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Is hippophagy a taboo in constant evolution?

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Abstract: Food choice is strongly determined by religious and cultural elements specific to each civilization. Numerous food prescriptions concern meat, beginning with the total or partial ban on meat. Among the numerous animal species concerned by religious or cultural prohibitions, horse meat occupies an original place because the ban on its consumption varies a lot according to places and times. Widely consumed in Eurasia in the Prehistory, horse meat is still eaten by many in the big steppes of Central Asia while hippophagy has declined in Western Europe, for reasons which seem more connected to a new social status having more to do with medieval nobiliary values than religious prohibitions. Some non- horse-eating countries such as Japan from the end of the 19th Century became hippophagic for the sake of western modernity or after the introduction of horse by the Europeans as in Chile or Argentina. On the contrary, countries with English and Germanic culture, formerly hippophagic, gave up the consumption of horse meat massively in the 20th Century, except in times of food shortage (World War II in particular). The study of the French case shows the importance of the veterinary and positivist propaganda in the legalization of hippophagy in 1866, in the context of the industrial revolution and strong meat need for the emerging working class. The decline in labour values and the deindustrialization since the 1970s have come along rather logically with a steep decline in hippophagy.

Keywords: Horse, Meat, Hippophagy, Food taboo, Neophobia

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