Tobacco smoking is definitely the default way to consume tobacco. But in certain times and places, smokeless tobacco- such as snuff, chew, or tobacco tea- have found niches. Yes, snuff was practical for some, a pop phenomenon to others, but many of these historical niches for smokeless tobacco were medicinal. It’s difficult to imagine now, in a society raised on the message of “smoking kills” but tobacco’s introduction onto the world stage in the 1500s can be traced primarily to its supposed medicinal properties. This is especially true of smokeless tobacco. But smokeless tobacco’s story doesn’t end there. Get ready for a wild ride, this is the global history of smokeless tobacco.

Transcript

Marissa: You know what’s kind of a lost art? Snuff-taking. Smoking has been and always will be a thing and chewing tobacco (a kind of snuff) has its rightful place (in 20th Century American baseball at least) but nasal snuff, or smeechin, or sneezing tobacco, or snus as its called by the Swedes, is so incredibly niche that most folks haven’t ever heard of it. Even fewer know how to take it. Moist or oral snuff is essentially chewing tobacco. You take a pinch or “dip” of ground or finely shredded, cured tobacco leaves and put it between your lip and gums.

Dry or nasal snuff is a powdered tobacco product that is kept in some sort of receptacle. When one wants a hit of the sweet stuff, they pinch a small amount of powder between their index finger and thumb or they use special little spoons, or a long nail, bring it up to their nose and sniff the powder up one nostril and then the other. Unlike cocaine-snorting, dry snuff is meant to be ejected some time later via a sneeze. In fact, one of snuff’s most enjoyable qualities is that it provokes a sneeze. Which is weird… but I also kind of get it because sneezing is kind of satisfying.

Averill: For many of us today, this drug and the ritual associated with it is entirely foreign to us. But in snuff’s golden age, the eighteenth century, using snuff was as commonplace as having a cup of coffee is today. In some ways, tobacco snuff was the pumpkin spice latte of the 1700s– a pop culture phenomenon that elicited long lines, gushing praise, and endless branding opportunitie But plenty of people rolled their eyes at all the “basic bitches” whose lives revolved around sn

While riding in his coach, he observed a near-riot outside of a Parisian snuff shop. He consulted his coach-mates:

“A: Is it only sold in this shop?

M: Is it sold everywhere; but for the last three weeks no one will have any snuff in his snuff box except what comes from the Civet Cat.

A: Is it better than others?

M: Not at all; it may even be worse; but since the Duchess of Chartres made it fashionable no one will have anything else…”

Marissa: Tobacco smoking is definitely the default way to consume tobacco. But in certain times and places, smokeless tobacco- such as snuff, chew, or tobacco tea- have found niches. Yes, snuff was practical for some, a pop phenomenon to others, but many of these historical niches for smokeless tobacco were medicinal. It’s difficult to imagine now, in a society raised on the message of “smoking kills” but tobacco’s introduction onto the world stage in the 1500s can be traced primarily to its supposed medicinal properties. This is especially true of smokeless tobacco. But smokeless tobacco’s story doesn’t end there. Get ready for a wild ride, this is the global history of smokeless tobacco.

I’m Marissa

And I’m Averill

Marissa: and we are your historians for this episode of Dig.

…

Averill: Before we regale you with stories of drugs and disease, we have some very special people to thank. Our patreon supporters keep the lights on and the microphones recording, and we are grateful for each and every one of you. We want to give a special shoutout to our mega-donors, our Auger and Excavator level patrons: Maddie, Denise, Colin, Edward, Susan, Christopher, Peggy, Maggie, Danielle, and Iris! Your generosity knows no bounds, and we are honored that you choose us to support. Listener, if you are not yet a patron of this show, it’s easy: just go to patreon.com/digpodcast to learn more.

the topic of snuff, I was so entranced by the monograph that it's all I wanted to talk about anymore. I integrated additional sources as well; you can find all of them in our show notes.

Averill: In indigenous American societies, tobacco served several important purposes. The plant's therapeutic uses were many. The plant was used as a mild analgesic and antiseptic. Indigenous Americans packed tobacco leaves around aching teeth or painful wounds. Tobacco leaves and juice were used to treat snake bites. Indigenous medicine typically overlapped with religious ritual. Shamans used strong tobacco teas as an intoxicant that carried them on vision quests wherein they would identify the causes and remedies of disease. They blew tobacco smoke over the bodies of the ill as a diagnostic tool. This form of passive smoking could also be employed as a cure for complex ailments which were believed to be ceremoniously carried away by smoke spirits.

Marissa: Shamans in training used similar tobacco concoctions, often mixed with other narcotics, to bring themselves to the brink of death. Only after they defeated their intoxicated visions were they initiated into the shamanic priesthood. This journey often resembled a hallucinogenic obstacle course. One Warao shaman recounted his trial which required him to:

"… pass places where demons armed with spears are waiting to kill him, where slippery spots threaten to unbalance, and where giant raptors claw him. Finally, he must pass through a hole in an enormous tree with rapidly opening and closing doors. These symplegades are the actual threshold between life and death. Jumping through the clashing doors, he beholds the bones of those who went before him but failed to clear the gateway. Not finding his own bones among them, he returns from the other-world restored to new life."

Averill: Among the Inca, tobacco snuff was used for medicinal purposes only. Their chosen intoxicant was the coca leaf. The Inca used llamas as pack animals to transport coca and tobacco leaves across the thousands of miles of roads that connected the remote villages that composed their empire. Indigenous Brazilians preferred the use of coca to that of tobacco. Amerigo Vespucci described this habit among the natives of Brazil shortly after he made contact:

"We found… the most brutish and uncivilized people… each had his cheeks bulging with a certain green herb which they chewed like cattle… and hanging from his neck each carried two dried gourds one of which was full of the herb he kept in his mouth, the other full of a certain white flour like powdered chalk. Frequently, each put a small stick… into the gourd filled with flour, then drew it forth and put it in both sides of his cheeks, thus mixing the flour with the herb which their mc contained."

Though they shared this pleasure readily with the explorers, conquerors, and settlers they encountered, it took some time for non-Americans to fall in love with tobacco. Since tobacco's rise in popularity, it has become clear that most people looking to use tobacco as an intoxicant turn to the modes of smoking, chewing, or snuffing.

Averill: The indigenous groups of the West Indies introduced the art of snuffing tobacco to Christopher Columbus and his entourage. Columbus observed that snuffing was performed ceremoniously in spiritual dwellings where the natives would sit around a "finely wrought table, round like a wooden dish in which is some powder which is placed by them on the heads of these [idols] in performing a certain ceremony; then with a cane that has two branches which they place in their nostrils, they snuff up the dust… with this powder they lose consciousness and become like a drunken man."

As the Spanish conquered and colonized South and Central America, Spaniards living in the earliest colonies took up the habit of taking snuff. Like the natives they subjugated, they too associated tobacco snuffing with the divine. By far the demographic most attracted to snuff were Roman Catholic clergy. By 1580, the taking of snuff was habitual among most Roman Catholic clergy. Many even took snuff as they administered the sacraments. Eccelesiastical authorities were displeased.

Marissa: A 1588 decree in Lima declared that "It is forbidden under penalty of eternal damnation for priests, about the administer the sacraments, either to take the smoke of… tobacco into the mouth, or the powder of tobacco into the nose, even under the guise of medicine, before the service of the mass."

In Europe, the second half of the 16th century saw the introduction of tobacco seeds to the Old World but its cultivation was confined to palace gardens where it was planted and tended for its beauty. The French diplomat to Portugal, Jean Nicot, was responsible for recognizing its medicinal properties. He cultivated the plant in the French Embassy's garden and experimented on Lisbon locals suffering from serious illnesses. One man, suffering from cancer, was purportedly cured after Nicot used tobacco leaves to create a salve that he applied to the affected area.

Averill: Nicot introduced the plant to the French Court as a powerful medicine that could be used in poultices, teas, plasters, and clysters (enemas). At the French court, tobacco was called Nicotia's Herb. In his letter to Catherine de Medici introducing this new plant, Nicot described how tob could be snuffed up the nose. Before long, French courtiers were snuffing tobacco as a sort o

gardens of Cosimo de Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. In 1565, a Sevillian physician named Nicolas Monardes published a pamphlet called *Joyful News* which praised the Nicotian Herb and listed its many medicinal uses. According to Monardes, tobacco could cure bad breath, kidney stones, tape worms, dandruff, and infected wounds. Due to this publication, medicinal tobacco spread to the rest of Europe- Bohemia, the German lands, and Switzerland.

Marissa: Medicinal preparations varied and tobacco was cultivated, harvested, and prepared like any other medicinal herb in continental Europe. It was an incredibly expensive plant so only the wealthy had access to it. In the British Isles, the situation was entirely different. The English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish were, in the 1500s, somewhat peripheral to the rest of Europe. The most powerful among them, the English, were still relatively insecure on their thrones after the Wars of the Roses and the monarchy was in the midst of delegitimizing powerful regional lords and consolidating its power nationally.

Adding insult to injury, the English state was relatively poor. This was especially true as Spain and Portugal grew massively wealthy and powerful from their mercantile ventures in America. In the 1500s, the English focused most of their attention on chipping away at the Iberian powers’ growing empires. Given their unfortunate weaknesses, the English turned to privateering in order to disrupt Iberian shipping routes and claim Spanish riches for themselves. This tradition of English privateering had interesting consequences for tobacco use in the British Isles. Due to their deft command of the high seas, the British were the first Europeans to embrace smoking, and the first to use tobacco recreationally.

Averill: The first non-Americans to embrace the use of tobacco as an intoxicant were mariners. All throughout the 1500s, sailors were known to compulsively puff their tobacco pipes, even to the exclusion of food. Curious people from port cities around the world commented on this strange habit that sailors had picked up in the West Indies. For this reason, the plant was often referred to as the “motherless weed” because of its prevalence among Atlantic and Pacific seafarers.

“Tobacco,” by Anthony Chute. Thought to be the first depiction of a European man smoking. | Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

The infamous Elizabethan Sea Dogges– Sir Walter Ralegh, Sir John Hawkins, and Sir Francis Drake– were exposed to smoking during their ventures in Florida, the Chesapeake, and, in the case of Drake, the Pacific coast near San Francisco. The English Sea Dogges, and mariners flying under most any flag, took to smoking the plant but many other demographics resisted that mode of tobacco consumption.

Marissa: There’s a few reasons for this. The first was climate. Andean natives and Spanish se

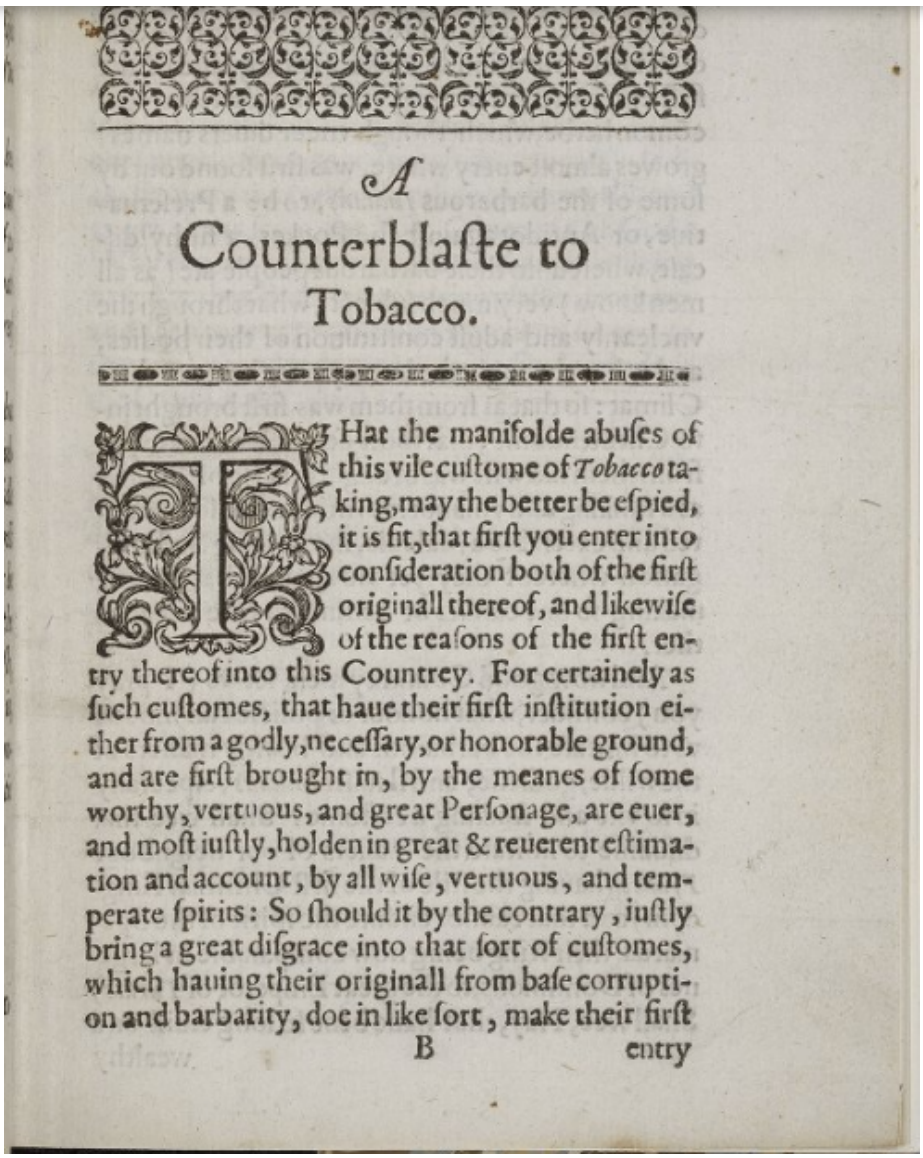
climes of Ireland and the Scottish highlands. These Celtic populations found that it was too difficult to keep tobacco leaves or smoking implements dry enough to smoke easily.

The second reason, and perhaps the most powerful reason, that much of the world resisted the act of smoking were cultural and religious. Catholics had always associated smoke with the Devil, hell, and brimfire. The acrid smell of tobacco smoke reminded virtuous Catholics of the sulphuric aroma of Hell. This instinctual disgust was compounded by the fact that Catholic imperial powers used tobacco smoking to criticize indigenous American hygiene and to associate them with paganism and satanism in order to justify their missions. For these reasons, Catholics tended to spurn tobacco smoking in favor of smokeless tobacco while Protestants embraced smoking.

Averill: Protestant ambiguity toward smoke was complicated briefly by 17th-century witch panics. The tobacco plant is closely related to both belladonna and henbane. This relation was known early on thanks to the rise of the study of botany in the 1500s. One of tobacco's nicknames was "henbane of Peru." This was unfortunate because belladonna and henbane were well-known ingredients in witches brews. Legend held that the combination of the two plants into a paste allowed witches to achieve flight. James VI of Scotland (aka James I of England), a noted witch-hunter, made tobacco his hobby horse for some time.

Marissa: James wrote a pamphlet called *Counterblaste to Tobacco* where he rewrote tobacco's history to capitalize on racism toward indigenous Americans, suspicion of satanism, xenophobia, and Europe's syphilis epidemic:

> "For Tobacco being a common Herb, which… grows almost everywhere, was first found out by some of the Barbarous Indians to be a Preservative, or Antidote against the Pox, a filthy Disease, whereunto these Barbarous People are (as all men know) very much subject, what through the uncleanly… constitution of their Bodie and what through the



A
Counterblaſte to
Tobacco.

THat the manifolde abuſes of this vile cuſtome of *Tobacco* taking, may the better be eſpied, it is fit, that firſt you enter into conſideration both of the firſt originall thereof, and likewiſe of the reaſons of the firſt entry thereof into this Countrey. For certainely as ſuch cuſtomes, that haue their firſt inſtitution either from a godly, neceſſary, or honorable ground, and are firſt brought in, by the meanes of ſome worthy, vertuous, and great Perſonage, are euer, and moſt iuſtly, holden in great & reuerent eſtimation and account, by all wiſe, vertuous, and temperate ſpirits: So ſhould it by the contrary, iuſtly bring a great diſgrace into that ſort of cuſtomes, which hauing their originall from baſe corruption and barbarity, doe in like ſort, make their firſt

B entry

King James, *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*, 1604 | Folger Shakespeare Library

stendome, that most detestable Disease: So from the likewise was brought this use of Tobacco, as a stinking and unsavory Antidote, for so corrupted and execrable a Malady; the stinking suffumigation whereof they yet use against that Disease, making so one Canker or Vermine to eat out another."

Averill: He continues: "And now, good Country-men, let us (I pray you) consider what Honour or Policy can move us to imitate the barbarous and beastly Manners of the wild, godless and slavish Indians, especially in so vile and stinking a Custom. Shall we that disdain to imitate the Manners of our Neighbour France, (having the style of the great Christian Kingdom) and that cannot endure the Spirit of the Spaniards (their King being now comparable in largeness of Dominions, to the greatest Emperor of Turkey;) Shall we, I say, that have been so long civil and wealthy in Peace, famous and invincible in War, fortunate in both; We that have been ever able to Aid any of our Neighbours (but never deafened any of their Ears with any of our Supplications for assistance;) Shall we, I say, without blushing, abase ourselves so far, as to imitate these beastly Indians, Slaves to the Spaniards, Refuse to the World, and as yet Aliens from the holy Covenant of God? Why do we not as well imitate them in walking naked, as they do, in preferring Glasses, Feathers, and such toys, to G and precious Stones, as they do? Yea, why do we not deny God, and adore the Devil, as they d

association of tobacco with the diabolical was unmoving to them since many of them had already developed the habit. So, ironically, because of Catholics' early exposure to tobacco, they had already accepted the "diabolical weed" as an inevitable part of life at a time when Protestants were debating the plant's spiritual implications.

Averill: By the late 1500s, Spain had taken to regulating their imperial tobacco industry. In 1606, King Philip III of Spain decreed that tobacco could only be grown in Cuba, Santo Domingo, Venezuela and Puerto Rico. Tobacco dealings with foreigners became punishable by death. Increasing the Crown's strangle-hold on the trade in 1614, Phillip III declared that all tobacco imports must be sent to Seville. In 1620, Seville's first tobacco factory was opened, specializing in the production of snuff. In 1636 the Crown established the royal tobacco company called the Tabacalera and opened state-run tobacco shops called *estancos*. This allowed the Crown to tax tobacco at a high rate and rake in the dough. But ecclesiastical authorities were unhappy that colonials' snuff habit was spreading from Seville outward to the rest of the peninsula. Priests in Seville embraced the taking of snuff so wholeheartedly that Pope Urban VIII had to threaten the clergy with excommunication if they continued to take snuff during mass.

Marissa; In the rest of the world, which was largely non-Christian, the differentiation between smoking and smokeless tobacco was less important. The global spread of tobacco happened relatively rapidly by 1600, primarily due to the fact that Atlantic and Pacific mariners were so heavily invested in the habit. For example, the Portuguese introduced tobacco to the African continent from their imperial holdings on the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. The Dutch actively stimulated tobacco markets to the Balinese and Javanese in their new colony the Dutch East Indies and began tobacco cultivation in their settlement in Sri Lanka. For example, the Dutch recognized the Javanese obsession with cloves and mixed smokeless tobacco with cloves to encourage its consumption. They also observed the Balinese habit of chewing betel nuts, a stimulant, and convinced them to upgrade their chewing ritual by adding tobacco.

Averill: Smoking was an accepted mode of tobacco consumption in Africa because of the continent's long tradition of smoking cannabis, or *dagga*. Many African groups accepted tobacco readily, switching back and forth between the plants using their specially designed water pipes which cooled the smoke before it reached the lips. There were, however, some exceptions to the universality of smoking on the African continent. For example, the Masai in Kenya, who were known to be very proud people with disdain for rival tribes, took to snuffing instead of smokir They felt that taking snuff, rather than smoking tobacco, elevated them above their rivals. The

where tobacco-lovers adapted the African water pipe into the Persian narghile and the Indian hookah. East Asian countries didn’t have the same fear of smoke we see in the Catholic West so smoking tobacco was pretty readily taken up there, with a few exceptions. That’s not to say that tobacco enjoyed a pleasant reception in all of these places at all times.

Marissa: The third reason why smokeless tobacco sometimes eclipsed the habit of tobacco-smoking (following climate and cultural taboos) is a temporary one: smoking prohibitions. Since smoking was the default mode of consuming tobacco on the Asian landmass, most regulations of tobacco came in the form of smoking bans. Even when tobacco prohibitions targeted smokeless tobacco as well, snuff and chew predominated during prohibitions because they were more discreet forms of tobacco consumption.

Tobacco bans happened primarily in areas without a tradition of excise taxes. Nation states that were making tax income from tobacco rarely prohibited its use. Oftentimes, tobacco prohibitions were instituted on both practical and moral grounds. In early modern Muscovy (Russia), Romanov Tsar Michael Feodorovich launched a tobacco prohibition and a brutal campaign to enforce it. He established a Tobacco Court to try violators of the law. Those convicted of tobacco use were flogged or had their lips slit. The Tsar’s campaign was reinforced by the Greek Orthodox Church which updated its interpretation of the biblical story of Noah to demonize tobacco-smoking. The story goes that a drunken Noah revealed his genitals to his son Ham, triggering the Curse of Ham. According to the Orthodox Church, Noah was intoxicated not on alcohol but on tobacco.

Averill: In the Near East, the general public embraced tobacco smoking enthusiastically. This was not always the case for Muslim rulers, however. Ottoman Sultan Murad IV was particularly hostile to tobacco use. Murad IV was traumatized by a devastating fire that ravaged his capital early in his rule. Sometimes he himself summarily executed suspected smokers. An estimated 25,000 smokers were killed by Murad IV or on his orders.

A similar situation developed in Japan. The general public nurtured robust smoking habits to the chagrin of the Japanese Shogunate. The Shogunate was displeased that a foreign plant and foreign custom was becoming so popular in their realm. After 1609, the Shogunate issued successive bans, each one levying more severe penalties than the last. These punishments stopped short of execution, typically amounting to fines, imprisonment, and property forfeiture. Their attempts to deprive Japanese subjects of tobacco went generally unheeded and the prohibition was repealed in 1625.

years, the Chinese turned to snuff instead to get their tobacco fix and avoid execution. Several years into the prohibition, the Qing toppled the Ming dynasty and established their rule over the former Ming empire. The Qing repealed the smoking prohibition and stimulated domestic tobacco cultivation in the Fukien Province.

Averill: In Europe, the Catholic/Protestant divide in preferred modes of tobacco consumption remained. The English and Dutch became two of the biggest proponents of tobacco smoking during the 1600s. While the French, Irish, and Catholic southern European countries turned first to smokeless tobacco. In these areas, snuff was the primary mode of tobacco consumption. This led to an interesting situation in the German and Swiss lands where rulers sometimes espoused a different confession than their subjects.

In the case of Saxony, the Protestant masses became quickly hooked on tobacco smoking but the Catholic temporal and ecclesiastical rulers objected to this new fad, saying, "it is both godless and unseemly that the mouth of man, which is the means of entrance and exit of the immortal soul, that mouth which is intended to breathe in the fresh air and to utter the praises of the most high, should be defiled by the indrawing and expelling of tobacco smoke." A similar situation developed in Switzerland where legal culture borrowed heavily from Saxony. Switzerland developed a dedicated tobacco court and, in some regions, even instituted the death penalty for smokers which wasn't abolished until 1691.

Marissa: In more remote Catholic areas, such as the Scottish Highlands, their preference for snuff went above and beyond theological rationales. Snuff became popular in the Highlands after it was introduced there by the Irish. It is well-documented that the Irish had taken up the habit of snuffing by the 1630s. One observer from 1636 said, "The Irish take tobacco most in powder or smutchin, and it mightily refreshes the brain, and I believe there is as much taken this way in Ireland as there is in Pipes in England; one shall commonly see the serving maid upon the washing block, and the swain upon the ploughshare when they are tired with labour, take out their boxes and draw it into their nostrils with a quill and it will beget new spirits in them."

Averill: The snuffing habit took hold in Scotland, where it was called "smeeshin ." The damp climate of the Scottish Highlands made it difficult to keep pipes lit or wrapping papers dry so snuff seemed like the most reasonable alternative. Still, the damp presented a problem for powdered tobacco as well. For this reason, Highlanders redesigned the snuff box to suit the climate. Instead of using cube-shaped receptacle, they adapted the ram's horn to keep as much of the powder dry as

exposing the powdered snuff to precipitation and moisture in the air. Highlanders' snuff horns were called mulls.

Marissa: Taking snuff evolved into an important aspect of Scottish lore and political culture. Visiting clans were offered a pinch of snuff upon their arrival. And mulls became coveted family heirlooms that conveyed the chiefdom to successors. Highlands myths evolved around the taking of snuff from an heirloom mull called the scuttermull. One clan believed that the ghost of an ancient chieftain named Hamish Ich McFerr appeared when his successors were on their deathbeds. The ghost would ask for a pinch of snuff before conveying the scuttermull to the chieftain's heir.

Scottish Highlanders are, historically, not known for being fashion-forward or trendsetting. However, in the case of snuff, they were ahead of the curve. As the 1600s came to a close, snuff was about to dominate tobacco consumption in a big way. For decades, Spain had been the epicenter of snuff manufacturing and consumption, but by 1700, its status as snuff capital of the world was in the decline. For much of the 1700s, Spain continued to get rich on its snuff production but the taking of snuff was no longer a Spanish peculiarity. This was due, in part, to discontent with the Spanish Crown's strict control of the tobacco trade but also because of the growing popularity of cigars in the Spanish Atlantic.

Averill: Spain's South American colonies chafed at the restrictions placed on their tobacco trading by the Tabacalera. Small illegal trading operations developed outside of the Tabacalera system. In response, the Crown cracked down even harder on tobacco regulation, crippling Venezuela's economy and sparking rebellion in Cuba. As a result, Spanish America cultivated a domestic tobacco trade among creoles who had little or no affection for the Spanish Crown. Spanish American clergy, who maintained closer political and cultural ties with the mother country, stuck to snuff. But lay people began smoking cigars, or *ceegars* as they were known, which consisted of shredded and cured tobacco wrapped in tobacco leaf.

Marissa: Slowly, demand for cigars in Spanish America and Spain's insistence on manufacturing as much tobacco product as possible, meant that cigar production was established in Spain, specifically in Cadiz. While the Seville tobacco factories, now called *fabricas*, continued to produce only snuff, a small outfit in Cadiz split its production between snuff and cigars. It took some time for cigars to catch on in Europe so snuff remained Spain's most important tobacco export but habit of taking snuff was no longer confined to Catholic clergy, the French court, the Scots, a

assumed the throne in 1740, was a non-smoker who was disgusted by the smell. He was not shy about his anti-tobacco stance, calling its users slovenly and foolish. Under the aegis of Frederick the Great, Prussia was a military juggernaut. Frederick was known for his iron will and discipline, a quality that he imposed on the infamous Prussian army. As is the case in many martial societies, discipline and self-mastery were values held most dear in 18th-century Prussia. Prussia was, like many European countries at this time, experiencing rapid urbanization. Growing Prussian towns were built primarily of wood, making fire a constant risk.

Marissa: Frederick was able to capitalize on Prussian preoccupations with discipline and fear of fire to criminalize smoking outdoors within Prussian towns. The same rule applied in the Prussian countryside, especially during the harvest. Prussians found smoking outdoors during harvest time were sentenced to one month in prison. The ban on smoking in public combined with the importance of public life in 18th-century Prussia encouraged the habit of snuff-taking in Prussia. Tobacco had such a hold on people that Prussians were willing to drop the ritual of smoking and take up a new mode altogether in order to get their buzz.

Averill: In Prussia, snuff was adopted as the "next best thing" to smoking, but in Western Europe, snuff's cultural importance was escalating beyond anything that the earliest Conquistadors and explorers could have imagined two centuries before. The eighteenth century marked the emergence of the "public sphere," a concept articulated by Jurgen Habermas which he defines as " the domain of social life where public opinion can be formed." Newspapers flew off the presses and literacy rates skyrocketed. A tradition of public intellectualism developed within this public sphere. Philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Baruch Spinoza, Voltaire, and Immanuel Kant enjoyed considerable celebrity. Enlightenment thinkers united with historians like Edward Gibbon and economists like Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus in wielding influence over both popular culture and official policy.

Marissa: In this new public sphere, respectability (or gentility) became paramount. Europeans focused on improving their hygiene, refining their manners, and following the latest fashions. France was the obvious fashion front-runner. To other Europeans, the French had a *je ne sais quoi* that they longed to imitate. One social critic bemoaned the British enslavement to fashion:

"The gods who are worshipped here, although no altars are raised to them, are novelty and fashion. A man has but to run, and all those who see him run after him. They would not stop until he was found to be mad but to find that out is to count the sands; we have madmen here who have b mad from birth and they are still accepted as wise. The snuff from the Civet Cat is a very smal

the English vernacular and everyone read the latest French novels. Genteel British people ordered their clothes, cosmetics, and accessories from Paris and watched intently from across the channel the soap opera that was the French Revolution. Unsurprisingly, then, the courtly French habit of taking snuff, established initially by Jean Nicot in the 1560s, became all the rage 200 years later. This international interest in French snuff stimulated the Parisian snuff industry and, in turn, amplified and extended the French love of snuff. As early as the 1720s, the snuff craze was under way. European writers of conduct literature were often displeased with this turn of events:

“The world has taken up a ridiculous fashion– the excessive use of snuff. All nations are snuffing. All classes snuff, from the highest to the lowest. I have sometimes wondered to see how lords and lackeys, High Society and the mob, woodchoppers and handymen, broom squires and beadles, take out their snuff boxes with an air and dip into them. Both sexes snuff for the fashion has spread to the women; the ladies began it, and aren now imitated by the washerwomen. People snuff so often that their noses are more like a dust heap than a nose; so irrationally that they think the dust an ornament, although, since the world began, all rational men have thought a dirty face unhealthy; so recklessly that they lose the sense of smell and their bodily health.”

Painting depicting a man taking snuff in the 18th century | Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

Marissa: This was especially true in England, which with the 1707 Act of Union, became Great Britain. Britain is such a strange case because smoking tobacco was one of an Englishman’s favorite pastimes for about 100 years before smokeless tobacco came into fashion. Smokeless tobacco was brought to England by Charles II and his entourage in the 1660s after they picked up snuff habits during their exile in France. But it wasn’t until the naval battle of Vigo in 1702 that taking snuff became a quintessentially English habit.

Averill: After defeating French and Spanish fleets, English Vice Admiral Edward Hopson confiscated 50 tons of Spanish snuff from their ships and sold the product on England’s west coast. Hopson credited the massive volume of snuff with saving his life during the battle. One of the many ships laden with Spanish snuff was unintentionally caught in the crossfire and served to cushion the blow from a French fire attack. The powder extinguished the flames before the English ship caught fire. Vendors encouraged buyers to patriotically partake in the spoils of war by acknowledging snuff’s role in the English victory.

Marissa: In the early decades of the 18th century, people freshly ground their own snuff. In th

of the snuff industry came new branding opportunities. Tobacco had always lent itself to branding. In 1619, John Rolfe cultivated a new strain of tobacco in the Chesapeake which he called *Orinoco. Orinoco* inspired impressive brand loyalty among tobacco-lovers and revolutionized the way that Europeans stimulated markets for their products. (Remember how we mentioned earlier the way the Dutch cultivated foreign markets in Southeast Asia. That was all made possible by the example of *Orinoco*).

Averill: Part of this branding process was the strategic adulteration of snuff powder with other substances. This process of adulteration had its roots in snuff's introduction to Europe as a therapeutic. Much like other botanicals, tobacco was mixed with all kinds of active ingredients designed to amplify its therapeutic properties. So snuff had hardly ever been "pure." But by the 1700s, manufacturers and boutique distributors were mixing snuff with additives in an attempt to find the next best thing. This technique could involve the mixing of snuff with narcotics like cocaine, opium, or hashish. Oftentimes snuff was adulterated with substances we now understand to be toxic: lead, arsenic, or hydrogen cyanide, for example.

Marissa: Snuff was also enhanced with flavorants like orange oil, rose, musk, ginger, mustard and pepper. This process of adulteration added another layer of complexity to a product that had already earned the attention of aficionados who had been, for centuries, refining their appreciation for different strains, provenances, and preparations of their favorite plant. Gentlefolk and refined wannabes everywhere looked for any opportunity to flaunt their encyclopedic knowledge of snuff varieties.

Averill: This performative aspect of snuff-taking was punctuated with all sorts of snuff accoutrements. Once tobacco rasps (the little graters used to grate carrots of tobacco) were no longer needed, the snuff box became the snuff-taker's most important accessory. Snuff boxes became so elaborate that they were regarded as jewelry. Perhaps they were comparable to pocket watches or wrist watches which have a functional but also a decorative purpose. An array of tiny implements in the shape of spatulas or spoons were used to bring snuff to nostril and dedicated handkerchiefs, often emblazoned with its owner's initials or family crest, were used to complete the snuff-taking ritual.

Marissa: These items were incredibly precious to the folks who owned them. Records from the Old Bailey, London's central criminal court, are filled with stories of snuff box thievery. Eighteenth-century newspapers are filled with classified ads placed by crestfallen owners describing the

For example, in 1747 the Boston Gazette published the following classified advertisement: “Lost in removing Good in the last Fire at the Court House, a Silver Snuff Box marked Sa. Butler, a Lyon engrav’d theron, any Person who will bring it to the Owner, or to the Printer, shall have 20 shillings… and if offer’d to sell, it’s desir’d it may be stop’d.”

Averill: Snuff boxes were often made of expensive materials, like gold, silver, ivory, or tortoiseshell and inset with precious gems, mosaics, cowry shells, and portrait miniatures. Chinese snuff boxes were often lacquered and decorated with mother of pearl. More often in China, the insides of snuff boxes were painted so elaborately that it became an art form. There were, of course, less ostentatious versions made of tin, carved wood or papier mache. Still, they would have been precious objects to those who owned them even if they weren’t encrusted with jewels.

Marissa: In the early decades of the 18th century, European aristocrats and Enlightenment celebrities developed elaborate snuff-taking rituals that resembled performance art. Upwardly mobile Europeans imitated these public performances and some even enrolled in workshops or finishing school courses to learn how to take snuff in a manner that conveyed their desired social status rather than the social status into which they were born. During this time more than any other, the mode of one’s tobacco consumption was intimately bound with their social status. Smoking became decidedly low-brow, meant for soldiers, sailors, country bumpkins, and foreigners. Snuff, with its fancy, ornate receptacles, elaborate etiquette, and savvy branding, conveyed cultivation and sophistication.

Averill: This process of emulation was amplified by the French and British presses whose bread and butter were columns and news stories about High Society in Paris and London. For example, author,, historian and MP Edward Gibbon had a wicked snuff habit which he credited as the basis for his creative genius. Gibbon’s love for snuff was widely publicized and imitated by admirers in the British and French empires. This amplification by the public sphere continued into what is known as the Regency period (1795-1820) in Britain and the Napoleonic era in France (1799-1815).

Marissa: The French briefly disowned snuff during the French Revolution and its many related wars. Support of Republican politics became so fervent that revolutionary radicals were able to take control of the new French Republic. The revolution slowly devolved into the Reign of Terror under Maximilien Robespierre. During the Reign of Terror (1793) it was dangerous to be an aristocrat and even more dangerous to WANT to be one. Since snuff was associated with elitism. taking it could amount to a death sentence. This did not, however, last long.

all made of precious metals and gems and encrusted with miniatures and busts of his historical heroes: like Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great. His favorite snuff box, however, bore the likeness of his first wife and love of his life, Josephine.

In Britain, snuff, and its elite associations, never went out of style but its cultural meaning was changing. Snuff’s new spokesperson was George Bryan Brummel, known to history as the world’s first metrosexual, “Beau” Brummel. One observer described him as follows: “heroically consecrated to this one object: the wearing of clothes wisely and well; so that as others dress to live, he lives to dress.”

Beau Brummel | Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

held straight with stirrups that were wrapped around his black boot heel. Brummel accentuated his Regency aesthetic with a new, neater snuff ritual. His chosen blend was called "Martinique," mixed by a high end snuff firm, Friburg and Treyer. Brummel was imitated by many and he even converted the Prince of Wales (Prinny) into a devoted snuff-taker. Prinny's mother, Queen Charlotte, came to love Friburg & Treyer's "Morocco" blend which she took so regularly that she was called "Snuffy Charlotte." Friburg and Treyer took advantage of Brummel's and the royal family's loyalty, by reporting it on their product labels , making them the first tobacco company to obtain a royal endorsement.

Averill: Snuff's golden age, however, was coming to a close. The British aided Spain and Portugal in their war against Napoleon, known as the Peninsular War (1807-1814). It was there that the British cavalry were introduced to Spanish cigars. Remember, Spain began producing cigars a century earlier in response to the desires of their South American markets. Cigars were relatively rare in Britain before the Peninsular War. They imported only 26 pounds of cigars in 1800. By 1830, Britain was importing 250,000 pounds of cigars per year, some of those directly from Cuba.

Marissa: Just as snuff had its detractors, so too did cigars. People were generally unused to the smell of tobacco smoke, after decades of smokeless tobacco consumption, especially in public places. Complaints from non-smokers stimulated the establishment of smoking rooms in gentleman's clubs, restaurants, and even in Parliament. In order to minimize the absorption of smoke into their hair and clothing, smokers took to wearing smoking caps and smoking jackets. After their smoke, they removed their smoking garments and left them, and the acrid odor, behind.

With the cigar's newfound popularity, pipe-smoking returned to Britain, France, and the rest of continental Europe. Of course, folks had been smoking in all of these places all along, but their habit was, in the public sphere, regarded as plebeian and even aberrant. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, smoking was becoming normal again. Snuff became the habit of old-fashioned geezers, has-beens. As always, there were some exceptions to this. Sweden retained its early modern love for snuff, in the form of snus, a nasal snuff that still enjoys popularity in Swedish culture.

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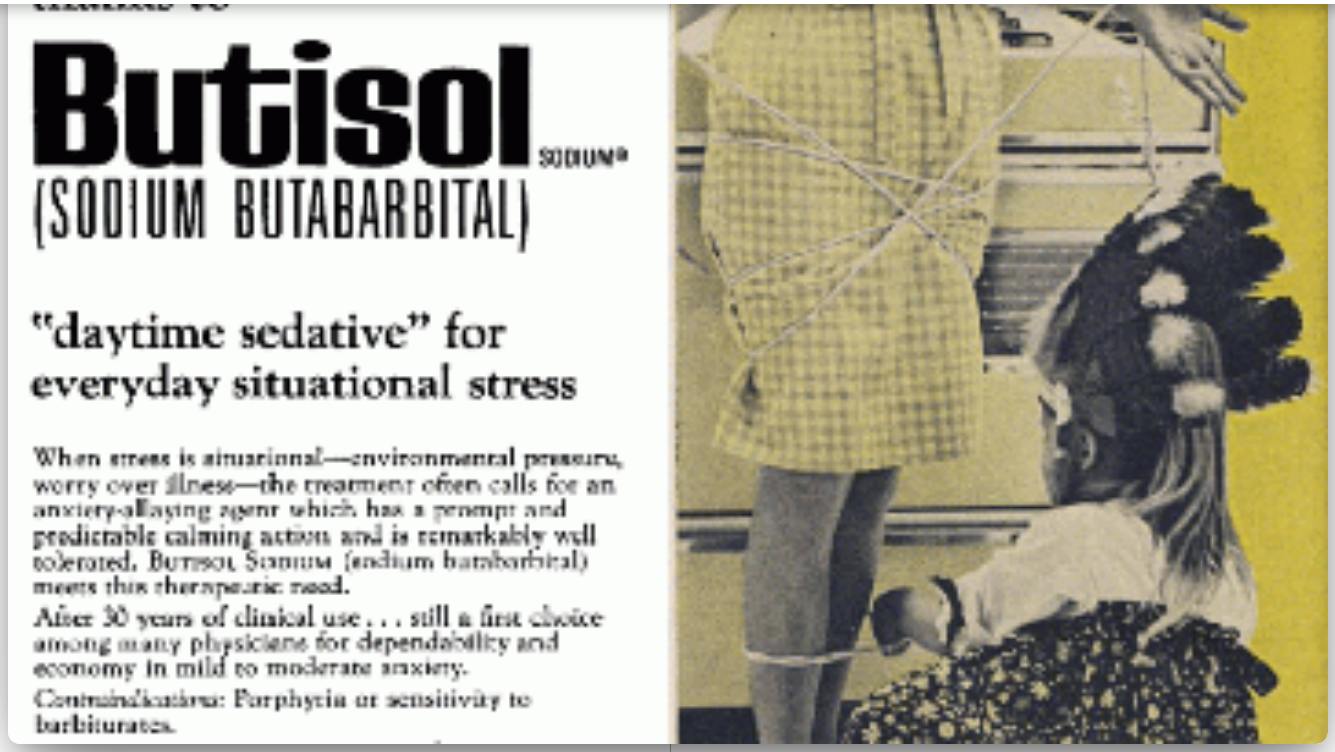

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