

The Turbot and the Pilchard

Sea Product Consumption in Eighteenth Century South - West France

Frédéric Duhart

Faculty of Gastronomic Sciences
of the Mondragon University
Basque Culinary Center
Paseo Juan Avelino Barriola, 101
20009 Donostia-San Sebastián
Guipuzkoa - Spain
fduhart@bculinary.com



Keywords:

Fish – Crustacean – Mollusc – Popular Taxonomy – Consumption - France

Abstract

Southwest France constitutes an interesting field to study the conditions and the forms of sea product consumption in early modern Western Europe because of its geographical situation. This area is widely open to the Bay of Biscay on the west and connected to the Mediterranean Sea by various roads and a canal from the east. The distances between certain interior parts of Southwest France and the Atlantic or Mediterranean coast were accentuated by bad transport conditions. Even in these inland areas, however, some sea products were consumed. In this paper, I would like to underline the complexity of this regional consumption of seafood, studying its modalities in the littoral areas and in the inland towns and countries. Such analysis takes into account the local fishery conditions, the forms of regional fresh and preserved sea product trade, the culinary seafood uses and the social implications of sea product consumption. Finally, differences between lower class and elite forms of sea product consumption prove as important as geographical contrasts.

The question of aquatic resource consumption in the early modern Western Europe calls for complex answers. Underlining the importance of fish consumption during the fast days is not enough. Indeed, fish dishes could be combined with meat ones in certain meals. For instance, Toulouse councillors enjoyed both meat and fish, such as mutton, sea-bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*), duck liver pies, woodcocks, veal, capon stuffed with truffles, partridges and crawfishes (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) during a dinner organised on November 1788 (Arch. Toulouse CC 2826). Moreover, aquatic resources and meats could be mixed to obtain certain dishes. For example, bisque of crawfish garnished with pigeons was served to the guests at a meal offered by the municipal government for the town of Bayonne to the intendant on October 1737 (Arch. Bayonne CC 322). Considering the role of fishes during the penitential times, giving them necessarily a low gastronomical or dietetic status is also a hasty conclusion. A famous Montaigne's phrase is sufficient to remind that fish eating lovers existed in the past: "I delight in fish, so that my days of abstinence are days of plenty and my fast-days are feast-days. I believe what some say: that fish is more easily digestible than flesh (1558)."

South-West France constitutes an interesting field to examine the question of seafood consumption during the eighteenth century. Indeed, this region of approximately 100,000 square kilometres grouped together very different ecosystems and human settlements. In the west, the region was widely opened to the Bay of Biscay with more than 250 kilometres of maritime coast. More than three quarters of this littoral area were hostile to the development of an important halieutic activity. From Tarnos to La Pointe de Grave, the major part of the littoral line was a sandy beach totally exposed to waves and not adapted to intensive foot fishery activity. As a result of its morphologic peculiarity, Arcachon Bay was the most notable exception in this sandy part of the littoral. In the south of Adour River, the rocky Basque Coast offered natural harbours to fishermen communities located in Biarritz, Bidart, Guéthary, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Ciboure and Socoa. Along this large west littoral, Bidassoa, Adour and Gironde estuaries were also intensive fishing areas (Le Masson du Parc, [1727] 2002). Several 100 kilometres away from the Atlantic Ocean, the east of South-West France was closer to the Mediterranean Coast where it was connected with by various roads and by the Midi Canal since 1683. Various natural regions formed the more inland part of South-West France. Part of them were more or less prosperous alluvial plains, others were difficult highlands or real mountain valleys located at a great distance in time from the fishing harbours. South-West France was a rural region with notable towns. At the end of the eighteenth century, Bordeaux was one of the biggest French cities with a population of more than 100,000. With 52,000 inhabitants, Toulouse was an important inland centre of consumption (Meyer & Poussou, 1995). Medium and small size towns completed the urban landscape: Bayonne, Montauban, Libourne, Tarbes, Bergerac, Rodez, etc.

The Southwest inhabitants used a wide range of foods from the waters in the 18th Century. The present study is focused on marine species, even if we will sometimes evoke freshwater animals thanks to an archive document, as we did previously when we mentioned crawfishes. First, we will consider the essential question of local marine species classification. By the classical exercise of cultural arbitrariness, the fishermen did not

accept as edible all the non-toxic species which lived in the waters which frequently supplied the markets of the Southwest (Garine, 1979). This definition of marine animal edibility was the first step in a subtle categorisation of *good to be eaten* products. The two next ones specified gradually the degree of adequacy of fishes and shellfishes: were they good to sell or not, then, were they worthy of being served during a fine meal or not. Second, we will study the socio-economical and natural phenomena which affected fresh and preserved seafood consumption.

Good to Eat, Good to Sell, Good to Serve

Some European maritime communities expressed linguistically the distinction between the fishes they considered to be edible and those that were not. For instance, North-Norwegian inhabitants differentiated traditionally *Fisk* ["fish"] and *Ufisk* ["non-fish"] (Bolsstad Skjelbred, 2000). Precise words such as these were not used on the Bay of Biscay coast of France. Nevertheless, species were regarded as inedible in certain harbours. In his *Traité général des pesches*, Duhamel du Monceau indicated that Saint-Jean-de-Luz fishermen threw back to the sea the spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*) they knew as *melca* (1777). A few decades later, Ulysse Darracq noted the non-acceptance as food of various fishes in the Bayonne area. Part of them were uncommon in the local waters such as the smooth hammerhead (*Sphyrna zygaena*) or the Mediterranean moray (*Muraena helena*). Others were more common, for instance, the big ocean sunfish (*Mola mola*) or the little black goby (*Gobius niger*) (1836). Except in Jewish communities where some fishes and seafood were rejected to follow religious dictates, the cultural inedibility of a species generally was not founded on real taboos in South-West France. Rather it was the consequence of simple scruples generated by some species characteristics: smell, colour, global appearance, etc. The fate reserved for the anglerfish (*Lophius piscatorius*) by the inhabitants of coastal Gascony notably reveals a clear rejection of fishes that looked ugly - the "toadfish" was beheaded before sold (Thore [1811] 2001; fig. 1).

The edible fish category was not homogenous. Some species were totally accepted as food, but very few were considered good to eat, or they were not good to sell. Only fishermen or very poor persons who lived in maritime areas used them. During the summer, for example, Saint-Jean-de-Luz's lower-class people ate bogues (*Boops boops*), fishes that were abundant, but less appreciated by gourmets (Duhamel du Monceau 1772). Around the Bay of Arcachon, the little sand gobies (*Pomatoschistus minutus*) were used as food only by indigent households (Thore [1811] 2001). At the beginning of nineteenth century, the Atlantic horse mackerels (*Trachurus trachurus*) were mostly served on the tables of the fishermen's family in the Bayonne area. When they were brought to the market, they only attracted penniless consumers. Locally, the status of Atlantic mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) was barely better (Darracq 1836). Various elasmobranchs likewise contributed to the poor diets. Duhamel du Monceau noted that the torpedo (*Torpedo marmorata*) was left to the seamen when it was caught on a boat



from Saint-Jean-de-Luz. At the end of the eighteenth century, the porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*, fig 2), the sandy dogfish (*Scyliorhinus canicula*) and the angel (*Squatina squatina*) were of the cheapest fish available at the La-Teste-de-Buch market (Ragot 1987). A few decades later, only lower-class people ate the common skate (*Dipturus batis*) or the hundshai (*Galeorhinus galeus*) in Bayonne (Darracq 1836).

The most appreciated species were not only good to eat; they were also good to serve. They constituted gourmet foods. Offering them to guests was both, evidence of distinction and a mark of wealth because they were as much sought-after as they were expensive. From a fisherman's point of view, these species were too good to sell and to be eaten at home. These fish and seafood also represented luxury products that lower-class people could not afford, even in the harbours. The "dish of fish" that the lord of La Teste demanded every year to each of the fishermen who worked in his land, gives a good idea of the species considered to be the best in this area at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The dish had to be constituted by a big turbot (*Psetta maxima*, figure 3), twelve fine common soles (*Solea solea*), two big Atlantic John dories (*Zeus faber*), two red seabreams (*Pagellus bogaraveo*), a big grey gurnard (*Eutrigla gurnardus*), a big hake (*Merluccius merluccius*) and a maiden ray (*Raja clavata*) (Le Masson du Parc, [1727] 2002). In Bayonne, sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax* & *D. punctatus*), meagres (*Argyrosomus regius*), corbs (*Umbrina cirrosa*), blue mussels (*Mytilus edulis*), edible crabs (*Cancer pagurus*) and various shrimps (*Palaemon longirostris* & *Crangon crangon*) also contributed to the preparation of fine dishes (Duhamel du Monceau, 1777; Arch. Bayonne CC 323-330: 1740-1753). Prestigious seafood logically interested wealthy consumers who lived far from the coast. Of course, transportation costs put up their prices, but this did not trouble them. Quite the opposite occurred; a higher price meant a higher prestige. Consequently, appreciated marine species had a place of honour in certain feast menus that were tasted far from the sea. In February of the year 1704, for example, Toulouse councillors ate during a supper: oysters (*Ostrea edulis*), great scallops (*Pecten sp.*), spiny lobsters (*Palinurus elephas*), a piece of salmon (*Salmo salar*) and a turbot, which weighted around 3 kg. Nearly 80 years later, their successors enjoyed a sole soup, oysters, a gilthead seabream (*Sparus aurata*), two rolled whittings (*Merlangius merlangus*), a boiled pike (*Esox lucius*), a sea bass with sorrel, a ray with black butter, three grilled soles and ten red mullets (*Mullus sp.*). The codfish vole-au-vent also served during this meal invites one to consider the two faces of the seafood market (Arch Toulouse CC 2726 & CC 2724).

Fresh and Preserved Seafood Markets

To satisfy local upper-class needs, the marine fresh catches could be regularly transferred to big and medium size inland centres of consumption when the weather was favourable. Bordeaux attracted the biggest part of fish caught in Arcachon Bay. The best quality pieces were loaded on horses shortly after the boats arrived to be sold as

soon as possible to the inhabitants of this big town, 70 kilometres away (Le Masson du Parc, [1727] 2002). Toulouse market steadily received fish from the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts thanks to efficacious couriers who were paid and protected by the town (Arch CC 2724). Many smaller inland towns were also supplied at regular intervals with fresh seafood. In the 1770s, for example, fresh seafood catches arrived with regularity to Castres in the wintertime (Arch. Ac. Med. 129d23/1). At the same period, the Franciscan community established in Mirepoix occasionally bought seafood during the Lent season (Arch. Ariège H 58). Certain days, the seafood supply could be sent to medium towns located far away from the coast. Located at least two hundred kilometres from the nearest coast, the fresh fish price list established by Agen councillors in March 1763 mentioned around ten marine species. Among these were *Scophthalmus maximus* (17 sous per pound), *Solea solea* (nice: 17 s; damaged: 11 s), *Scophthalmus rhombus* (14 s), *Zeus faber* (14 s), *Mullus spp.* (14 s), *Dicentrarchus labrax* (big: 11 s; small: 9 s), *Merlangius merlangus* (9 s), *Eutrigla gurnardus* (9 s), *Raja clavata* (5 s) and *Dipturus batis* (4 s). Various grey mullets were also described in this document. Fish of these species could arrive to Agen with the fresh marine catches because sea grey mullets were more esteemed than others. However, *Mugil cephalus* or *Liza ramada* could also be caught by local fishermen because they entered Garonne River. We will not examine in this paper the freshwater species sold on the Agen market; but they were around ten. Migratory species merit few words because their cycle of life linked with the sea and the intense fishing which they were objected to in estuaries and down rivers. Eels (*Anguilla anguilla*), mayfishes (*Alosa alosa*), salmon (*Salmo salar*), great sea lampreys (*Petromyzon marinus*), lamperns (*Lampetra fluviatilis*) and sturgeons (*Acipenser sturio* and *A. naccarii*) were regularly sold in Agen like in all the Southwest towns. Some of them were much appreciated by elites as seasonal pleasures. The first lampreys and mayfishes, for example, were in great demand and their price could be high. In 1763 in Agen, a great sea lamprey cost between 30 and 18 s according to its size at the beginning of the fishing season. Few months later, the prices fell to 10 and 18 s (Arch. Lot-et-Garonne FF 60-Agen). In the early 1790s, one of the first mayfishes cost 40 s in Marmande or 30 s in Tonneins. In the second part of the fishing season, its price decreased too (Biollay 1886). Such fluctuations had important effects on the accessibility to these foods: when their prices were relatively low, lampreys and mayfishes could be bought and eaten by less wealthy households and, sometimes, by quite modest ones. On the other hand, the adult salmon caught in the estuaries was a preferred food throughout the whole fishing season, even if its price could fluctuate (Thore 1811; Bouchet 1995). Sturgeon was also a gourmet fish. Specifically, it was more popular by some amateurs who were able to pay a high price to get it. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, for example, the Bordeaux market received the main part of the sturgeons caught by French fishermen in the Bidassoa estuary; 200 kilometres further south (Le Masson du Parc, [1727] 2002).

Some molluscs were also sent from the coastal area to the important consumption centres and some inland towns. During the wintertime, especially during the Lent season, numerous carts, which were loaded with bags and barrels full of shellfishes, left the Bay of Arcachon to Bordeaux, and sometimes, to Toulouse or faraway places. The merchandise they conveyed, indeed, kept two to three weeks. These consignments included



mainly oysters (*Ostrea edulis*), blue mussels (*Mytilus edulis*), scallops (*Chlamys varia*), cockles (*Cerastoderma edule*), razor shells (*Ensis spp.*) and grooved carpet shells (*Ruditapes decussatus*) (Le Masson du Parc, 1727; Baurein, 1786). The last four species listed were particularly lower-class food in the vicinity of the Arcachon Bay, as well as in the towns where they were sent (Benzacar³; Fischer, 1865). Oysters and mussels were much more valued. In the 1780's in Agen, the nuns of the Rosary community regularly consumed some of these shellfish on fast days (Arch. Lot-et-Garonne Es GG 197). During March of 1753, Bayonne councillors enjoyed mussels during the course of a meal, which included fattened hen and other delicacies. Seventeen years earlier, oysters appeared with soles, salmon, grey mullets, gilthead seabreams, whittings and stone loaches (*Barbatula barbatula*) on the menu of a festive fasting dinner served in Toulouse (Arch. Bayonne CC 330 ; Arch. Toulouse CC 2738). During a Lent meal in 1757, Libourne councillors ate oysters, soles, lampreys, pikes and other fine dishes. *Ostrea edulis* was considered fine seafood, but all of the subjects of this species did not have the same commercial value in the marketplaces. At the end of the eighteenth century, three oyster categories were distinguished on the price list of the last mentioned city. The “nicest green oysters” were the most expensive ones, followed by the common “load oysters” and the small but fine “Gravette [sandbank] oysters”. In 1793, the first category oysters cost five times more than the smallest ones (Arch. Libourne CC 124; 10 L 36).

All of the oysters consumed in Southwest France were not gathered along the local coasts. In the second half of the eighteenth century, for example, Bayonne received cargos of oysters from Britain (Pontet, 1975). Nevertheless, such importations were more consequences of well-established commercial connections than efforts to obtain fashionable products like it occurred in the case of other foods (Duhart 2004). Like the oyster and the mussel, the great scallop (*Pecten jacobaeus*) was considered as a choice food in the eastern part of the region (Trouvé, 1818). Mediterranean fishermen also brought few other species to the local markets. In 1793, for example, *Ruditapes decussatus*, *Paphia aurea* and *Donax trunculus* could be found in Nimes (Nat. Arch. France 4-LB41-3504; Creuzé de Lesser: 1824). The presence of crabs, spiny lobsters and shrimps in this market that was located more than 40 kilometres from the sea reminds one that crustaceans were also sent to important consumption centres. A few decades later, Bayonne was a logical outlet for the 4-5 kg lobsters (*Homarus gammarus*) caught by Capbreton fishermen, 25 kilometres further north (Bailac, 1827). Favourable climatic conditions were necessary to obtain fresh sea fish inland. Even during the winter, an unforeseen turn of events could hold up a delivery or prevent it. In December of the year 1784, the “bad weather» considerably delayed the arrival of a horse loaded with Mediterranean fresh fish to Villefranche-de-Rouergue. This journey lasted four days, instead of two days under favorable conditions (Arch. Aveyron G 1037)! Intense fishing activity occurred in numerous places during the summer. Arcachon Bay fishermen were still sending their catches by horse to Bordeaux (Le Masson du Parc, 1727). Relations remained active between certain little towns and marine fishing areas. On August 16th 1763, the Carcassonne councillors tasted soles during a meal in which carps (*Cyprinus carpo*), brown trout (*Salmo trutta fario*), barbels (*Barbus sp.*), crawfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*), quails and a rabbit were also served (Arch.

Aude 4E69 /CC 171). However, the summer heat made fresh fish transport and conservation more difficult. Sometimes, Narbonne fishermen threw a part of their catches overboard during the summer because bringing fresh fish to faraway markets was impossible and there was not a notable fish-salting manufacture in their area (Trouvé 1818). A similar lack of know-how in fish-preservation gave a particular status to the bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) in Basque Country. This species was abundant along the Basque coast during the summer and was actively fished by boats from Ciboure, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Guéthary, Bidart or Biarritz. Bluefin tuna was an appreciated food. On July 18th 1716, for instance, it was served with soles to Bayonne councillors in addition to turbot with butter, sea-bass with mushrooms, salmon and sturgeon terrine and steamed carp (Arch. Bayonne CC 319). Nevertheless, the fishermen sometimes came back to the harbour with a massive quantity of catches. In 1727, Le Masson du Parc noted that 350 kg of tunas could be unloaded at the same time in a village. In these days of plenty, the tuna was sold at low prices because the impossibility to conserve it for a long time. Sometimes, the pound of fresh tuna cost only 4 s! Even rural lower-class families who lived a small distance from the harbour where it had been unloaded consumed this overabundant tuna. When fishing was mediocre or bad, the price of one pound of tuna could reach or exceed 20 s, and this fish was then reserved for the economical elite until the next days of plenty. More rare than *Thunnus thynnus* along the Northern Basque Coast, was the albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*), an appreciated fish of which the prices were more stable (Le Masson du Parc [1727] 2001; Darracq 1836). Like bluefin tunas, the pilchards (*Sardina pilchardus*, fig 4), which frequented the shores of North Basque Country every summer, were caught to provide fresh fish. They were barely salted, but not gutted to withstand transport under warm conditions. Saint-Jean-de-Luz was the French harbour most interested in their fishing. Boats from Fuenterabia (South Basque Country/Spain) also fished in this area and part of them unloaded their catches in Saint-Jean-de-Luz. During the eighteenth century, the stock of pilchards enormously fluctuated in this area from one year to another – reaching a maximum high around 1750. When the fishing was abundant, the fresh pilchards constituted a food that local lower-class people could easily afford. Valiant women brought this perishable product in the surrounding area of Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Some of them used to run to Bayonne, 25 kilometres away. From the middle of the eighteenth century, Saint-de-Luz engaged in the manufacture of authentic salted pilchards. The fish processed by this activity were not the products of the local summer fishing. It was provided by autumn and winter fishing campaigns conducted by South-Basque and Spanish seamen along the Cantabrian coast (Arch. Bayonne Ch. Commerce I 11 1750 & B 40 1785; Duhamel du Monceau 1772; Guibert 1806). We will not consider in details this processing activity, since there were up to twenty-two salted-pilchard factories in Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Indeed, the Basque salted pilchards were a new contribution to an existing market. Besides, the Britons, who dominated the trade of standard salted pilchards for a long time, did not welcome this new competition and did everything possible to hinder it, arguing that the Basque sardines were actually Spanish. Imported ready to sell or locally processed, the salted pilchards were distributed throughout the whole southwest. During the 1780s, pilchard barrels were notably sent from Saint-Jean-de-Luz to the Pyrenean provinces of Soule, Bearn and Bigorre (Robin, 2002;



Lafourcade, 2002; Duhamel du Monceau, 1772). At the same period, pilchards imported by Bordeaux regularly appeared on Périgueux, Nerac or Saint-Girons markets (Arch. Ariège 4L28; Biollay, 1886). Lower-class people were great salted-pilchard consumers especially during Lent season, but not only. In the moors of Gascony, for example, this inexpensive food was a characteristic element of the modest peasant diet at the turn of the eighteenth century (Thore: 1810). Closer to the Bay of Arcachon, fresh fish could take a more important part in the lower-class foodways. However, the “Galician pilchard” remained an essential food in this sector (Bernadau 1822). During fast days, members of the middle or upper classes could also consume salted pilchards to vary menus. In Pau, the nuns of the Orphan community alternated fresh fish, codfish and pilchard on their table in the course of the Lent season. The Ursuline Sisters of Grenade did too (Arch. Pau GG 257 1761-1790; Arch. Haute-Garonne 222 H2 1756-1790). In Libourne, in 1792, a widow settled a bill where purchases of pilchards, codfish and kippers appeared on it (Arch. Gironde 8J437-438).

The last mentioned product was one of the various types of herring (*Clupea harengus*), which were frequently available in the markets of southwest France. They were mostly imported from French harbours situated on the edge of the English Channel or from the North Sea. In the beginning of the 1790s, “first quality one night white herrings” from Dieppe, “second quality two nights’ full herrings” from Dunkerque or “dry smoked herrings” from Fecamp were sold in the Pyrenean town of Quillan (Arch. Aude 7L55). Some members of the elite tasted the best herring varieties. On March 14th 1781, for instance, the noble family Le Mazuyer bought 50 pilchards and 24 smoked herrings (Arch. Haute-Garonne 73J12). For its part, *Engraulis encrasicolus* was considered in a particular way: the salted anchovies were more condiment items than fish included as part of the meal. Consequently, they were widely used all year long in the place where the finest dishes were prepared. In the 1730’s in Toulouse, for example, there were anchovies in the food reserves of the Aignan d’Orbesson family (Vedel, 1975). Discreetly employed in various recipes, these salted fishes could be more visible in certain dishes, like the salad with olives and anchovies served to Bayonne councillors one day in 1737 (CC 322).

Imported in considerable quantities from Britain to Bordeaux, the dry conger eel (*Conger conger*) had two very different uses. Most of the cargo did not serve as food, but was implemented to make glue (Habasque 1832). Nevertheless, loads of dry congiers were sent to regions where inhabitants used to eat it; for example, certain Pyrenean valleys (Bourret, 1991). If salted salmon was also imported, its use was strictly alimentary. This processed fish, which sometimes appeared on the table of the Franciscans established in Mirepoix, was declined in different varieties (Arch. Ariège H 58). In the beginning of the 1790s, two salted salmons imported from the Normand harbour of Saint-Valery-en-Caux were offered to consumers who frequented the Quillan market. The best one had been caught within the year while the others were two years old (Arch. Aude 7 L 55)!

In the case of the Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*), there was a large choice on the market. Therefore, if the rich and the poor were eating flesh from fish of the same species when they were consuming “codfish”, they were sometimes eating two totally different foods. In the early 1790s, merchants of Saint-Girons offered four different dry codfish

to their customers: first quality from Bordeaux, standard quality from Bayonne, and second and third qualities from Bordeaux. The price of the cheapest was a third lower than that of the highest quality (Arch. Ariège 4L28). At the same period, three categories of codfish were sold in Cahors: Newfoundland first quality, Newfoundland small fishes and Stockfish. The last mentioned type was one quarter less expensive than the more prestigious one (Arch. Lot L170). The rich households could carefully choose the types of codfish they bought. In February of 1768, the Basque noble Laborde Noguès purchased half a quintal of “selected codfish from the first fishing”. Sixteen years later, the bishop of Rodez ordered “new big codfish” and twelve pairs of green codfish (Arch. Bayonne ms 165; Arch. Aveyron G 1037). A good quality codfish was a preferred food, worthy of being served during an exquisite meal. On September 22nd 1730, a chief engineer of Languedoc tasted a green codfish tail during a dinner offered by the Toulouse councillors. Two decades later, a very fashionable “cod Provençal” was served in Bayonne during the course of a dinner in which soles and truffles were also eaten (Arch. Bayonne, 1751). At the same time, in other forms, cod also played a key role in the diet of the upper-lower class people. In Mont-de-Marsan, for example, the least poor among the poor families ate codfish with some regularity (Papy, 1994). When they could not buy last choice codfish, they could purchase a piece of a “North fish”, which had been prepared like the cod but was cheaper (Arch. Lot L170; Duhamel du Monceau, 1772): American pollock (*Pollachius virens*), haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), silver hake (*Merluccius bilinearis*), etc. Ultimately, they could buy some pilchards!

The turbot and the pilchard...

The turbot and the pilchard represent perfectly the two faces of seafood consumption in the Eighteenth Century southwest France. The first one was considered a great delicacy. It belonged to the category of exquisite fishes that the inland elite members could transfer from the far away coast because they were wealthy enough to do so. From another point of view, turbot was too good to sell to be eaten by fisherman families and too expensive to be bought by lower-class households even in littoral towns. On the contrary, fresh pilchard was one of the foods that lower-class consumers were able to buy quite easily in the coastal areas. Once it was salted, the pilchard was converted into one of the dry fishes abundantly distributed and consumed as far as the highest valleys. Indisputably, the part played by these preserved products was considerable in the fast-time lower-class diet from the *Causse* to the Atlantic coast. Nevertheless, some of them were not only good for poor eaters. Best quality cod, for example, could be served on a very elegant urban table. Here, we are invited to think about food status in a given historical period. Of course, some foods such as turbot were exclusively “foods for rich people”, while others were only consumed by the poorest in the eighteenth century southwest France. But, wealthy consumers could eat food accessible to lower-class eaters because they chose to do so. Pilchards from the same barrel do not have an equal historical sense if they were consumed for lack of anything better or to satisfy a desire.



Species mentioned in this work, freshwater (*) and migratory (**):

*Acipenser naccarii***; *Acipenser sturio***; *Alosa alosa***; *Anguilla anguilla***; *Argyrosomus regius*; *Austropotamobius pallipes**; *Barbatula barbatula**; *Barbus spp.**; *Boops boops*; *Cancer pagurus*; *Cerastoderma edule*; *Chlamys varia*; *Clupea harengus*; *Conger conger*; *Crangon crangon*; *Cyprinus carpio**; *Dicentrarchus labrax*; *D. punctatus*; *Dipturus batis*; *Donax trunculus*; *Ensis spp.*; *Esox lucius**; *Engraulis encrasicolus*; *Eutrigla gurnardus*; *Gadus morhua*; *Galeorhinus galeus*; *Gobius niger*; *Homarus gammarus*; *Lamna nasus*; *Lampetra fluviatilis***; *Liza ramada*; *Lophius piscatorius*; *Melanogrammus aeglefinus*; *Merlangius merlangus*; *Merluccius bilinearis*; *Merluccius merluccius*; *Mugil cephalus*; *Mullus spp.*; *Mytilus edulis*; *Mola mola*; *Muraena helena*; *Ostrea edulis*; *Pagellus bogaraveo*; *Palaemon longirostris*; *Palinurus elephas*; *Paphia aurea*; *Pecten jacobaeus*; *Petromyzon marinus***; *Pollachius virens*; *Pomatoschistus minutus*; *Raja clavata*; *Ruditapes decussatus*; *Salmo salar***; *Salmo trutta fario**; *Sardina pilchardus*; *Scomber scombrus*; *Scophthalmus maximus*; *Scophthalmus rhombus*; *Scyliorhinus canicula*; *Solea solea*; *Sparus aurata*; *Sphyrna zygaena*; *Squalus acanthias*; *Squatina squatina*; *Torpedo marmorata*; *Trachurus trachurus*; *Thunnus alalunga*; *T. thynnus*; *Umbrina cirrosa* and *Zeus faber*.

References

- Bailac, J.-B., 1827-1828, Nouvelle chronique de la ville de Bayonne par un Bayonnais. Bayonne: Duhart-Fauvet.
- Baurein, J., 1784-1786, Variétés bordelaises. Bordeaux : Labottière.
- Benzacar, J., 1905, Le pain à Bordeaux (XVIII^e siècle). Bordeaux: Gounouilh.
- Bernadau, P., [1822] 1954, Voyage à La Teste. Revue historique de Bordeaux, 101-111.
- Biollay, L., 1886, Les prix en 1790. Paris: Guillaumin.
- Bolstad Skjelbred, A. H., 2000, Use and Non-Use: Natural Resources in Traditional North-Norwegian Households. A Contemporary Point of Departure. In Food from Nature. Attitudes, Strategies and Culinary Practices, edited by P. Lysaght. Uppsala: RGAASFC. p. 64-72
- Bouchet, J.-C., 1995, Histoire de la pêche au saumon dans l'Adour, les gaves et la Bidassoa. Pau: Marrimpouey.
- Bourret, C., 1991, Les Pyrénées centrales du XI^e au milieu du XIX^e siècle. Espaces, pouvoirs et relations privilégiées dans une zone frontière de montagne. Thèse: Université de Paris 7.
- Creuzé de Lesser, H., 1824, Statistique du département de l'Hérault. Montpellier: Ricard.
- Darracq, U., 1836, Liste méthodique des poissons des eaux douces et salées des environs de Bayonne. In Bayonne, vues historiques et descriptives, edited by F. Morel. Bayonne: Lamaignère. p. 536-548.

- Duhamel du Monceau, H. L., 1769-1777, Traité général des pesches et histoire des poissons. Paris: Saillant & Nyon.
- Duhart, F., 2004, Un gusto influido: élites del sudoeste de Francia y las modas alimentarias en el siglo XVIII. In Arbitrario cultural. Racionalidad e irracionalidad del comportamiento comensal, edited by A. Millán Fuertes. Huesca: La Val de Onsera. p. 635-648.
- Fischer, P., 1865, Faune conchyliologique du département de la Gironde et des côtes du sud-ouest de la France. Paris: Savy.
- Gariné (de), I., 1979, Culture et nutrition. Communications, 31, 70-92.
- Guibert (de), J., 1806, Voyages de Guibert faits dans différentes parties de la France et de la Suisse en 1774, 1778, 1784 et 1785. Paris: D'Hautel.
- Habasque, F. M., 1832-1836, Notions historiques, géographiques, statistiques et agronomiques sur le littoral du département des Côtes du Nord. Saint-Brieuc: Guyon.
- Lafourcade, M., 2002, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, port de pêche au XVIII^e siècle. Zainak, 21, 295-316.
- Le Masson du Parc, F. [1727] 2002, Procès verbaux des visites faites par ordre du Roy concernant la pesche en mer: Amirautés de Bayonne et de Bordeaux. Camiac-et-Saint-Denis: Ed. de l'Entre-deux-Mers.
- Meyer, J & P, J.-P., 1995, Etudes sur les villes françaises. Du milieu du XVII^e siècle à la veille de la Révolution Française. Paris : SEDES.
- Montaigne (de), M., [1588] 1993, *The Complete Essays*. New York: Penguin.
- Papy, L. & M., 1994, Histoire de Mont-de-Marsan des origines à 1800. Mont-de-Marsan: Editions interuniversitaires.
- Pontet, J., 1975, Le commerce des huîtres à Bayonne dans la deuxième moitié du XVIII^e siècle. *Annales du Midi*, 123, 351-363.
- Ragot, J., 1987, Histoire de la Teste-de-Buch des origines à la fixation des dunes. La-Teste: Ville de La Teste.
- Robin, D., 2002, Histoire des pêcheurs basques au XVIII^e siècle, Bayonne: Elkar.
- Thore, J., 1810, Promenade sur les côtes du Golfe de Gascogne. Bordeaux: Brossier.
- Thore, J., [1811] 2001, Notes pour servir à l'ichtyologie fluviale et maritime du département des landes. *Bulletin de la Société Borda*, 462, 293-324.
- Trouvé, C. J., 1818, *Etats de Languedoc et département de l'Aude*. Paris: Didot.
- Vedel, J., 1975, La consommation alimentaire dans le Haut-Languedoc aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. *Annales ESC*, 30, 478-489.

