter. It plays a part in the creation of table-companionship situations, which are propitious to the negotiations which it prepares, accompanies, or rewards. It establishes reception protocols. It contributes to exchange and to mutual understanding. It is also an important vehicle for the economic promotion and development of national products and food-related expertise, as well as being a prestigious showcase for powerful nations. In the encounter or confrontation of cultures, it promotes the differences linked to newly-discovered products, as well as languages or local food practices. As a vector of a public diplomacy, the table can conversely prove to be a frontier marking numerous cultural differences. The lack of knowledge about food-related symbolism, the psychological barriers relating to certain foods, and religious taboos, can, if they are ignored, lead to tensions that the table does not contribute to resolving since, on the contrary, it creates or aggravates them. Culinary refusal is a conspicuous marker of the extent of agreement. The banquet can even, quite deliberately, prove to be the final theatre of hostile intentions. In those
circumstances, the table provides, in line with a scale of increasing seriousness, the opportunity for an intolerable insult or the venue of premeditated poisoning.

The aim of this conference is to analyse how diplomatic and food practices link up together when the table becomes an additional, and, at times, a major setting for polite formality and ceremony. This will not involve the featuring of every national gastronomy but rather the examination of the part that the table can play during meetings, negotiations, at the end of conferences, and, more generally, in the everyday process of exchange. Even though the field of gastronomic studies is no longer neglected, the analysis of reception protocols has been the subject of fewer research studies, but these have paid particular attention to the topic of food at royal and princely courts. It will be interesting to understand the way in which European courts from the Middle Ages to the 21st century associated the table and negotiation. In fact, the history of diplomatic ceremonial, which was discredited by actors in diplomacy themselves at the end of the Ancien Régime, and which used to be neglected by historians as a legitimate subject of research, has experienced a remarkable return to favour over the last 15 years. As a subject of total history, the study of the state meal thus falls within the fields of material history (lighting materials, tableware, and glassware), of social history (organisation of trade associations and guilds), of the history of representations (place accorded to meat and alcohol in religious cultures; setting the scene to show power or equality), and of the cultural history of international relations, as it brings into play material and symbolic transfers as power-based relationships. This history also acts a stimulus to the understanding of culinary cultures, which are transmitted through the order of dishes, the choice of menus, the affirmation of gastronomic registers, the giving of prominence to chefs, or the calling on the services of craftsmen and specialist caterers.

Since the 1960s, the opening of a new phase of globalisation, combined with the effects of the radical change in social mores and of those, which are very noticeable in the 2000s, of the new revolution in telecommunications, prompts the rethinking of the place held by the time spent at the table within the framework of diplomatic exchanges in the present day. From the working lunch around a tray meal to the continued importance of the prestige dinner which reflects the image that the host state wants to communicate, the time taken or not taken to share a meal can be a sign of standardisation of practices, of a suavity of manners, or, indeed, of their coarsening. The table's place in diplomatic relations is of such importance that it can be the object of media attention. Whether recounted in the Chronicles or in newspaper articles, aspects of protocol, menu composition, the quality of the foodstuffs, as well as the sumptuousness or the simplicity of the courses are seized upon by photographers and journalists, as well as, nowadays, by internet bloggers. The intermixing, during this conference, of the history of both diplomatic and food practices appears to be a vital key to the deeper understanding of thinking on Europe's cultural, culinary, and diplomatic identity, and its construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction from the viewpoint of the practices of other cultural areas. The table, a material and symbolic place of diplomatic negotiation par excellence, is also that of the recognition, and, indeed, of the negation of otherness. With this objective in mind, the conference will favour contributions from historians and art historians, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists who are specialists of political communication, and comparative literature and cinema specialists. It will also be open to contributions from those working in the field of diplomatic gastronomy.

Numerous themes can be considered within a very wide-ranging area of potential study, in which no cultural area or continent, from the Middle Ages to the 21st century is to be excluded.

- The evolution of practices and procedures relating to the organisation of receptions will be examined: venues (palaces, hotels, the village square, a ship at a port of call); type of service and protocol; table decor; association of music and live entertainment; speaking (speeches and toasts); ceremonial and protocol specialists; the choice of chefs and their teams, their transnational links; the creation of codes and conventions for the welcoming of distinguished guests
- Menus will form the subject of analysis: the order of dishes; the taking into account of food taboos; the length of the meal; the choice of drinks; the place of wine and the selection of vintages; the symbolism of dishes; the iconography and design of menu cards
- Table-specific behaviour will be given prominence: eating manners (hands; the use of eating implements); food taboos; the checking of food safety (food tasters); destructive intentionality (use of wine to loosen tongues, poisoning); the influence of religion on table practices and the use of certain products; the sociability associated with the table (polite conversation, confidence, spying, friendship, and emotional bonds; errors of appreciation; the lack of regard for conventions)
- The porosity of food cultures can serve as a marker for the various stages of globalisation: the introduction of new products (coffee, chocolate, tea); the discovery of foreign cuisines
- The evolution of the presence and participation of women at diplomatic meals will be examined: role and influence of the female rulers of organising countries; role of wives, courtesans, dancers, and singers
- The spectacle of the table: the people at the meal, public opinion and publicity. The analysis of the evolution of the staging of the diplomatic meal, from the paintings of the modern era to the photographs of the G8, and also including literary descriptions, magazine articles, and the analysis of advertising, will enable the understanding of the evolution of representations linked to the place that the table holds in diplomatic communication
- The place of the table in economic diplomacy and public diplomacy will be the subject of particular attention: suppliers of kitchen equipment and cookware; the export of food products and drinks; the influence of reception styles
- The translation by the media of these occasions can also be considered (films of meal scenes within a diplomatic context, film clips; radio reports; literature)
Subject Areas

Contributions are welcome that cover:
- New approaches to history of diplomatic practices
- New approaches to history of food

Subject areas: history, history of art, anthropology, sociology, information and communication

Conference languages

English and French

Deadline for the submission of proposals for papers

Draft paper proposals (500 words maximum) and a short CV should be sent

**On or before 15 mars 2015** at tablediplomatique@univ-tours.fr

All proposals will be studied, whatever the language used.

Scientific Committee

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