

Please join us for

“The Adoption of Coffee in Pre-Revolutionary France”

Dr. Julia Landweber of the MSU History Department will be presenting her research at the Nutrition & Food Science Colloquium.

April 12th at 2:30 pm, in University Hall room 4008

ABSTRACT:

For the MSU Food Studies Colloquium

The Adoption of Coffee in Pre-Revolutionary France

This talk analyzes how coffee was adopted into early modern French pharmacological and food cultures. Coffee was the last of the great trio of exotic new caffeinated beverages (the others being chocolate and tea) to reach France in the seventeenth century. Coffee immediately touched the senses of all who first encountered it through its powerfully rich aroma, fearsome black brothy appearance, and bitter taste. In the 1640s-1660s, early potential drinkers deemed these qualities alarming and repellent. But when its pharmacological qualities were examined in the 1670s and 80s, doctors and patients seeking health and wellbeing began to think coffee attractive. These tangible appeals to taste, smell, and health gave way, between 1690-1730, to the more intangible sensory attractions of fashion and sociability, as coffee drinking became popular at court in the last decades of King Louis XIV's reign, and cafés in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille introduced coffee to the middle classes. In the middle of the eighteenth century a new generation of culinary and medical experts grew interested in coffee, now a widely available commodity in French homes and public spaces. Over the 1740s-1770s, cookbooks taught domestic chefs of both upper and middling class homes to add coffee not just to their repertoire of drinks, but also encouraged its use in dessert recipes. Concerned physicians countered with new studies challenging coffee's efficacy as a drug, and its safety in food and drink. Yet by century's end, coffee had become ubiquitous. Although it took nearly one hundred and fifty years to fully penetrate France, the myriad appeals to individuals' senses of health, taste, and fashion, enabled coffee to trump its many skeptics and become a staple of French sensory culture.



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