

Royal Taste

Food, Power and Status at the European Courts after 1789

Edited by
DANIËLLE DE VOOGHT
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Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
Suite 420
101 Cherry Street
Burlington
VT 05401-4405
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Royal taste : food, power and status at the European courts after 1789 / [edited by] Daniëlle de Vooght.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-6837-4 (hardcover) -- ISBN 978-0-7546-9478-6 (ebook) 1. Food habits--Europe--History--19th century. 2. Dinners and dining--Political aspects--Europe--History--19th century. 3. Courts and courtiers--Europe--History--19th century. 4. Political culture--Europe--History--19th century. 5. Europe--History--1789-1900. I. Vooght, Daniklle de.

GT2853.E8R69 2010

394.1'209409034--dc22

2010038454

ISBN 9780754668374 (hbk)

ISBN 9780754694786 (ebk)



Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall.

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Chapter 2

A Culinary *Captatio Benevolentiae*: The Use of the Truffle as a Promotional Gift by the Savoy Dynasty in the Eighteenth Century

Rengnier C. Rittersma¹

per Umberto, fine conoscitore del bosco

Since the late Middle Ages, the local elites of Piedmont were well aware of the value of the truffles indigenous to their region. The first recorded instance in which truffles were given as a promotional gift by Piedmontese magnates was when the ally of the Savoy dynasty, Prince Amadeus VII of Acaia, presented truffles to Bona di Borbone, the wife of Count Amadeus of Savoy in 1380.² No

¹ I would like to thank the following people and institutions for having been of great help during the preparation of this chapter. First, the staff of the *Archivio di Stato di Torino* and, in particular, *Dottoressa* Paglieri, Marsaglia, and Niccoli. I am also grateful to Irma Naso, Albina Malerba, Monica Cuffia, and Philippe Marchenay for their help. This chapter benefited greatly from the stimulating observations of Allen J. Grieco, Professor Geoffrey Symcox, Gustavo Mola di Nomaglio, Daniëlle de Vooght, and Peter Scholliers, to whom I extend my sincerest thanks. Last but not least, I should also like to thank Milton Kooistra and, again, Allen Grieco for their rigorous linguistic corrections. I owe you all an immense amount of *truffes*, *bertavelle*, and *vacherins savoyards*. The remaining errors and inadequacies are, of course, all my own.

This research—which forms part of the project “Manifestations of Truffle Mania in Italy (1400–1800): Towards a Cultural History of the Truffle in Europe,” conducted at the Center for Social & Cultural Food Studies (FOST) at the *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*—has been made possible by a Rubicon grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). For more information: <http://www.nwo.nl/projecten.nsf/pages/2300136061> (accessed August 20, 2008).

² For the first mention of the use of the truffle as a gift, see: *Archivio di Stato Torino* (henceforth AST) C. Tes. gen. d’Acaia, rot. 2; and Casa Bona di Borbone, rot. 33. For an account of the exchange of food and other regional products by the princes of *Savoia* in the Middle Ages, see: L. Vaccarone, “I Principi di Savoia attraverso le Alpi nel medioevo (1270–1520),” *Club Alpino Italiano*, Bollett. nr. 68 (1902): pp. 1–91.

systematic research in Piedmontese archives has been done for the period between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, but since truffles were frequently used as prestigious gifts in other Italian regions, it is likely that Piedmont was no exception to this rule.

The princes of Savoy were, however, very “truffle-minded,” from roughly 1730 to 1830, as archival material in Turin suggests. In this period the dukes of *Savoia* showed in different ways that they were highly aware of the instrumental value of their subterranean mushrooms. The most remarkable manifestation was the use of the *tartufi* as a promotional gift in diplomatic relations. Due to the perishability of these mushrooms, the utility of the truffle as a present was naturally limited by transport terms, since truffles, even when preserved under the most favorable circumstances, tend to decay after 10 to 14 days. Among the different capitals which were situated within reach of a 10-day trip, Vienna appears to have received the most truffles as gifts.

However, this exchange between Turin and Vienna is intriguing not only because of its frequency, but also because of the supplementary information in the correspondence and, in particular, the specific background of the Piedmontese–Austrian relationship, which, when combined analytically, sheds light on various aspects of the foreign politics and state administration of Savoy. For that reason, this chapter will primarily focus on a detailed analysis of the diplomatic correspondence between the Savoyard and the imperial court from approximately 1730 to 1780. In order to place this Piedmontese–Austrian truffle connection in the right context, other cases of diplomatic instrumentalization of the truffle by the *Savoia* will also be briefly presented, but they will serve an illustrative purpose.

This chapter attempts, thus, to examine the following issues: first, it will demonstrate that the Savoy were perfectly aware of the unequivocal instrumental value of their *tartufi*; second, it will shed light on the giving of gifts as a political tool, used to facilitate the development and maintenance of diplomatic relations during a period in which the dukes of Savoy entered the scene of European *Großmächte*. Finally, this contribution will also show that the management of this gift-giving culture can be considered a “barometer” of the relationships between the various sections of the Piedmontese state administration, especially between the chancellery in Turin and the diplomatic corps abroad.

***Do ut des*, About Giving and Owing: Some General Observations on Gift Exchange**

There is no such thing as a free gift. If we expect nothing in return for a given object, then we simply discard it. A gift, on the other hand, appeals to deeper

motivations and should at least evoke gratitude, a strong sentiment, described as nothing less than the “moral memory of mankind.”³ A gift will inevitably tip the balance of the social relation between the persons involved. A present affects a social relation and engenders a differentiation between the partners, even before the gift has been offered and received.⁴ This intrinsically divisive dimension of giving gifts finds expression especially in the Spanish and Italian verbs *regalar* and *regalare* respectively, which originally meant to present a gift to the king, and is even more apparent in archaic forms such as *offerre*, *offrande*, *offerieren*, or *offrir*, which literally refer to the humble activity of bringing something toward someone (*ob-ferre*) and whose aspect of vertical differentiation stems, of course, from sacrificial practices. Something of this idea of eternal debt (*coram dei*) remained in the notion of gift-giving, since social scientist theories—in spite of the many nuances each one of them might introduce—basically share the idea that gift-giving results in an irreversible incommensurability. Simply said, while the first gift can (but must not) be voluntary, the return gift is inherently compulsory. Explicit or not, there is a claim of reciprocity in every present.⁵

Since the time of primitive societies, victuals have played a dominant role in gift-giving culture, either in a direct way by exchange or in an indirect way as an expression of hospitality. Hospitality without food is unthinkable, because food is the most elementary form of sociability. The fundamental social dimension of food also becomes clear in the tacit claim to share one’s food, as long as hygienic concerns allow, even with strangers. Everybody has experienced the situation of invidious eyes when entering a train compartment with an ice cream or fresh cherries, and everybody can confirm the favorable role exercised by the act of sharing food when socializing with unknown people. Perhaps it is this very basic quality of food that turns the presenting and sharing of it, in terms of gift practices, into a unique one-way communication where no reward is expected, yet everybody is stimulated to reciprocate because they are certain to experience a similar situation in the future.⁶

³ G. Simmel, “Faithfulness and Gratitude,” in A. Komter (ed.), *The Gift: an Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 39–49, p. 45.

⁴ B. Schwartz, “The Social Psychology of the Gift,” in A. Komter (ed.), *The Gift: an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, pp. 69–81, p. 78.

⁵ See the various contributions in Komter, *The Gift*. For a study of gifting in medieval societies, see G. Algazi, V. Groebner and B. Jussen (eds), *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange* (Göttingen, 2003).

⁶ See, for example, M. Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” in A. Komter (ed.), *The Gift: an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, pp. 26–39; and M. Fantoni, “Feticci di prestigio. Il dono alla corte medicea,” in S. Bertelli and G. Calvi (eds), *Rituale, cerimoniale, etichetta* (Milan, 1985), pp. 141–63, pp. 153–60.

In much the same way, the use of food as a gift is a universal phenomenon in all social classes.⁷ In Umbria, even an exclusive product like the truffle was, particularly until the rise of the packaging industry in the area of Spoleto-Norcia but also thereafter, popularly exploited as a rewarding gift during the feasts of December. This usage was practiced by the truffle hunters themselves, who were commonly crofters, in order to thank the landowners for letting them exploit their truffle grounds or to do a favor for a prominent person (such as the local physician or priest) or for a friend or relative. After the commercialization of the Umbrian truffles from approximately 1865 onward, they increasingly tended to use the commercially unsuitable part of the harvest, which consisted of fragmented, gnawed, or otherwise damaged tubers (the *capatura*), for their informal gift circuit.⁸

Apparently, even second-rate truffles were an appreciated gift. This reveals something of the value and, more in particular, of the *fascinosum* that was generally attributed to the subterranean mushroom.⁹ Initially, they may have been used primarily for their inherent prestige and exclusivity, but gradually the preference shifted to the gastronomical qualities of the truffle, clearly seen in the increasing use of truffle-based products in France, such as *dinde truffée* (truffled turkey).¹⁰

“Faire goûter ces sortes de fruits de notre pays”:¹¹ The Use of Food as a Gift by the Savoia

In spite of the abundant truffle grounds on their own territory and the historical awareness of the truffle’s potential, it took a while before the dukes of Savoy

⁷ Compare P. Meyzie, “Les cadeaux alimentaires dans le Sud-Ouest aquitain au XVIII^e siècle: sociabilité, pouvoirs et gastronomie,” *Histoire, Économie & Société*, 25 (2006): pp. 33–51; N. Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 56–72.

⁸ On the Umbrian truffle trade and consumption: C. Papa, “Il tartufo. “Dono di natura,” *La ricerca folklorica*, 41 (2000): pp. 25–36; R.C. Rittersma, “Industrialised Delicacies: The Rise of the Umbrian Truffle Business and the Pioneering Work of Mazzoneschi and Urbani (1860–1918),” in G. Dorel-Ferré (ed.), *Nourrir les hommes, de la Champagne-Ardenne au monde: Actes des premières rencontres de la section agroalimentaire de TICCIH* (Reims, 2010).

⁹ See J.-L. Flandrin, “L’huître et la truffe,” in J.-L. Flandrin (ed.), *Chronique de Platine* (Paris, 1992), pp. 143–52, pp. 149–50.

¹⁰ For example, see Meyzie, “Les cadeaux alimentaires.” Until the eighteenth century, neither truffled products nor *pâté truffé* were mentioned: G. de Merlhac, “Essai historique sur la truffe,” *Chroniqueur du Périgord*, 3 (1855), pp. 91–120, p. 95.

¹¹ “To let (someone) taste these kinds of fruits of our country”: AST Lettere Ministri (henceforth L.M.) Austria, Mazzo 65, Ormea > Canale, January 13, 1738.

started to exploit them systematically in diplomatic relations. Until then, other valuable food products were used as gifts. In fact, the diplomatic correspondence of the period 1670–1730 presents a wide variety of local products that were occasionally sent to the most important partners and/or neighboring states, such as France, Milan, Switzerland, Rome, and the United Kingdom.

The most frequent *bagatelles* sent along were Piedmontese wines (unfortunately not specifically named), *rosolio* (a sweet liqueur whose aroma derives from different products like orange, coffee, vanilla, and so on), jam from Mondovì, the *fromage de Noël* (recently known as *Vacherin d'Abondance*), and Piedmontese tobacco.¹² All these products were eagerly consumed at foreign courts, especially the Piedmontese wine and liqueur, which seem to have been highly pleasing to Louis XIV and Charles II.¹³ Strikingly, in the diplomatic correspondence from the period 1670–1725, the subterranean mushroom did not appear, not even when in season (November to January).¹⁴ However, before discussing the question of how the Piedmontese truffle “conquered” the diplomatic scene, a few words should be said about the political circumstances that induced the rulers of Savoy to create their well-organized system of distributing regional food products to foreign courts.

The political vicissitudes that characterized the history of the dynasty of *Savoia* since its medieval origins were determined by its geographical position. Its *pedemontanus* setting was both a blessing and a curse: on the one hand, the actual sphere of influence was relatively small and rather insignificant from an economic point of view. On the other hand, its cisalpine and transalpine territories, proximity to and influence on the Mediterranean, and position at the crossroads of the north–south and east–west axes of the European communication network made Savoy a region that was too strategic to be neglected. Geopolitically, the state of Savoy constituted a kind of buffer zone between the continental superpowers of

¹² For *rosolio*, see <http://www.saporidelPiedmonte.it/prodotti/bevande/16.htm> (accessed May 2008); for *vacherins savoyards*, which might have been the so-called *Vacherin d'Abondance*, see L. Bérard, J. Froc, P. Hyman, M. Hyman and P. Marchenay, *Inventaire des produits régionaux de la France. Rhône-Alpes* (Paris, 1995), pp. 425–8; C. Abry, R. Devos, H. Raulin, and J. Cuisenier (eds), *Les sources régionales de la Savoie. Une approche ethnologique: alimentation, habitat, élevage ...* (Paris, 1979), p. 221. This *Vacherin d'Abondance* was already famous in the fifteenth century: Pantaleone da Confienza, *Summa lacticiniorum* (Turin, 1477), Tractatus II, cap. 8.

¹³ D. Perrero, “I regali di prodotti nazionali invalsi nella diplomazia piemontese dei secoli XVII–XVIII,” *Atti della Reale Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 31 (1896): pp. 411–32, pp. 412–17; and, more recently: G. Caligaris, “Viaggiatori illustri e ambasciatori stranieri alla corte sabauda nella prima metà del Seicento: ospitalità e regali,” *Studi Piemontesi*, 4/1 (1975): pp. 151–71.

¹⁴ See Perrero, “I regali di prodotti nazionali.”

Spain, France, and Austria (Figure 2.1). This already precarious situation was only aggravated by the proximity of Milan and Monferrato, both contested territories repeatedly claimed or invaded by the *Savoia* but equally desired by the Spanish king and the Austrian emperor. Due to this geopolitical constellation, the state of Savoy became embroiled in virtually every war that took place during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, and eventually succeeded in politically exploiting the rivalries of the different contenders.

The key to Savoy's gradual, but persistent accumulation of power was the combination of successful marital policy, the creation of both a consistent and considerable army as well as an able diplomatic corps, and the pronounced political instinct of some of its rulers, who repeatedly managed to gain in influence by an ingenious and well-aimed diplomacy that regularly played the *Großmächte* off one another. Since the time of Emmanuel Philibert, one of the most important long-term goals ardently pursued by all the dukes of Savoy—despite differing political agendas—was the acquisition of a royal crown.

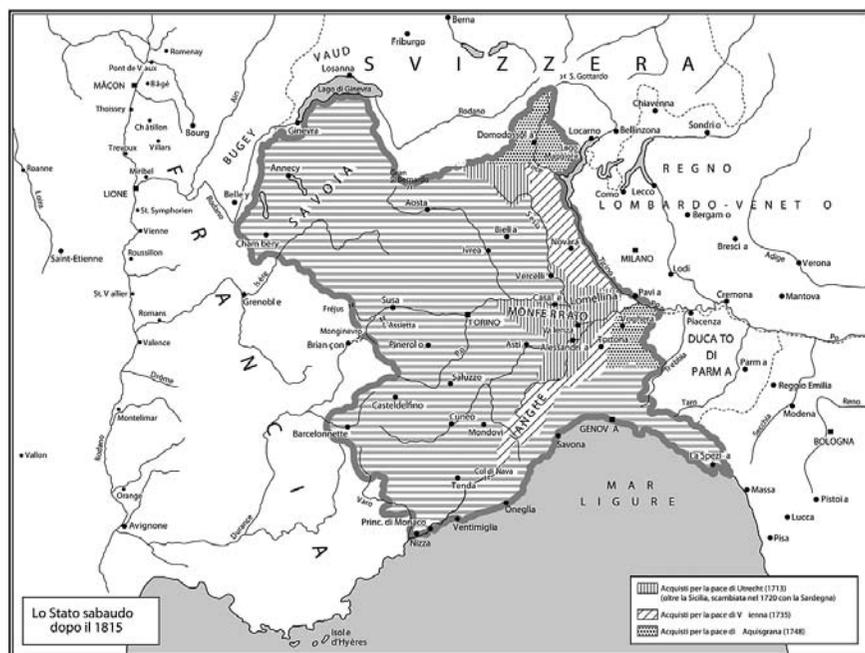


Figure 2.1 The change in the geopolitical position of Savoy during the eighteenth century

(Source: Gianni Oliva, *I Savoia*, 1998; by kind permission of Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A.).

The quest for a crown and scepter was triggered by an intra-Italian competition between the Medici and the *Savoia*, who both more than once claimed the title of King of Cyprus and tried to underpin their prerogatives with the publication of their genealogy and with a diplomatic campaign. Simultaneously, the Savoy dynasty also showed its ambitions by creating a court society that was clearly inspired by the French model of “Noblemen-in-Residence.” The court in Turin tried to integrate the local aristocracy by subsuming its radius of action under the immediate sphere of influence of the duke. By the time of Charles Emmanuel II, the court of Savoy had obtained a self-evident prestige which was progressively acknowledged at an international level. From approximately 1660 onward, the dukes of Savoy were considered *de facto* kings, since an increasing number of states honored them with royal treatment. In 1713, they finally saw their ambitions fulfilled with the bestowal of the Kingdom of Sicily (by the Treaty of Utrecht), which after the conquest of Sicily by Spain in 1720 was exchanged for the crown of Sardinia.

During the various wars that took place between 1688 and 1738 (the Nine Years War, War of the Quadruple Alliance, and the wars of Spanish and Polish succession), the princes of Savoy gained in importance as political allies. Because of the strategic position of their territories and the considerable size of their army, the *Savoia* were often approached by both of the contending sides. This was a situation that led them to frequently change alliances from one war to another, or even during an armed conflict, depending on what was politically advantageous. During the four aforementioned wars, Victor Amadeus II and Charles Emmanuel III chose twice to side against the Austrian Hapsburgs overtly and ambiguously, and once betrayed them in the course of the armed conflict, a decision which resulted in a significant expansion of the Duchy of Savoy. Even if they fought as allies of the Hapsburgs, as they did during the Spanish Succession War, peace negotiations turned out to be another source of friction, as Savoyard territorial ambitions could only be gratified at the expense of Hapsburg Lombardy. For example, the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, which ascribed substantial territorial expansion to Savoy, prefigured a long period of tension. Another important territorial gain took place after the battle of Guastala (1734) during the War of the Polish Succession, when Austria had to cede important areas in Lombardy and Piedmont and was almost forced to renounce the Duchy of Milan. This underlined, once again, the expansionist aspirations of the *Savoia* but contributed to undermining an already fragile relationship.¹⁵

¹⁵ See, amongst others, W. Barberis, “I Savoia. Quattro storie per una dinastia,” in W. Barberis (ed.), *I Savoia. I secoli d'oro di una dinastia europea* (Turin, 2007), pp. XV–LIV; C. Storrs, “La politica internazionale e gli equilibri continentali,” in W. Barberis (ed.), *I Savoia*, pp. 3–49; G. Symcox, “L'età di Vittorio Amedeo II,” in P. Merlin, C. Rosso, G. Symcox, and

The years between the armistice and the final peace brought about by the Treaty of Vienna (1738) were particularly full of tension and mutual suspicion. In order to stabilize the relationship with the imperial court, Charles Emmanuel III sent one of his most capable diplomats, Count Luigi Girolamo Malabaila di Canale. Besides the defeat at Guastala and the subsequent territorial losses, there were also other factors that complicated the Austrian–Savoyard relationship. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Austria tried to reinforce its position in Italy, but it was repeatedly obstructed by the rising Duchy of Savoy. The main offensive and defensive powers on the Italian peninsula lived in a slumbering but ongoing state of conflict. The fact that Savoy had formally been part of the Holy Roman Empire since the Middle Ages also prejudiced the relationship because both states used ancient privileges and stipulations to lend weight to their territorial claims. However, since both parties no longer believed in the juridical legitimacy of these feudal arrangements and used them only as political instruments, diplomatic relations were very much complicated by infinite juridical disputes. Significantly, the staff of the Piedmontese delegation in Vienna consisted of excellent diplomats who were well versed in both imperial legislation and feudal issues, and were frequently assisted by special juridical experts.¹⁶

In January 1737, a young but relatively experienced and very promising Piedmontese nobleman arrived in Vienna, where he had been appointed ambassador by Charles Emmanuel III. Due to the Savoyard–French alliance during the War of the Polish Succession, the diplomatic relations between Turin and Vienna had been broken since September 1733, and Count Luigi Girolamo Malabaila di Canale, who previously served as the king’s representative in The Hague, was expected to reestablish diplomatic contacts. A first step in this direction was the arrangement of the third marriage of the Duke of Savoy to the

G. Ricuperati (eds), *Il Piemonte sabauda. Stato e territori in età moderna* (Turin, 1994), pp. 271–441; G. Ricuperati, “Il Settecento,” in P. Merlin, C. Rosso, G. Symcox, and G. Ricuperati (eds), *Il Piemonte sabauda*, pp. 441–515; R. Oresko, “The House of Savoy in Search for a Royal Crown in the Seventeenth Century,” in R. Oresko, G.C. Gibbs, and H.M. Scott (eds), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 272–350; E. Castelnuovo, W. Barberis et al. (eds), *La Reggia di Venaria e i Savoia. Arte, magnificenza e storia di una corte europea* (Turin, 2007).

¹⁶ On the relation between Savoy and the Holy Roman Empire: G. Tabacco, *Lo stato sabauda nel Sacro Romano Impero* (Turin, 1939). For the juridical details of the tensions: K. Otmar von Aretin, *Das Alte Reich 1648–1806, Band 2: Kaisertradition und österreichische Großmachtspolitik (1648–1745)* (Stuttgart, 1997), pp. 202–5. More specifically on the Savoyard *legazione* in Vienna: E. Piscitelli, *La legazione sarda in Vienna (1707–1859)* (Rome, 1950), especially pp. 13–32. On Canale’s capability: Ricuperati, “Il Settecento,” p. 483.

sister of the future Emperor Francis I, Elisabeth Theresa of Lorraine in 1737, which had already been concluded before Canale's arrival.¹⁷

In accordance with the procedures of the Savoy state administration, once in Vienna, Canale received the instructions of his predecessor, Marquis Giuseppe Roberto Solaro di Breglio, and there are indications that Breglio initiated Canale into the practice of gift-giving. Marquis Breglio had experienced that offering *bagatelles* was a subtle way of gaining favor at the imperial court, and he did not omit to inform his successor about this effective strategy.¹⁸ Whereas Breglio suggested the use of rock partridges (*bartavelle* or *bertavelle*),¹⁹ Canale seems to have discovered that Piedmontese truffles turned out to be an excellent way of gaining favor in the Viennese diplomatic *milieux*. From the start of Canale's tenure, mention of truffles begins to appear regularly in diplomatic correspondence.²⁰

Curiously, the rise of the Piedmontese truffle coincided with the entering of the Duchy of Savoy into the arena of European states. It would be, of course, too casuistic to conclude that the Piedmontese truffle brought about this emergence of the *Savoia*. Nevertheless, some factors made this period a propitious moment

¹⁷ For a biographical account, see A. Ruata, *Luigi Malabaila di Canale. Riflessi della cultura illuministica in un diplomatico piemontese* (Turin, 1968), especially pp. 11–19. For an account of the political function of gifts in early modern statecraft literature, see J. Falcke, *Studien zum diplomatischen Geschenkwesen am brandenburgisch-preussischen Hof im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2006), pp. 53–66.

¹⁸ See the following fragment from a letter of Canale: “Feu le marquis de Breil [i.e. Breglio; R.C.R.] qui le [le *bartavelle*; R.C.R.] sçavois bien m'en donna 12 pour le chancelier de Sinzendorf tres entendu en bonne chere, lorsque je vins a Vienne pour la premiere fois; le chancelier en fit grand bruit comme d'un regal ainsi ce fut la un [... unreadable; R.C.R.] d'erudition que j'appris dans les premiers instants de mon sejour à Vienne et quoique j'aie vu beaucoup de changements ici, il n'y en a point eu à cet egard.” (“It was marquis Breglio, being familiar with the *bartavelle*, who gave me 12 of them for the *connoisseur* chancellor Sinzendorf, when I came for the first time in Vienna; during the initial period of my sojourn in Vienna I heard that the chancellor made it widely known that such a gift was a [... unreadable] of erudition, and nothing changed in this respect, even though I have seen a lot of changes here.”) Cited from: AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, Canale > Raiberti, December 14, 1769. See also Perrero, “I regali di prodotti nazionali,” p. 425.

¹⁹ On the rock partridge or “*bartavelle d'aosta*” (*Alectoris graeca*), see: <http://www.chasses-du-monde.com/europe/especes-chassees/perdrix-bartavelle.htm>; <http://oncfs.esigetel.fr/Oncfs/Obj/Pdf/Bartavelle.pdf> (both sites accessed May 2008); Gruppo “Amis du patois,” *Dizionario del dialetto francoprovenzale di Hône, Valle d'Aosta* (Comune di Hône, 2007), p. 407 (1).

²⁰ See, for example, AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 65, Ormea > Canale, January 13, 1738; AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 65, Ormea > Canale, December, 18, 1738. See also Table 2.1 in this chapter.

for the introduction of the Piedmontese truffle into court society, and may have set the stage for its subsequent exploitation in view of their own political agenda.

Tartufomania: Truffles Blanches de Piémont (AOC)

Since nobody, not even the gods, can resist the pull of presents, as Ovid knew perfectly well (“Munera, crede mihi, capiunt hominesque deosque,” *Ars amatoria* 3, 653), who could abstain from a basketful of these peculiar telluric commodities? Notwithstanding their gastronomical qualities, which only in the course of the eighteenth century became recognized and properly exploited, it was their very mysterious and exclusive nature which made truffles so immensely appealing.²¹

Today, it would be an offense or a very bad joke to offer someone potatoes in Western societies, but when introduced the potato was considered a prestigious gift and frequently circulated among the elites. This use of the “cheaper tuber” as a rewarding gift shows that “there is much more in the exchange itself than in the things exchanged.”²² It was precisely the symbolical value and the semantic meaning of the truffle that made this unsightly tuber an unequalled gift object.

Since offering gifts can be considered an act of self-definition and a means of defining the other, the truffle (and to a lesser extent other Piedmontese delicacies) conveyed different, but overlapping meanings. Like all gifts, this also served as an indicator of social prestige in two ways: it referred to the prestige of the giver and simultaneously also revealed the ascribed prestige of the recipient.²³ The message conveyed by the gift of truffles could, of course, provoke a range of different reactions: the recipient could counter immediately with their own gift, delay the counter-gift, or not engage at all in a response gift. Accordingly, this process of accumulated gift-giving frequently becomes a source of competition or even

²¹ The gastronomical use of the truffle presumably started only at the court of Louis XV and Louis XVI. Until then, truffles appeared rarely at the French court, but rather served as an *accessoire* that was therefore served rather like boiled eggs: Merliac, “Essai historique,” pp. 115–16.

²² C. Lévi-Strauss, “The Principle of Reciprocity,” in A. Komter (ed.), *The Gift: an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, pp. 18–26, p. 21. For the use of the potato as a precious gift, see, for example, *Die Korrespondenz Hans Fuggers von 1566 bis 1594. Regesten der Kopierbücher aus dem Fuggerarchiv*, ed. Ch. Karnehm (2 vols, Munich, 2003), vol. 1, p. 523; vol. 2.1, p. 772. I would like to thank Professor Wolfgang Behringer and Katharina Reinholdt for this information.

²³ Schwartz, “The Social Psychology,” pp. 70, 74.

conflict, as the anthropological phenomenon of the *potlach* illustrates.²⁴ It would require other archival research to verify whether or not emulative intentions played a role here, however, as for quite a long time the initiative of gift-giving was coming solely from the Piedmontese side, which suggests a distorted gift relationship.²⁵

However, the truffle did not only symbolize prestige, but also served in other respects as a distinctive and noteworthy object. What pushed the court society in general, and this newly arrived royalty of Savoy in particular, was the urge

²⁴ On contemporary relevance of competitive gift-giving still inspiring: M. Mauss, "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," *L'Année Sociologique*, *seconde série*, I (1923–1924): pp. 5–106, especially pp. 8–11. For an online version, see: <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1522/cla.mam.ess3> (accessed May 2008). On the importance of timing in the gift exchange: "[...] l'intervalle [temporelle; R.C.R.] [...] était là pour permettre à celui qui donne de vivre son don comme un don sans retour, et à celui qui rend de vivre son contre-don comme gratuit et non déterminé par le don initial" ("the interval enables he who gives to experience his gift as a gift without a return gift and it enables he who renders to experience his counter-gift as disinterested and not determined by the initial gift"). Cited from P. Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris, 1994), p. 177. Also: P. Bourdieu, "The Work of Time," in A. Komter (ed.), *The Gift: an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, pp. 135–48.

²⁵ In November 1769 Raiberti communicated to Canale "V.E. verra par la dépêche que je lui [i.e. Canale; R.C.R.] envoie en reponse à sa relation, combien le Roi a été sensible au present de Vin de Tokai, que l'Empereur a voulu lui [i.e. Charles Emmanuel III; R.C.R.] faire." ("His Excellence will see through the letter which I am sending him [i.e. Canale; R.C.R.] as reaction to his report, how pleased the king has been by the gift of the Tokaj wine which the Emperor has wanted to give him [i.e. Charles Emmanuel III; R.C.R.].") Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, November 18, 1769. Five years later, the correspondence for the first time made mention of the standardization of this gift: "Puisque Monsieur le comte de St. Julien vous a déjà parlé du vin de Tokai, je pense qu'on voudra aussi se conformer à l'usage dans la distribution de cet envoi." ("Since Count St Julien has already spoken with you about Tokaj wine, I think that they want to make a custom of the distribution of this product.") Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Aigueblanche > Scarnafaggi, October 15, 1774. But this standardization was preceded by some subtle pressure from the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in Turin, Aigueblanche, who gave the following instructions to the interim ambassador in Vienna, Montagnini: "Vous pourres dire comme de vous meme à Mr. de St. Julien que le vin de Tokai dont il vous a parlé sera toujours bien reçu ici par le cas que l'on fait de tout ce qui vient de la part de LL. M.M. Imp^{les}. Il sera meme très à propos que lorsqu'on vous le remettra, vous prenes des mesures telles à éviter toute sorte d'inconvenient la dessus." ("You can tell Mr St Julien yourself that the Tokaj wine, of which he spoke with you, will always be well accepted here in any case, as will be all things that come from the Empress and Emperor. It would also be appropriate that you take the kind of precautions, while they submit the wine to you, that will help you avoid any kind of inconvenience in this respect.") Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Aigueblanche > Montagnini, January 29, 1774.

to distinguish itself. The frequent dispatch of considerable and initially ever-increasing quantities of truffles and other regional produce was also a way of displaying prodigality and financial carelessness. It was this costly game of tit-for-tat which forced the state administration in Turin to act promptly whenever Vienna requested truffles, even if the budgetary repercussions of these transports affected the functionaries or even the king (as will be dealt with below).²⁶

In terms of distinction, truffles also turned out to be a rewarding gift, since they could be perfectly integrated into an aristocratic lifestyle which was characterized, if not dictated, by the search for prestige. So, as often is the case with presents, the charm of the *tartufi* essentially derived from their redundancy²⁷ and from the fact that they, as delicacies, largely contributed to the state of *bien-être* and *douceur*, which higher nobility, and especially court nobility, actively pursued.²⁸ In much the same way, and perhaps even preeminently, truffles could immensely delight the recipient because of their concomitant unexpectedness and eccentricity. Startling and peculiar presents are likely to be highly effective, especially in a court society overburdened with gift-giving which was very often merely ritual.²⁹ The truffle was at that time an undeniable novelty and curiosity.

It is difficult to explain the origins of this sudden, almost feverish, interest in truffles. Was it the gradual progress in the scientific unveiling of the subterranean mushroom which triggered this vivid interest, or were these explorations rather manifestations of a deeper, primary curiosity which preceded and induced the

²⁶ With regard to the conspicuous lifestyle of the court society: T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions* (New York, 1934); N. Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft* (4th edn, Frankfurt am Main, 1989).

²⁷ On the typical redundancy of the gift: D. Cheal, "Moral economy," in A. Komter (ed.), *The Gift: an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, pp. 81–95.

²⁸ M. Figeac, *La douceur des Lumières: Noblesse et art de vivre en Guyenne au XVIIIe siècle* (Bordeaux, 2001). This hedonistic lifestyle was not a goal in itself, but rather served as a display of wealth and social valence (Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft* for example, pp. 87–8). Conversely, this search for prestige did become a *Selbstzweck* and a plane of projection of aristocratic honor, since the social status of the nobility deteriorated due to the rise of the *noblesse de robe* and the professionalization of the armed forces. On the changing self-perception of the nobility between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century: K. Margreiter, *Konzept und Bedeutung des Adels im Absolutismus* (Florence, 2005), pp. 8–205.

²⁹ Cheal, "Moral economy." For an analysis of such a merely ritual gift relation, see C. Windler, "Tribut und Gabe. Mediterrane Diplomatie als interkulturelle Kommunikation," *Saeculum. Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte*, 51 (2000): 24–56; P. Burschel, "Der Sultan und das Hündchen. Zur politischen Ökonomie des Schenkens in interkultureller Perspektive," *Historische Anthropologie*, 15/3 (2007): 408–21.

scholarly findings?³⁰ Whatever the case, these mycological studies very strongly suggest that the scientific interest in truffles was anything but an isolated academic issue.

The best proof of this *tartufomania* was the requests for truffle hunters that the French, English, and Prussian court sent to the King of Savoy. At least three truffle dog expeditions—each time accompanied by a couple of truffle pickers—left Piedmont in the course of the eighteenth century in order to verify whether these countries produced (white) truffles.³¹ Very soon the reputation of Piedmont in this particular field of specialization was internationally acknowledged, as the “potato” entry in the *Zedler Universallexikon* (1749–) demonstrated: “These truffle dogs come from the Turin area to Augsburg and other German regions.”³²

³⁰ The major developments were Geoffroy’s theory that truffles had seed-vessels (around 1710); the actual observation of the spores by Micheli (approx. 1710); the first successful reproduction of the black truffle by Bradley (around 1726); and the first illustration of a truffle’s cross-section by Bruckmann (1720). See R.C. Rittersma, “The Quest for the ‘Holy Spores’: Exploring the Truffle in Early Modern European Science,” unpublished paper (2008); R.C. Rittersma, “Subterranean Fieldwork: Marsili’s Survey on the Biogeography and Ecobiology of Truffles in 18th Century North and Central Italy,” in C. Ries, M. Harbsmeier, and K. H. Nielsen (eds), *Ways of Knowing the Field: Studies in the History and Sociology of Scientific Fieldwork and Expeditions* (Aarhus, 2010); G. Lazzari, *Storia della Micologia Italiana. Contributo dei botanici italiani allo sviluppo delle scienze micologiche* (Trento, 1973), pp. 96–132; and G.C. Ainsworth, *Introduction to the History of Mycology* (Cambridge, 1976), especially pp. 1–81. Perhaps the supposed aphrodisiac qualities contributed to the popularity and the appeal of the truffles, as for example discussed in the works of courtiers like Brantôme and Giacomo Casanova. However, this aspect is never mentioned even in guarded terms.

³¹ With regard to the truffle dog expeditions to Paris (1723), London (1751), and Berlin (approx. 1720): “Tempo addietro partirono di qua cercatori di tartufi fra i più esperti con cani addestratissimi, mandati dai grandi Vittorio Amedeo II e Carlo Emanuele III in Germania, in Francia, in Inghilterra, nelle parti più fiorenti d’Europa a sommi principi e re amici.” (“Formerly, some of the most experienced truffle hunters with well-trained dogs were sent by King Victor Amadeus II and Charles Emmanuel III to prominent rulers and friend kings in Germany, France, England, and in the most prosperous regions of Europe.”) Cited from G.B. Vigo, *Tubera terrae. Carmen. I tartufi* (1st edn, Turin 1776; Borgosesia, 1994), p. 27; and Perrero, “I regali di prodotti nazionali,” pp. 425–32; respectively F.E. Bruckmann, *Specimen botanicum exhibens fungos subterraneos vulgo tubera terrae dictos* (Helmstedt, 1720).

³² “Dergleichen Hunde kommen aus den Turinischen Gebiete nach Augspurg und andre Orte Teutschlandes.” (“These dogs come from the region of Turin to Augsburg and other parts of Germany.”) Cited from: “Erd-Aepffel,” in J.H. Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexikon* (vol. 8, 1st edn, 1749; Graz, 1994), p. 1518.

^undoubtedly, this supra-academic interest was also very much related to the early modern scientific practice, which was not only socially closely connected with the *milieux* of the

There are some indications suggesting that the rulers of Savoy managed to exploit their local specialty in multiple ways, and that they increasingly became aware of its unique promotional possibilities. Besides the “export” of truffle dogs and the casual product promotion through the organization of truffle-hunting sessions in Piedmont for foreign aristocratic visitors³³ there was, of course, the exploitation of the culinary qualities of the truffle. The administration of the Duchy of Savoy seems to have noticed its unique utility only at a later stage.

Initially, the truffles sent to Vienna were just announced in the accompanying letters as “quelques livres de truffes,” but from the winter of 1768 onward they are repeatedly called “Truffes blanches de Piémont” or “Truffes de Piémont.”³⁴ I cannot yet conclude that the Savoy rulers aspired to a kind of *appellation d’origine contrôlée* (AOC) with regard to their local specialties, but the abrupt change in the designation of the truffle in the diplomatic correspondence is, to say the least, striking. Perhaps, the distribution of Hungarian truffles in Viennese high society made the *Savoia* aware of the uniqueness of the products of their own *terroir*.³⁵ In

court and aristocracy, but thematically also strongly inspired by a primary, almost childish kind of curiosity: B.T. Moran, “Courts and Academies,” in K. Park and L. Daston (eds), *The Cambridge History of Science, vol. III: Early Modern Science* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 251–72; and specifically with regard to the Piedmontese court: V. Ferrone, *La Nuova Atlantide e i Lumi. Scienza e politica nel Piemonte di Vittorio Amedeo III* (Turin, 1988). On the role of curiosity: L. Daston, “Die Lust an der Neugier in der frühneuzeitlichen Wissenschaft,” in K. Krüger (ed.), *Curiositas: Welterfahrung und ästhetische Neugierde in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2002), pp. 147–75.

³³ Perrero, “I regali di prodotti nazionali,” p. 428.

³⁴ See, for example, AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, December 14, 1768; 2 XII 1769; Mazzo 94, December 3, 1774.

³⁵ A workable definition of *terroir* would be: “Un système au sein duquel s’établissent des interactions complexes entre un ensemble de facteurs humains (techniques, usages collectifs ...), une production agricole et un milieu physique (territoire). Le terroir est valorisé par un produit auquel il confère une originalité (typicité).” (“A system in which complex interactions are established between a set of human factors (as, for example, techniques, collective practices, etc.), an agricultural production, and a physical environment (*territoire*). The *terroir* is valorized by a (agricultural) product, whose very specificity and originality derive from this constellation of human and natural factors.”) Cited from L. Bérard and P. Marchenay, *Les produits de terroir. Entre cultures et règlements* (Paris, 2004), p. 72. With regard to the Hungarian truffles: “Diese nun auf obige Art gesammelte Schwämme, werden von denen Bauern in die Städte gebracht, nach Pfunden verkauffet und hernach auf zweyerley Weise verbraucht. Erstlich frisch, welche man vor etwas delicats hält, und weit und breit davon nach Wien und andern Orten an grosse Herren Geschenke machet.” (“The peasants bring the accordingly collected mushrooms to the cities and sell them by the pound, whereupon they are used in two ways. First, as a fresh product, which is considered to be a delicacy, and in the whole region exploited as a gift to *grandseigneurs* in Vienna and

any case, the white truffle of Piedmont became more and more in vogue, as the recurrent rumors about truffles in Viennese court society (see the next section) and the ever-increasing quantities of truffle transports demonstrated.

From the diplomatic correspondence at issue it is difficult to date with certainty the first dispatch of truffles to Vienna. The first consignment might have taken place from approximately 1738 onward, since the previous years of correspondence did not contain any mention of truffles.³⁶ However, from this supposedly first occurrence onward, diplomatic communication gives evidence of a steep rise in demand. Significantly, the initiative of the first gift came from the newly instated queen, Elisabeth Theresa of Lorraine, who charged her minister, the Marquis of Ormea, to send “une demie douzaine de vacherins et quelque livres de truffes” to Canale, who should forward them to the queen’s brother, the Duke of Lorraine, in order “de [lui; R.C.R.] faire gouter ces sortes de fruits de notre pays.”³⁷ The Piedmontese delicacies apparently appealed to the Duke of Lorraine: in November 1739 he asked Canale whether he knew if the queen had already expedited the truffles. In the subsequent autumn, the queen sent him first 15 livres and then nine more. Remarkably, 30 years later the quantities were almost doubled, as Table 2.1 illustrates.

Table 2.1 Quantities of food gifts sent from Turin to Vienna (1738–1774)

Year*	Quantity of offered victuals**			Information source (AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo [= M.])
	<i>Truffes</i>	<i>Vacherins</i>	<i>Bertavelle</i>	
1738	-quelques tr. -quelques livres de tr.	- 6 - quelques		M. 65, Jan. 13, 1738 M. 65, Dec. 18, 1738
1739	4 boîtes de tr.			M. 66, Nov. 18, 1739
1740	24 livr. = 9.1 kg			M. 67, Dec. 3, 1740 (15 livres de tr.) M. 67, Dec. 10, 1740 (9 livres de tr.)
1766	42 livr. = 16 kg	6		M. 88, Dec. 20, 1766

other places.”) See the entry “Hirsch-Schwämme,” in Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexikon*, p. 251.

³⁶ I checked the correspondence from 1721 (Mazzo 48), 1733, 1736–73 (Mazzo 64), and 1737–38 (Mazzo 65).

³⁷ “To let him [i.e. the Duke of Lorraine; R.C.R.] taste these kinds of fruits of our country.” AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 65, Ormea > Canale, January 13, 1738.

1767	84.5 livres = 32.1 kg	- 6 - 6		M. 89, Jan. 3, 1767: 38,5 poids d'ici M. 89, Dec. 19, 1767: 46 livres de tr.
1768	176 livres = 66.9 kg	- 6 - 8	18	M. 90, Jan. 2, 1768: 56 livres de tr. M. 90, Dec. 14, 1768: 70 livres de tr. M. 90, Dec. 24, 1768: 50 livres de tr.
1769	56 livr. = 21.3 kg		18	M. 90, Dec. 2, 1769
1773	28 livr. = 10.6 kg	8	12	M. 94, Dec. 22, 1773
1774	44 livr. = 16.7 kg	- 8 - 6	- 16 - 25	M. 94, Jan. 3, 1774: 44 livres de tr. M. 94, Dec. 3, 1774: no truffle quantity indicated

* Understood as calendar year (and not as the truffle harvest season, which goes from October till January). Decisive are the date and the weight of the transport on the day they were sent.

** 1 livre equals approximately 380 g.³⁸

The table also shows that there was a sudden decrease in 1769, which was predominantly caused by the bad harvest of that year. After having sent a first dispatch of 56 livres (approx. 21.3 kg) on December 2, 1769, Canale's correspondence partner in Turin, Raiberti, wrote on December 30, 1769 that he counted on sending a second consignment. Unfortunately, he was informed by the *Intendant general de la maison du Roi* that—in spite of “les recherches plus exactes”—there were, due to warm winds, no good truffles available or expected for the rest of the season.³⁹ The relatively low quantity in the year 1773 was primarily due to the fact that a new ambassador had to be initiated into the “art” of gift-giving, as Count Canale died in July 1773.

In several respects, 1768 differed considerably from the previous years. In this year the gift repertoire of the dukes of Savoy was expanded with the reintroduction of the rock partridge, or *bertavella d'Aosta*. Simultaneously, the *Savoia* became increasingly aware of the uniqueness of their white truffle, and identified the *terroir* of the *tuber magnatum* explicitly with their own power base. Most striking, however, was the enormous increase in food gifts that were

³⁸ According to Giuseppe Bracco, who can be trusted to know the actual measures adopted by the Savoyard court, since he was involved in the source edition of the accounts of the *Savoia* between approx. 1500 and 1789, a Piedmontese *livre* (*libbra*) was equivalent to approx. 380 grams: G. Bracco, “La tavola dei Savoia nei secoli XVII e XVIII,” in *Accademia Italiana della Cucina* (ed.), *Il terzo convegno dell'Accademia Italiana della Cucina, Piemonte, 15–17 Ottobre 1971* (Milan, 1973), pp. 71–85, p. 82. I would like to thank signora Ginepro (Biblioteca Comunale di Novara) for having sent me a copy of this book.

³⁹ Cited from: AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, December 30, 1769.

sent around, especially of truffles. Was this the result of a plentiful harvest of that season so abundant, or was there more at stake?

1768 was also the year in which Raiberti for the first time added truffles for private use. The size of these portions for personal aims was unspecified.⁴⁰ Significantly, the truffles, whether additional or meant for the imperial highness, were in most cases announced in a postscriptum or on a separate leaflet, together with other informal remarks. Only exceptionally did they appear in the main diplomatic letters that discussed important political issues and were, because of their confidentiality, mostly enciphered. These short notes were, of course, never sent separately but always attached to the official diplomatic correspondence. However, this does not automatically mean that they were completely insignificant politically and negligible. On the contrary, these casual remarks very often revealed an economy of emotions, which were, in the highly ceremonial and emotionally repressive regime of the court society, otherwise retrievable only with great difficulty.

“Parler ministerielement au sujet des truffes,” or How to Use Truffles in Diplomacy

It was Canale who presumably had the *primeur* of exploiting Piedmontese truffles at the Viennese court, but it was his predecessor, Breglio, who suggested to him the possibility of facilitating things with imperial court society by using Savoyard delicacies. From the instructions given to Canale’s temporary successor, Interim Ambassador Montagnini, we can deduce that Canale systematically pursued this strategy⁴¹ and the same applies to his successor, Count Scarnafaggi.

⁴⁰ In a postscriptum, Raiberti wrote: “Je joins à cet envoi une petite caisse de Truffes qui vous regarde.” (“I add a little box of truffles to this expedition that is for you.”) Cited from: L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, Raiberti > Canale, January 2, 1768.

⁴¹ “Je sai que Monsieur de Canal envoyoit directement une partie des Truffes aux principaux Ministres Imperiaux. On ne veut pas s’écarter de ce système [...]” (“I know that Mr Canale sent a part of the truffles directly to the principal Imperial Ministers. You should not drift away from this system [...]”) Cited from: AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Aigueblanche > Montagnini, January 29, 1774. See also the letter from Scarnafaggi to Aigueblanche: “Si dans la susdite expedition V.E. trouve à propos d’en faire ajouter une petite quantité pour distribuer à deux ou trois des principales personnes de cette Cour, elle me mettra à meme de continuer une attention pratiquée par le feu Comte de Canale, et pour la quelle on lui en etoit très reconnoissant.” (“If His Excellency considers it appropriate, a small quantity of truffles could be added to the mentioned expedition for distribution among the two or three most important persons at this court. This would enable me to maintain an attention, practiced by the late Count Canale, of which the recipients were [always] very grateful.”)

But unlike Canale, Scarnafiggi frequently requested truffles for his own use: “Il y a quelques tems que je vous ai parle ministerielement au sujet des Truffes, et je vous en reparlerai encore, pour vous dire que si vous pouvez m’en envoyer une ou deux fois une petite quantité pour distribuer, cela me facilitera les moyens d’être plus familièrement dans quelques maisons qu’il me convient de frequenter.” One year later, Scarnafiggi was able to inform his chief in Turin that the truffles had achieved their purpose, because the “[...] principaux Ministres de cette Cour [...] m’en sçavent un gré infini.”⁴²

Other remarks in correspondence suggest, furthermore, that truffles were in high demand at the Viennese court and that the main recipients, the imperial couple, adored them: “Aussi S.M. Imperatrice m’a-t-elle encore fait dire par un de ses Valets de Chambre de confiance, que ces truffes étoient si bonnes, que tout ce qu’elle avoit mangé depuis lui avoit paru fade et insipide.”⁴³ According to courtly rumors, the State Chancellor Kaunitz, who was imperial *attaché* at the court of Savoy between 1742 and 1744, always received his truffles two weeks prior to Canale, which leads one to believe that Kaunitz had his own supply network, and that Canale may not have told the whole truth in his letters to his home base in Turin. There are, in any case, indications that Canale obscured information about the conditions in which the truffles arrived. Even worse he also suppressed what he did with these failed expeditions, as Scarnafiggi critically suggested when he wrote that during his predecessor’s tenure “[...] malgré qu’on en envoyât une grande quantité à la fois, comme elles

Cited from: AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, October 3, 1774. It is not clear whether Canale used the imperial or the private truffle portion for this goal.

⁴² “It is some time ago that I spoke with you in my capacity of minister about the issue of the truffles, and I will come to speak about it again, in order to tell you to send me once or twice a small quantity of truffles for distribution purposes. That would make it easier to get more familiar with some houses that it would be useful to have contact with”; respectively “the most important ministers were most grateful for this gift.” Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafiggi > Aigueblanche, October 24, 1774; respectively AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafiggi > Aigueblanche, December 23, 1775.

⁴³ “The Empress told me also through one of her confidential pages that the truffles were so tasty that everything that she had eaten afterwards seemed bland and insipid.” Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafiggi > Aigueblanche, December 19, 1774. Canale also testified repeatedly to the fact that the empress and emperor enjoyed the truffles; see, for example: “Leurs majestés ont été fort sensibles au souvenir du Roi,” cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 89, Canale > Raiberti, December 29, 1768; also AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 89, Canale > Raiberti, January 19, 1767; AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 89, Canale > Raiberti, December 31, 1767; AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, Canale > Raiberti, December 14, 1769.

murissent en chemin, LL.MM. Imperiales ne pouvoient qu'en manger une ou deux fois."⁴⁴

Scarnafaggi's reflection is rather curious, since Canale confirmed the arrival of every consignment. As we have just seen, he also wrote some words on how the royal gift was actually perceived and tasted by the empress and emperor. The following remark of Raiberti even suggests, that Canale *had* to give an account of the way he presented the truffles: "J'espere que vous les recevrez en bon etat, me raportant pour la maniere dont vous avez pratiqué à l'égard du premier envoi [...]"⁴⁵ But perhaps these reports were from time to time untrue because there is also a letter from Raiberti informing Canale about a rumor which circulated in Turin that "[quelqu'un a supposé ici que] les Truffes qu'on est en coutume d'envoyer à Vienne s'alteroient en route de manière à n'avoir plus après leur arrivée le gout et la saveur qui les fait rechercher."⁴⁶ Perhaps Canale sometimes also made illegitimate use of the truffle consignments. As yet, Canale's negligence can—for lack of evidence—not be substantiated, but it might be, perhaps, more rewarding to focus on the wider context of these calumniations and accusations.

The recurrent confrontation with delicate, anonymously supplied information perfectly illustrates what, according to Norbert Elias, characterized the court society, namely its penetrating culture of mistrust and *Überwachung*.⁴⁷ Since the creation of a separate Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1717, which resulted from a drastically administrative reform by the recently crowned Victor Amadeus II, diplomatic policy became more than ever centered on the sovereign. Since the rulers of Savoy, and their first monarch in particular, considered themselves chief foreign ministers, they were ever more intensively involved in diplomatic affairs. In order to remain well informed about all political developments, they disposed of different instruments.

⁴⁴ "[...] even though a large quantity was sent, the imperial couple could only eat them once or twice, as the truffles decayed on their way." See for this citation and with regard to Kaunitz's own truffle connection: AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafaggi > Aigueblanche, October 3, 1774: "Je me suis rappellé l'envoi des truffes, [...] au sujet du quel j'ai appris que le Prince de Kaunitz en avoit toujours reçu quelques semaines auparavant que le Comte de Canale." ("[...] I have been informed that the Prince of Kaunitz always used to receive them some weeks earlier than Canale.")

⁴⁵ "I hope you will receive them in a good condition and that you will notify me in the same way as you have done after the first dispatch." Cited from: AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, Raiberti > Canale, January 2, 1768.

⁴⁶ "someone has suggested here [in Turin; R.C.R.] that the truffles that are usually sent to Vienna decay on their way and lose their flavor and aroma which make them so requested." Cited from: AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 90, Raiberti > Canale, December 2 1769.

⁴⁷ Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft*, pp. 197–200, 296.

First and foremost, in their own correspondence with the ambassadors in the different *legazioni*, the dukes of Savoy consistently instructed their representatives in a sometimes almost embarrassingly meticulous manner. Second, they were also informed about the ins and outs of the correspondence of the ambassadors with the Chief Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Third, in view of their own political agenda, the dukes of Savoy also exploited their private communication channels, for example with relatives at foreign courts. Additionally, several aspects of foreign administration, for example archival and budget policy, became increasingly institutionalized in the course of the eighteenth century. Eventually, from an organizational point of view, virtually every step of the ambassadors of Savoy had to be formally approved by the secretary of foreign affairs and/or by the king. Nevertheless, even in this regime of permanent supervision, there were still grey areas in which individual initiatives were still possible.⁴⁸

Someone who obviously felt at ease with this free space was Count Luigi Malabaila di Canale. As the king's minister he was able to maintain a more independent existence because in Vienna he very quickly married a woman from the upper stratum of the Austrian-Hungarian nobility, namely Maria Anna Palffy-Ordöd from the influential and wealthy Esterházy dynasty. This alliance not only relieved his financial dependence on his sovereign, but also eased his access to court society in general and to the imperial couple in particular, since Canale's wife (and later also one of his daughters) belonged to the bedchambers and intimates of the empress.

Several fragments in the correspondence indicate that Canale regularly had private meetings with Archduchess Maria Theresa, which was rather exceptional for representatives of foreign states.⁴⁹ He was also very close to influential members of the Viennese state apparatus, for example Baron Hagen, the vice-president of the Imperial Council. With Kaunitz, the most powerful statesman at the Viennese court, he maintained a rather antipathetic relationship. Canale spent more than 35 years at the Viennese court and eventually began to identify with the imperial side from time to time, which was particularly clear in the War of the Polish Succession. During this political conflict, he was engaged as go-between by King Stanislaw II of Poland to secure simultaneously political support from Charles Emmanuel III and Maria Theresa. This diplomatic *Alleingang* of Canale damaged his reputation, which was otherwise excellent, since he managed to repair the fragile relationship with Vienna and regain the

⁴⁸ Storrs, "La politica internazionale," pp. 40–47; D. Frigo, *Principe, ambasciatore e jus gentium. L'amministrazione della politica estera nel Piemonte del Settecento* (Rome, 1991), pp. 21–99, 180–89.

⁴⁹ Ruata, *Luigi Malabaila di Canale*, pp. 152–3.

confidence of the empress.⁵⁰ In this process of reconciliation, the mutual gifts of food products were simultaneously an instrument and a symbol of the actual social relation.⁵¹ From this point of view, it was only expected that the rulers of Savoy would continue this yearly practice. They actually had no choice, since the *obligeantes attentions* progressively became obligatory, especially since the introduction and subsequent standardization of Tokaj (Tokay) wine as a counter-gift by the imperial court. But not everything remained as usual.

The painstaking initiation of Canale's successors (Montagnini as interim and Scarnafiggi as the new imperial ambassador) into the yearly ritual of the food gift in a way corresponds with the more general process of centralization and reorganization of the Savoy state apparatus, started by Victor Amadeus III immediately after the death of his father in 1773. The new king replaced the established cadre of ministers and appointed a new staff, headed by the novice Marquis of Aigueblanche. After an initial phase of disorientation and a struggle for power, this new minister of state and foreign minister succeeded in dominating state administration.⁵²

Whether it was this reorganization of the state administration or the changing of the Viennese ambassador that provoked increasing interference from Turin in truffle affairs, it became increasingly evident that the yearly truffle consignments were not a *bagatelle* for the rulers of Savoy, but rather a ritual to whose fulfillment they progressively attached a certain value—as we will see, not only because the gift exchange weighed considerably on the state budget. There was more at stake than budgetary accuracy, there were other reasons for care. This personal concern became visible in four ways. First, Canale's successors were meticulously instructed in the entire practice of this yearly ritual. Strikingly, they had to check customs formalities with the revenue officers before they could receive the consignments—as though there had never been a precedent network!⁵³ They also constantly received the same directives: even after a couple of years, they were informed that the small box of truffles was for private use and that the destination of the dispatch, needless to say, was, as usual, the imperial couple. To put it shortly, there was a

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 198, 167.

⁵¹ M. Godelier, *Lénigme du don* (Paris, 1996), p. 145.

⁵² See, for example, Ricuperati, "Il Settecento," pp. 581–98, 607–17.

⁵³ See for the customers formalities AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Aigueblanche > Montagnini, December 11, 1773; and for the instructions to the staff: *ibid.* and Mazzo 94, Aigueblanche > Montagnini, December 22, 1773; Mazzo 94, Aigueblanche > Montagnini, January 29, 1774.

constantly repressed suspicion between the center (Turin) and the periphery (Vienna).⁵⁴

This suspicion was to a certain extent understandable, since a considerable number of expeditions in the transitional period after Canale's death failed due to customs formalities, transport delays, theft, and so on. In order to avoid such complications, the diplomats all tried to find a solution; this was the second illustration of the increasing concern of the Savoy governors. Scarnafaggi suggests, with regard to the recurrent problem of the conservation and theft of truffles, that the truffles be properly packaged in Turin and that the *maitres des postes* should instruct the coachmen to take care that the truffles not be subjected to strong fluctuations in temperature.⁵⁵

Third, another clear manifestation of the weight and high utility value the Viennese diplomats of the house of Savoy ascribed to the Piedmontese food products is that the ambassadors in Vienna also regularly sent their own precious counter-gift to their superiors in Turin. This gift exchange among officials of Savoy obviously served to remove tension and to express esteem. At least since Canale's tenure such a gift was usually offered to the first and second ranking officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Turin:

N'ayant reçu le vin de Tokay que depuis environ un mois, il ne sera en état d'être mis en bouteille que vers la fin de Février, en quel tems je l'expédierai en faisant mettre du Vin de St. George sur la [unreadable; R.C.R.] du Tokay selon que le

⁵⁴ "J'ai fait partir [...] sous votre adresse une caisse de Truffes et une de Bartavelle [...]. Vous savés leur destination, il me seroit superflu de vous en reparler." ("I have sent a box of truffles and a box of *bartavelle* to your address [...]. You are informed about their destination; it would be superfluous to say tell you again.") Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 95, Aigueblanche > Scarnafaggi, December 2, 1775.

⁵⁵ "Comme cependant il peut arriver dans ces sortes d'envoi quelque contretems en chemin, et qu'un des inconveniens, aux quels ils sont le plus sujets, est celui de geler et de degeler, je pense qu'on pourroit les éviter en partie si V.E. vouloit avoir la bonté de les accompagner d'une lettre à mon adresse, et de faire recommander aux Maitres des Postes de ne pas permettre que les postillons en changeant de chevaux mettent les caisses, dont il sont chargés, dans des chambres chauffées, ou dans les écuries." ("With this kind of expedition there is always a risk of some misfortune during the transport, and one of the most frequently occurring complications is the alternately freezing and thawing of the truffles. I think we can avoid this partly, if His Excellency would be so good as to dispatch them accompanied by a letter to my address, and to recommend the *Maitres des Postes* that they prevent the coachmen, who are responsible for the (truffle) boxes, from putting the boxes into the stables or into heated rooms when they are changing the horses.") Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafaggi > Aigueblanche, December 19, 1774. See also AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafaggi > Aigueblanche, December 11, 1775.

pratiqueoit mon Predecesseur. J'aurai soin que le Ministre et son P^r Off^r puissent juger de l'envoy et de la reconnoissance de leur correspondant pour les Truffes qui lui ont envoyées.⁵⁶

This creation of secondary circuits of gift exchange clearly demonstrates the intrinsically inflationary character of gifts.

The fourth and final manifestation of the value which the king of Savoy and his state administration attached to the truffle delivery is in their emotional involvement. Most striking is the following remark of Aigueblanche: “Je vous écris à part, que le Roi [i.e. Victor Amadeus III; R.C.R.] a été fâché d'apprendre que le second envoi des Truffes ait aussi essuyé des contretems.”⁵⁷ In order to understand this emotional reaction, the reader should know that the first truffle consignment of the year had arrived in a very bad state: nearly all of the truffles were rotten, and “only” a selection of approximately two dozen had been sent immediately to the *grand maitre d'hotel* of the Viennese court, “[...] le quel j'avois prevenu sur la cause de la petite quantité de Truffes, que je lui faisois remettre.”⁵⁸

Despite these precautions, something went wrong with the second consignment, causing the person giving the truffles to become angry. What happened is made clear in another letter from Scarnafaggi, reporting the arrival of the second dispatch:

[...] j'ai reçu le second envoi [...], dont les caisses s'étant ouvertes en chemin, il s'en est perdu une partie, ce qui a fait, qu'en les envoyant à Monsieur le Comte St. Julien Grand Maître d'Hotel de LL. dites Majestés je lui ai fait communiquer le certificat ci-joint des officiers de la Poste de Vienne, par lequel il conte du susdit accident.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ “Having received the Tokaj wine (only) approximately one month ago, it will not be ready to be bottled until the end of February and in that period I will send the wine, putting the wine of St George on the [...] [unreadable; R.C.R.] of the Tokaj, according to the practice of my predecessor. I will take care that the Minister and his Prime Officer will experience the gratitude of their correspondent (by way of the wine dispatch) for the truffles which they sent him.” Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafaggi > Aigueblanche, December 19, 1774.

⁵⁷ “I am writing you solely (to inform you), that the king has been angry to learn that the second consignment of truffles has also experienced a mishap.” Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 95, Aigueblanche > Scarnafaggi, December 23, 1775.

⁵⁸ “[...] whom I had notified about the cause of the small quantity that I had sent him.” Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafaggi > Aigueblanche, December 23, 1775.

⁵⁹ “I have received the second consignment, and a part of it was lost, as the boxes were opened up during the transport. For that reason I submitted these boxes together with the

At this point, the correspondence also beautifully exemplifies Marcel Mauss's observation of the gift as a "fait social total," because this certificate of damage, which Scarnafaggi sent to the *grand maitre d'hôtel* of the imperial court and—as a certified copy—to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Turin was anything but a formality. Here was loss of distinction, or—even worse for an eighteenth-century nobleman—loss of honor at stake, as Aigueblanche's response illustrates: "La précaution que vous avez eû d'envoyer à Mr. de St. Julien le certificat que vous avez retiré du Bureau de la Poste, étoit à propos pour faire voir que l'intention du Roi n'étoit pas que la portion en fut si petite."⁶⁰ Scarnafaggi might have requested instantly a certificate of damage at the Viennese post office for at least two reasons. First, he had to make it known that it was not the king's intention to send such a small portion, *a fortiori* as the first consignment had already arrived in bad order. Second, Scarnafaggi had to avoid even the semblance of having suppressed the truffles, both to Count St Julien and to his own sovereign. In other words, Scarnafaggi was forced to provide full disclosure to all parties involved about the full facts of the matter, in order to maintain his master's honor and his own reputation.

While the bad tidings of the unsuccessful consignments were arriving in Turin, Aigueblanche had already sent a third consignment with a lot of truffles as compensation for the first incomplete one: "Il y a dans cet envoi de quoi suppléer abondamment au premier."⁶¹ A week later in a letter to Scarnafaggi he wrote that he was "impatient d'apprendre"⁶² whether this third dispatch had arrived in good order. This once again makes it evident that the truffles were, for the *Savoia*, not to be taken lightly, but rather something to which they ascribed weight and importance.

attached certificate [of damage] of the post office of Vienna to the Grand Maître d'Hotel, in which he is informed about this accident." Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 94, Scarnafaggi > Aigueblanche, December 11, 1775. Unfortunately, the certified copy of this certificate of damage, which Scarnafaggi sent to the ministry in Turin ("le certificat ci-joint des officiers de la Poste de Vienne") has not been conserved in the correspondence at issue.

⁶⁰ "The precaution, which you took by sending Mr St Julien a certificate of damage from the post office, was appropriate to demonstrate that it was not the king's intention that the portion of truffles was so small." Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 95, Aigueblanche > Scarnafaggi, December 23, 1775.

⁶¹ "This dispatch abundantly compensates the first one." Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 95, Aigueblanche > Scarnafaggi, December 16, 1775.

⁶² "impatient to hear." Cited from AST L.M. Austria, Mazzo 95, Aigueblanche > Scarnafaggi, December 23, 1775.

Conclusion

Gifts, as we all know, are conveyors of emotions and meanings, even if they appear to be merely ritual or perfunctory. Food gifts are no exception to this rule. On the contrary, due to its very palpability (and, one can even say, palatability), food has been used as an effective gift since time immemorial. Its use in gift relations is as universal as the resource itself. Nevertheless, some foods are particularly appealing for their exclusive characteristics to be exploited in gift exchange, and the use of the truffle as a promotional gift by the dukes of Savoy clearly shows evidence of this. The truffle enabled the emerging Savoy dynasty to create a distinct and unequalled profile for themselves, as the *Truffes blanches de Piémont* were, due to their rareness, simultaneously precious and as a gift object exclusively connected with the territory of Savoy. Management of the process of giving the truffles as gifts itself shows that officials from different levels of the state administration were very concerned with the practical organization of this gift exchange, and thereby also offers insight into the texture of personal relations within the state apparatus.

From correspondence and other diplomatic contact with the courts of Vienna, London, Paris, and Berlin, it becomes very clear that this culinary resource for the kings of Savoy was not just an object of occasional value, but rather a deliberately exploited instrument and image that sustained their quest for preeminence and prestige. In so doing, the *Savoia* simultaneously were indicators and factors of the *tartufomania* that progressively captivated the European elites on the threshold of the French Revolution. Significantly, the revolutionary movement which—as is generally known—profoundly changed European (and some non-European) societies did not even leave these subterranean commodities untouched. But it would be better to discuss the post-revolutionary history of the truffle on another occasion.

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Chapter 2 (Rengenier C. Rittersma)

A Culinary Captatio Benevolentiae: The Use of the Truffle as a Promotional Gift by the Savoy Dynasty in the Eighteenth Century

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Chapter 3 (Charles C. Ludington)

Drinking for Approval: Wine and the British Court from George III to Victoria and Albert

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