Following the fairy

a socio-geographical history of absinthe in Paris from 1850-1890

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how absinthe was embedded in Paris between 1850 and 1890. To do so, the method of socio-geographical mapping is applied. By focussing on different domains of knowledge and places of knowledge, a comprehensive understanding of absinthe is formed. First, the domain of medical-scientific knowledge is investigated, discussing popular scientific publications, Parisian hospitals and scientific laboratories that experimented with absinthe. Second, the social domain of public drinking places is explored, discussing absinthe production and consumption rituals, as well as drinking places that are relevant to the story of absinthe. Eventually, it becomes clear that the two domains of knowledge that are distinguished in this thesis indeed produce different knowledge about absinthe. The method of socio-geographical mapping successfully illustrates absinthe as a complex historical phenomenon and produces new insights in its embedding in the context of this thesis.

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been an incredible journey with phases of extreme joy and inspiration as well as moments of stress and stagnation. Interestingly, the concept of *places of knowledge* that is central to this thesis also applies to the writing process. With pieces being written at my parents' house, both my old and new apartment in Utrecht (having moved in between), at the kitchen table, at the university, in the bathtub, during a short vacation in Limburg, in the train and in the best suited study room in the university library, the geography of this thesis' writing constitutes a colorful image. Similar to the story of absinthe, products of knowledge should always be considered within their specific spatial context and environment.

Photograph of one of the study rooms at Utrecht's University library.

In the full year that I have worked on this thesis, many people have joined me in my research on the wonderful world of absinthe. In particular, I would like to thank both my supervisors for their guidance and inspirational meetings. Stephen Snelders has been very clear and flexible in the methods used in this thesis and research aims. Daan Wegenaar has been extremely helpful in his suggestions and references, surpassing the role of second supervisor by a great extent. I am very grateful for the time and energy they have devoted to this thesis.

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Contents

Introduction

It was exactly 150 years ago, the beginning of 1871, when the disillusioned French troops returned to their homes and families all over the country. The French had been defeated, and the Franco-Prussian War had come to an end. While many soldiers might have felt deeply humiliated, it is without a doubt that many of them reunited in the café. Together with their fellow soldiers, they must have raised their glasses: the war was over. Whether one's preference existed in a fine Bordeaux, a sparkling cider or Calvados, or rather a glass of *absinthe*: alcohol was strongly connected to the military.

However, the importance of alcohol did not limit itself solely to the military, as more and more nineteenth-century Frenchmen found their salvation from everyday life in wine, beer and spirits. From 1830 to 1890, the consumption of spirits in France more than tripled, while the consumption of wine nearly quadrupled between 1830 and 1904. Wine consumption rose from 33 litres per capita in 1830-34 to 90 litres in 1895-1899 and 120 litres in 1900-1904.[1] However, the study producing these numbers is often discredited by more recent historians. As Thomas Brennan, an influential historian whom we will encounter several times during this thesis, states: the equation used for calculating alcohol consumption – the so-called Ledermann equation – "has been criticized for serious theoretical deficiencies and is almost certainly inappropriate for nineteenth-century France. One of the chief problems with its application to nineteenth-century France, and with our overall understanding to date, is the assumption of a homogeneous population."[2] As will be shown numerous times, there was no *one* type of alcohol consumer, just as there is no *one* type of French citizen. However, we do know that there was a clear and distinctive rise in alcohol consumption.

The rise in alcohol consumption was, amongst many other factors, caused by increasing standards of living. Instead of poverty and cruel circumstances, common people were now experiencing more and more financial stability and (sometimes) even time for leisure. Besides, the railroad network turned France into a giant domestic market for wine, making regional wines available to the entire country.[3] As a result of both the French Revolution and later industrialization, everyone in the nation seemed to benefit from France's growing prosperity. Of course, we have to remember that there were still enormous differences in wealth and socioeconomic status amongst the French population, but – compared to previous centuries – the ideals of the Revolution started to bear their fruits. Interestingly, as other scholars paradoxically argue, periods of heavy drinking are sometimes related to social discomfort,

[1] Brennan (1989) 73. See also: Sully Ledermann, *Alcool, alcoolisme, alcoolisation*, 1:36, 60-65.
[2] Ibid., 74.
[3] Ibid.

anxiety and popular suffering.[4] Especially amongst the lower classes in industrialized cities, living conditions continued to be piteous for a long time. Whether the rise in alcohol consumption was due to poverty or prosperity – the conclusion is clear: alcohol dominated the public sphere of France in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The differences in alcohol consumption between 1830 and 1900 were not only visible in quantity, but also in quality. While beer and cider had been common household beverages for centuries, the rise of alcohol consumption in the nineteenth century was caused by an explosion of wine and spirit consumption. Especially wine, which was only recently made available (and affordable) for the masses, made a great impact on the figures. Fine wine had been an elite drink for centuries, but was now making its way into middleclass households and weeknight dinners. The growing popularity of industrialized spirits – wherein alcohol is obtained not via fermentation but via industrial distillation – is most striking in this picture. Being of little significance to the yearly intake in the first half of the nineteenth century – not exceeding 2 litres per year per capita – the popularity of spirits rose to a stunning 25 percent of alcohol intake between 1890 and 1894.[5] In the later nineteenth century, the period of the so-called *Belle Époque*, spirits peaked in their yearly intake amongst citizens.

The most noteworthy development during this period was the introduction of the *aperitif*. A typical example in the growing consumer society with a very competitive market, different aperitif brands sprung up all over the country, resulting in 1500 distinct French aperitif brands in 1900.[6] Usually an industrial alcohol with added ingredients such as sugar, syrup, anise or other herbs and botanicals; each aperitif had its own distinct flavour and character – or, according to its selective marketing and advertisement, claimed to have so. As one of the primary examples of a modern capitalist economy, the competition within the aperitif market led to a strong identification between the popular product and its consumer. As a result, the aperitif had become a symbol for the Third Republic and *l'apéro* had become a national habit for the French by the end of the nineteenth century.[7] But despite consisting of over 1500 different brands and products, the aperitif market was dominated by one alcoholic beverage in particular: *absinthe*.

In this thesis, I will focus specifically on absinthe, or 'the green fairy' (*La fée verte*) as it was commonly called, since this alcoholic drink has a special place in the history of alcohol. Especially in France, where it enjoyed tremendous popularity, the drink became the symbol for a bohemian lifestyle and pleasure in the late nineteenth century. The magical era of the *Belle Époque* continues to amaze historians and laypeople until this day, and images from this period are often met with a strong sense of nostalgia. It

[4] Marrus (1974) 116.
[5] Marrus (1974) 122, 125.
[6] Howard (2008) 429.
[7] Ibid., 455.

has a somewhat magical feeling: the times before the great wars that would tear the European continent apart, the time of growing wealth and exploding economies, and an inexhaustible belief in positivism and progress. Of course, as we will encounter several times during this thesis, this image is highly romanticized and incorrect. Nevertheless, the *Belle Époque* remains an interesting period to consider, as it relates to several other bigger historical developments in European society. Themes like industrialisation, urbanisation, degeneration, nationalism, the growing consumer society and the rise of medical science and psychiatry are all partly intertwined and typical for the long nineteenth century. As we will see in this thesis, some of these broader historical themes can be explicitly linked to the story of absinthe.

For this reason, absinthe provides an ideal scope for this research: offering an explicit angle to enter this variety of related topics, while also allowing for constructing a broader view on some of the major themes during this historical period. In this thesis, the aim is to research the way in which absinthe was ingrained in the life of people during its most prevalent period in history. This raises the questions of *when* absinthe was most dominant and *where* this was the case. Concerning the latter, the decision was easily made. Absinthe consumption has always been strongly connected to continental Europe – Spain, Czechia and Austria to some extent, but primarily to France and Switzerland – and Paris was its undisputed capital. With its strong café culture, rapidly growing number of residents, artistic population, literary circles and bohemian groups, it is no doubt that most of the famous absinthe-drinkers were connected to this great city. Besides, absinthe consumption was highly localized throughout France, as a handful of *departements* – housing less than a quarter of all Frenchmen – was responsible for more than sixty-five percent of its intake.[8] Absinthe was enjoyed primarily in the urban areas around the Rhone and Seine basins in cities like Lyon, Grenoble, Rouen and Paris. It is not surprising that especially Paris became so highly associated with public drinking and café culture during the *Belle Époque*:

> At the turn of the century France had by far the most drinking places of any country in the world, and was second only to Belgium in having the fewest inhabitants (87) per outlet. The French capital [Paris], it was calculated in 1909, with 11.25 *débits* for every 1,000 residents, had the greatest proportion of any major city anywhere.[9]

In other words, it is only natural to consider Paris as the central place in this thesis. Being both the capital of public drinking in the *Belle Époque* and the cultural, political and scientific capital of France, it serves as a perfect map for investigating the way in which absinthe was most firmly embedded into the nineteenth-century society. In this thesis, Paris will be quite literally used as a map. In order to research the embeddedness of absinthe, I will make use of the method of *mapping* different places of interest that

[8] Prestwich (1979) 308.
[9] Marrus (1974) 129-130.

are crucial to the story of absinthe. This includes the drafting of maps, the plotting of places of interests and analysing their geographical data. Many of these places of interest play an important role in the transfer and the production of knowledge about absinthe. Following contemporary theories within the history of science, these places will henceforth be described as *places of knowledge.*[10] To investigate the embeddedness of absinthe, the knowledge about this alcoholic spirit during the nineteenth century should be assessed in different contexts. By focussing on one particular place of knowledge only, it is impossible to obtain a rich understanding of the role of absinthe in the context of this paper. In the following section, this concept will be explained in more detail.

Concerning the timeframe for this thesis, I will focus on the period from 1850 to 1890. The popularity of absinthe in France started to really get going around the 1850s, in the first instance as a bourgeois drink that was closely linked to the military. From the 1860s, absinthe became available to a wider audience and the first traces of frequent absinthe drinking were noticed. The 1860s are also the decade wherein the medical debate around absinthe took off, with the first voices to express their concerns about absinthe in relation to the health of the French population. Absinthe consumption really exploded during the 1870s and 1880s however, when the French vineyards were destroyed by phyllorexia – a wine crop disease – and the majority of the working class was looking for cheaper alternatives.[11] When the majority of Parisians was hooked on absinthe, they did not go back to their previous alternatives. The late 1870s and 1880s can be seen as the heyday of absinthe – both in terms of its production and sales as well as in relation to its social significance. During the 1880s, the green fairy was most closely associated with the artists living in Paris. It was during this period that the famous cabarets like *Le Chat Noir* became popular and started to facilitate the artistic experience of drinking absinthe even more.

The end date of this period of research has been very consciously chosen. While the consumption of absinthe in Paris was still high in the 1890s, its character and social context had drastically changed. As I will show near the end of the second chapter, the combination of a growing consumer society and large-scale entertainment suffocated the artistic cabarets and drinking places from the 1880s. From 1890, there is a different story of absinthe to be told. While the two following decades are equally interesting – the 1890s being the pinnacle of the Belle Epoque culture and the early twentieth century as the period of growing criticism and demonization of absinthe resulting in its eventual ban on 16 March 1916[12] – the scope of this thesis is limited to the rising popularity and early medical debates around absinthe consumption, as well as its social significance between 1850 and 1890.

[10] See, for example Livingstone, 'The Spaces of Knowledge; Contributions towards a Historical Geography of Science. Environment and Planning' *Society and Space* (1995) 13(1); 5-34; and Thrift, Nigel. 'The geography of truth.' (1995) 1-4.
[11] Marrus (1974) 128.
[12] Snelders (2020) 9.

To summarize the aims of this thesis: the embedding of absinthe will be researched along the lines of geographical and social analysis of primary source material, combined with the approach of mapping. The main research question is: *How was absinthe embedded in Paris between 1850-1890?* I will use mapping as an analytical tool to gain insight into the geographical aspects of this question. In doing so, I focus on different places of knowledge, as the knowledge about absinthe was found in different places and in different contexts. In a later section, on methodology, this approach will be explicated further.

Of course, I am not the first in noticing the particular role of absinthe in French history. In writing this thesis, I lean heavily on the earlier work done by cultural historians and other scholars. With regard to their positions, I consider this thesis as a re-interpretation of the history of absinthe. Much of the literature on this topic dates from two or three decades ago, making the topic both partly saturated by earlier studies but also open to re-interpretation. In the following section, I will briefly outline the concerns and questions that arose from earlier studies on the topic of this thesis.

Academic debate and background

In an influential article, Thomas Brennan argued some thirty years ago that we should move towards a '*Cultural history* of alcohol in France'.[13] He claims that: "Consumption, even in [previous] studies, amounts to a *quantity*, the factor of demand, rather than a complex of social interaction and ritual."[14] An example of these previous endeavours is found in Michael Marrus' socio-economical study of alcohol consumption in the *Belle Époque*.[15] As Marrus himself acknowledges: the problem is that "the statistics we have on alcoholic consumption do not directly address the question of *social drinking*."[16] This is what Brennan means with the complex of social interaction and ritual: the question of social drinking includes researching drinking motives, popular trends and the drinking choices that are made in certain occasions. For example, while wine was drunk more and more as a household beverage during dinner, absinthe and other aperitifs were primarily drunk in public cafés and cabarets.[17] When looking solely at the numbers of alcohol consumption, these differences in social drinking are left unnoticed. Besides, there are many difficulties with interpreting alcohol consumption solely on the basis of quantitative data,

[13] Brennan (1989). Towards the cultural history of alcohol in France. *Journal of Social History*, 23(1), 71-92. [Emphasis added].
[14] Brennan (1989) 72.
[15] Marrus (1974). 'Social Drinking in the 'Belle Epoque'. *Journal of Social History*, 7(2), 115-141.
[16] Marrus (1974) 121. Emphasis mine.
[17] Ibid.

as the data available contains too many insecurities and impurities.[18] This shows that studying alcohol from a purely quantitative perspective is insufficient.

Only more recently has social drinking become a serious research object for historians, as a result of the growing interest in popular culture.[19] Brennan argues, however, that the evidence and sources about drinking remain difficult to interpret, despite being abundant and widely available.[20] There have been several attempts to understand the social function of alcohol in a qualitative, "impressionistic" manner: i.e. focused on idiosyncrasies, anecdotes and biographies. More generally, the social history of alcohol seems to be written more and more from an individual's perspective.[21]

So, there are now two traditional approaches to studying alcohol in society. The first is highly statistical and '*dry'*: it is concerned with factual information, taxes, alcohol intake per capita, overall consumption rates and the prices and availability of drinks. The second is highly impressionistic, focussing on the role alcohol has on the works, relations and lives of (for example) the famous 'absinthe-drinkers' like Van Gogh, Gaugin and Baudelaire. In this thesis, I extend this second way of studying alcohol with the approach of mapping by not only focussing on individuals and social contexts, but also on geographical data and the importance of places. In doing so, I aim to provide a new way of investigating alcohol consumption in Paris from 1850 to 1890, namely the *socio-spatial dimension of absinthe drinking*.

Compared to earlier studies, I plan on doing a number of things differently in this thesis. I will treat alcohol as a social phenomenon, but simultaneously use quantitative methods to interpret its impact and function in society. To do so, I will make use of local sources and studies, social network-analysis and geographical mapping. As Brennan states: "It is worth remembering that *where* people drank was often as important as *what* they drank" and "In the end, questions about the social experience of drink must inevitably lead researchers to study the public drinking place."[22] It is precisely this *public drinking place* that I would like to focus on in this thesis. In doing so, one must be aware of not looking solely at the famous cafés of the artists and poets, but also consider the hubs and meeting places for the working class. This way, the social classes that are involved with certain cafés become important, as well as the neighbourhood wherein they are located.

Central to this approach is the aforementioned concept of *places of knowledge.* Coined at the end of the twentieth century, the concept entails the specific circumstances and context wherein (scientific)

[18] Brennan (1989) 77.
[19] Brennan (1989) 72.
[20] Ibid., 73
[21] An example of this is the compelling book of Jad Adams: *Hideous Absinthe: A History of the Devil in a Bottle* (2004). However, it must be noted that Adams is fairly critical about focusing on the lives of famous people like Van Gogh and Baudelaire. As he states, the importance of absinthe in their lives and art is often exaggerated (137). Nonetheless, Adams describes the story of absinthe largely from an individual's perspective.
[22] Brennan (1989) 80; 85.

knowledge is produced, transferred or transformed, and furthermore stresses the situatedness of knowledge.[23] It is a rejection of the traditional Western beliefs of universal knowledge and it emphasises contingencies, social contexts and 'geographies' of knowledge. Generally speaking, there are three different types of geographies of knowledge to be distinguished. First, there are sites of scientific knowledge; particularly those that produce knowledge. These places include laboratories, asylums, and libraries, but also pubs and coffeehouses.[24] All these places are crucial for the production of knowledge, and should therefore be investigated when researching the overall process of knowledge creation. Second, there are "the different networks of people and things which have allowed knowledge to be constructed at a distance."[25] These include scientific societies, journals, newspapers, academic circles and personal correspondences. Thirdly, there are the fields through which scientific knowledge can be gathered in a legitimate way. These 'breeding grounds', or matrixes, for harvesting scientific results include expeditions, social experiments and the concept of 'the field' in general.

In the story of absinthe, one can already speculate about different places of knowledge that play a role in its knowledge production and circulation. For this thesis, I have divided them into two domains of knowledge: one being the medical-scientific domain of knowledge, the other being that of public drinking places. The second domain especially will show a vast variety of places of knowledge. To get an overview of this, I aim to create a database containing information about which drinking places were popular, who attended them, and where they were located. I will gain the information needed for this from primary sources (historical publications, newspaper reports, advertisements, and personal letters or diaries) and secondary source material. I will then upload this database to Palladio – a mapping tool developed by Stanford University, explicitly designed for historical data.[26] With this online tool, researchers can map their data on the basis of certain identifiers and with the help of coordinates. In addition, there is an option to visualise the social connections of the audiences that visited the public drinking establishments. Although there are many more options to this historical research tool, I will mainly use it for creating accurate maps and visualisations in this thesis. I am convinced that this analytical tool will help find new information and interesting views on the socio-spatial aspect of Parisian absinthe-drinking between 1850 and 1890. In the following section, I will explicate my intended methodology and analytical approach further.

[23] Livingstone (1995) 28.
[24] Thrift (1995) 2.
[25] Ibid.
[26] See http://hdlab.stanford.edu/palladio/

Methodology

As stated before, my methodology for this thesis differs from traditional historical research. Besides a focus on illustrative case studies and primary source material, I emphasize the embedding of absinthe within its socio-geographical context. In contemporary studies, the effects of drugs are often investigated in a model that is focused on drugs, set and setting.[27] In this thesis, I take on a similar approach: focusing on the actual drug – absinthe itself – as well as its set (Why did people consume absinthe? What were their motives?) and setting (Where was absinthe consumed? What was its social context?). This means that I not only focus on the story of absinthe and its (historical) argumentation, but also consider the specific places, institutions and social environments vital to absinthe as a historical phenomenon. It is without a doubt that some cafés or other meeting places were crucial in the spread of absinthe's success, as was the rise of psychiatric institutes in Paris to the demonization of absinthe consumption. Although these places have been considered previously by other historians, this thesis will be enriching by adding an additional methodology to analyse the existing research material.

The structural approach of *mapping* is what sets this endeavour apart from similar research projects. I am convinced that the mapping of places wherein the story of absinthe is embedded will provide promising insights. It is not my aim to present an inclusive and closed-off story of absinthe. Rather, this thesis is a first exploration into the field of socio-historical mapping and must be understood accordingly. The research process will be aimed at further developing this methodology and collecting promising insights and observations along the way.

With regard to research material, I have selected the sources that were both representative for a hypothesized place of knowledge (i.e. either having a place in the medical-scientific domain or fitting the culture of public drinking establishments) and those that were accessible online. I started my research by finding case studies that serve as an illustration of the themes related to this thesis. It was my hypothesis that the most important sources could be found in primary medical-scientific publications and sources about public drinking establishments, since these places were most frequently mentioned and analysed within secondary literature. I have deliberately chosen to leave out political and legislative historical documents, since these sources started to impact the story of absinthe only later, especially in relation to its eventual banning.[28] Besides, I wanted to treat two essentially different domains of knowledge with regard to absinthe, in order to contrast and compare them accordingly. This way, I hope to clearly demonstrate that the conception of absinthe in Paris during the nineteenth century was, indeed, depending on different *places of knowledge.*

[27] Simon Wright (2013) 'Drug & Alcohol Effects: drug, set and setting.'
[28] See, for example, Prestwich (1979) 311.

Although the primary sources that are used in this thesis are diverse and essentially different, nearly all of it is derived from the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. Not only does their collection consist of an enormous amount of manuscripts, documents, published books, images and material – their digital environment is well-equipped and up-to-date: nearly all material is digitized and accessible in high-quality, with texts often transcribed and images available in high-resolution.[29] Especially in the times writing this thesis, when personal mobility and international travelling is very much discouraged due to COVID-19 measures, this digitized collection formed the basis of my research. The material for this thesis can therefore be interpreted as an explorative study of relevant parts of the digital collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

To structure this research, my thesis is divided into two chapters with subsections. Each of them treats different aspects and focuses on different domains of absinthe consumption in nineteenth-century Paris. The first chapter focuses on absinthe consumption in the domain of hospitals and laboratories. It is divided into three subsections, with each section focussing on a different aspect of absinthe in the medical-scientific environment. The final section consists of an extensive case study on laboratory practices and experiments with absinthe around 1870. The second chapter is focused on the social context wherein absinthe was consumed in the Parisian cafés and cabarets. It is equally divided into three sections, with the third being the most extensive. In this final section, there will be four different social contexts that are discussed in relation to the topic of this thesis. Depending on the material that is available, this can range from a short illustration or anecdote to an extensive case study.

Predominantly in the second chapter, I use the method of mapping to analyse (inter)connections and draw links between different public drinking places, audiences and locations. This new method of socio-historical mapping has not yet been applied to the question of absinthe. By carrying out this exploratory research, I do not only hope to find new interesting insights and conclusions, but also wish to contribute to the larger field of historical inquiry. By learning, testing and developing this new research method of mapping, I hope to make way for future historical-mapping approaches.

A word on terminology

Before we turn to the structure and contents of this thesis, a quick word on some deliberate choices in language use. I will refer to the central spirit of this thesis as '*absinthe'* in its French spelling, since this is most natural with regard to the primary source material that is used. References from other languages – e.g. 'absinth' from English or 'absint' in Dutch – will thus be rewritten as *absinthe.*

[29] See gallica.fr for the online collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

One of the presupposed active substances in absinthe is considered to be wormwood. Given its scientific taxonomy – *Artemisia absinthium* – and etymology, wormwood and absinthe are sometimes used interchangeably. However, it is important to note that wormwood is only one of the many ingredients that together make up absinthe. Despite this, some writers use the term 'wormwood' to refer to absinthe as a whole. When this is the case, I will only refer to 'wormwood' if the writer refers to the use of the pure herb; in other cases, 'absinthe' will be used for clarity reasons. In the case of experiments done with absinthe (particularly with essences) writers vary between their descriptions. The labels 'wormwood-essence' and 'absinthe-essence' are sometimes used interchangeably. However, as absinthe does not only consist of wormwood, I will only use the term 'wormwood-essence' if there is evidence that wormwood is the only active substance in the prepared distillation.

In socio-medical discourse, the term *absinthisme* is sometimes used. It was first introduced by Motet in 1859, aiming to classify a disease that was related to absinthe consumption specifically – different from general alcoholism.[30] The term absinthisme will return many times in medical publications from the second half of the nineteenth century, for example in the works of Magnan. It is important to note, however, that this condition was never soundly substantiated and that an overall consensus about the disease was lacking in the medio-scientific community. Given its great impact and importance, however, I will use the term absinthisme regularly in the first chapter of this thesis. In doing so, it remains important to understand that absinthisme was considered a *disease*, making it different from the mere consumption of absinthe: it is primarily visible through mental and psychical effects and shortcomings.

Finally, the languages used in this thesis will be both French and English. In the greatest part of this thesis and in running text, English is the dominant language. However, the names of certain cafés, common terms or proverbial expressions are sometimes impossible to successfully translate into English. With nearly all primary source material being available in French only, some passages are translated, while other (short) passages or expressions are used in their original language. Unless explicitly stated, the translations from French into English are mine. I have tried to translate – to my own insight – as much as necessary for the reader of this thesis to understand the meaning of the text. However, were it to occur that a certain passage or expression is not clearly explained and therefore incomprehensible, please get in touch with the author of this thesis.

[30] Luauté (2007) 517.

Structure and contents

The main question of this thesis is as follows: *How was absinthe embedded in Paris between 1850-1890?* To answer this research question, we have to look at the different domains wherein absinthe played a significant role. For this, I have distinguished two different domains of research, each consisting of different *places of knowledge.* They are, as interpreted in this thesis, environments that facilitate, transfer or generate knowledge amongst individuals. Such places include scientific environments like laboratories and university institutes, as well as industrial producers and the cafés of the common people.

The first chapter discusses the medical-scientific sphere of laboratories and psychiatric institutes. They are, in particular, the Parisian hospitals Salpetriere, the Bicetre and Sainte-Anne. In the first section, I trace the origins of the socio-medical absinthe debate and discuss three different publications of the 1860s. In the second section, I will elaborate on the status of Parisian medicine during the nineteenth century. This provides us with a framework of reference to interpret the medical and scientific claims in relation to absinthe. In the third section, I will highlight the case study of Valentin Magnan's laboratory work in the Sainte-Anne hospital in Paris. As will be shown, there are many shortcomings and problems with Magnan's experimentation. Another publication from Théodore Challand (Magnan's student) gives this case study another dimension, providing even more insight into the laboratory practices and substances used in these experiments.

The second chapter focuses on the café sphere and public drinking culture between 1860 and 1890. In the first section, I present the generated geographical map of Parisian public drinking places and their distinctive audiences and start with analysing these results. In this bigger picture, it becomes clear that some of the claims in secondary literature must be revisited and that the social embeddedness of absinthe has multiple dimensions. In the second section, the focus is on the consumption and ritualization of absinthe and its relation to other alcohols. The case study of the *Tubabsine* – a device designed specifically for the preparation and consumption of absinthe – shows that the social aspect was crucial to the consumption of absinthe. This social aspect is further investigated in section three. In this part, absinthe is discussed in light of production and economic value, as well as the different public drinking establishments that had a role in the story of absinthe. In the final subsection, four different *places of knowledge* in the domain of café culture and public drinking are established. Consecutively, they are the bourgeois and early café culture (IIIa), the working class tavern (IIIb), and the bohemian artists, literary circles and women in the cabarets (IIIc). All these places of knowledge are discussed and illustrated with the help of (at least) one case study, making it easier to distinguish between these different categories. Eventually, it becomes clear that the two domains of knowledge that are distinguished in this thesis indeed produce different knowledge about absinthe.

Chapter 1: Degeneration, doctors and lab dogs

Image: one of the gates of the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital complex (June 1899)
https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105177387/f1.item.r=salpêtrière

It is the third of March in the year 1869, when a thirty-eight year old woman is brought into the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital in Paris. She is transferred by monsieur Peter to the *salle Saint-Charles*, where she is placed on bed number 14. This woman, after having drank an abundance of alcoholic beverages the day before, had wandered into the countryside, in the neighbourhood of Irvy-sur-Seine – just outside of Paris. She had spent the night in freezing, heavy rain; and had been seen wandering around three o'clock in the morning by local farmers. At six o'clock in the morning, she was found lying in a ditch, cold and unconscious. When arriving at the Salpêtrière, later that morning, the woman entered a coma: having, amongst other things, little sensibility and hypothermic limbs. Her temperature was determined to be 26 degrees. The

patient is hospitalized and given a warming blanket and *boissons stimulantes* to help increase her body temperature. Monsieur Hirne, who was an intern at the hospital, recorded the following increase in body temperature over the day:

Heure.	Température vaginale.	Température axillaire.
11 h. 30	27°.9	27°.9
12 h. 30	28°.7	28°.6
12 h. 45	30°.4	30° »
1 h. 15	30°.9	31°.1
3 h. 15	34°.4	34°.3
4 h. 20		36°.3

Image: table from Magnan (1871) 12.[31]

At 4:30 in the afternoon, the patient started to regain consciousness. From that moment on, the woman began to recover further, and two days later she left the hospital in good health. But despite the woman's hypothermia being caused by the cold of the night and the rain, the doctors cannot ignore the role that alcohol has played in her tremendous (almost 11 degrees) decrease in body temperature. With alcohol gaining substantial popularity amongst working class people during the nineteenth century, and the French drinking more and more of it each decade; instances like these were common in the Parisian hospitals.[32] Together with other developments in medicine – like accurate value determination, scientific experiments and psychiatric theory – alcohol consumption became part one of the central topics whereupon patients were being diagnosed.

[31] It must be noted that these practices were, at the time, state-of-the-art science. Temperature determination and measurement had only recently been established and its relation to the human body was not always clear. See also: Chang, Hasok. *Inventing temperature: Measurement and scientific progress*. Oxford University Press, 2004. This objective-scientific approach will later be used by Magnan to substantiate his theory about the dégénérescence of the French people.

[32] During the second half of the nineteenth century, alcoholism will play an important role in the degeneration debate, which we will discuss more in the second section of this chapter.

Usually, patients that were picked up from the streets or cases related to alcoholism were first dealt with by the police. They were brought to the Prefecture de police, centrally located on the Île de la Cité, in the heart of the city. From there, patients were divided and transferred to hospitals and asylums all over Paris. This centralized approach made for clear administration and its logistics enabled the division of patients into specialized categories: some hospitals were primarily treating women, while other asylums were solely focused on psychiatric patients. The journey of the woman that was brought in into the Salpêtrière is mapped below.

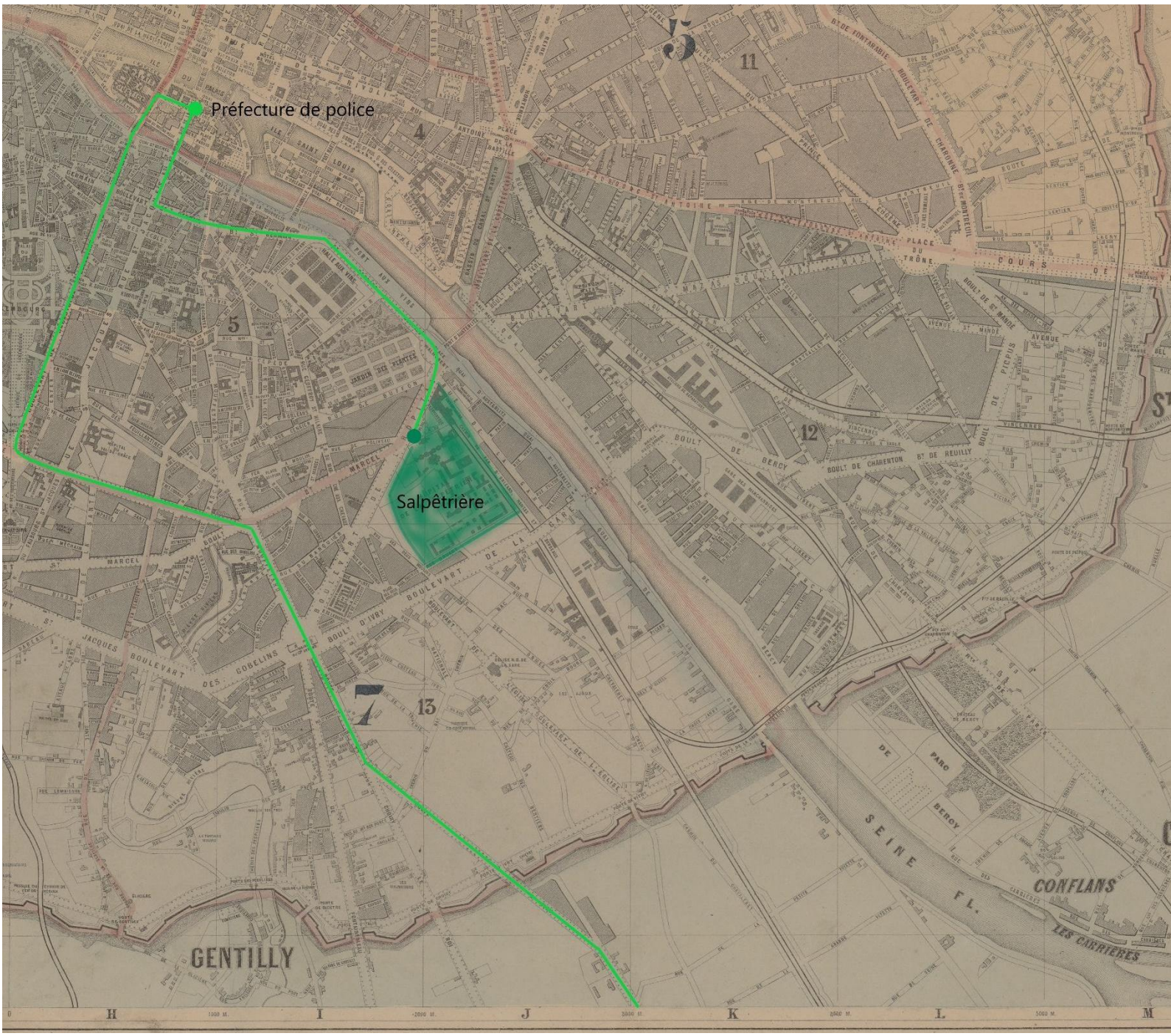


Image: the estimated route of the 38-year old woman from Irvy-sur-Seine to the Salpêtrière. Map from 1862 © gallica

Her journey did not take the shortest route, but was compromised by the centralistic approach of the Parisian authorities. After being brought to the Préfecture de police, she was transferred to the Salpêtrière (marked green).

This travelled route tells us something about the places that were involved in medicine and public health, as well as the status of alcoholism during the nineteenth century. Patients were picked up drunk from the streets by local authorities, and absinthe was often seen as a direct cause for trouble.[33] As the English writer Sherard recalls from his times spent in Paris:

> In a police station in Paris […] there were brought in from the streets in one day six prisoners so demented from absinthe drinking that they had all to be sent to the lunatic asylum. Absintheurs drop down dead in the streets of apoplexy, cerebral congestion and heart failure, every day that dawns red over Paris.[34]

The effects of absinthe consumption were thus clearly visible in hospital admissions and public health. In this chapter, we will investigate this particular context of the medical domain and see to which extend Sherard's illustration of absinthe abuse is true. The Parisian hospitals and medical-scientific laboratories will be considered as important places for the production and transferring of knowledge about absinthe. Moreover, scientific publications on absinthe and its effects are seen as important factors in the circulation of knowledge.

In the following section, three publications in the early absinthe debate during the 1860s will be explored. These publications sketch an image of the different voices within the scientific absinthe debate. In the second section of this chapter, the places of knowledge within the medical-scientific domain will be explicated further in the context of Parisian hospitals. The third section will consist of a case study of the laboratory experiments of Valentin Magnan, one of the most important scientists in the story of absinthe. For now, let us start by exploring the scientific debate around absinthe as it was conceived in the 1860s.

[33] Adams (2004) 180.
[34] Sherard (1909) 43.

I: Early developments in the popularized medical-scientific debate around absinthe

The 1850s can be seen as the real start of absinthe's popularity, as it became more commonly available and drunk by different groups in French society. However, the rise of absinthe was not only received positively. During the 1850s and 1860s, there was a growing feeling of awareness in terms of absinthe's negative consequences. Absinthe was seen as a new and dangerous substance, and moreover encouraged the overall consumption of alcohol, which was already considered a great societal problem during the second half of the nineteenth century. The numbers affirm this: in 1886, it was estimated that alcohol was causing 2.000 deaths a year and that the amount of people turning insane from drinking had doubled since 1854.[35] Doctors and scientists started worrying about the effects of such a rise in absinthe consumption, and some popularized medical-scientific publications appeared in the 1860s.[36] Some claimed that absinthe was more than a strong alcohol, and that its unique combination of alcohol, herbs and wormwood had devastating effects on the consumer's wellbeing. Others, on the other hand, argued that the effects of absinthe were perfectly explainable and by no means different (or worse) than those of other alcoholic spirits.

Ia) Anselmier

One of the first attempts at warning the general public for the particular dangers of absinthe was done by doctor Victor Anselmier in 1862.[37] In his work, entitled *De l'empoisonnement par l'absinthe*, he argued that absinthe caused serious threats in relation to public health. The use of absinthe may have had a long medical history, dating back to ancient Greece and Egypt: but by escaping from the office of the pharmacist, absinthe has unlawfully fallen into the domain of alcoholic liquors.[38] Now, after having done serious damage to a large part of the French military, especially in the lower classes – whose absinthe-victims can no longer be counted [39]–

[35] Marrus (1974) 118, original source : Le Moine, "Alcool," La Croix, 26 January 1886. Cf. Jules Rochard, "L'Alcool: son role dans les societes modernes,"Revue des deux mondes, 15 April 1886.
[36] Challand (1871) 82.
[37] Anselmier (1862) *De l'empoisonnement par l'absinthe.*
[38] Adams (2004) 15-16; and Anselmier, 8.
[39] Translated by author : "L'armée, dans tous les grades, mais surtout les inférieurs, ne peut compter le nombre des victimes de ce poison. Dans la vie réglementée des camps et des garnisons figure l'heure de l'absinthe comme

the green fairy continues to poison substantial parts of the population. Anselmier substantiates this claim by referring to numbers of specific hospital admissions: in Charenton, a small village just outside of Paris, there were over a hundred cases of *folie* detected that were related to absinthe consumption from 1857 to 1858.[40] had risen from 42 determined

For Anselmier, the difference between the effects of absinthe and those of other alcohols is clear: it is found in the composition of the drink, as alcohol is rarely drunk straight.[41] Of course, this analysis is extremely simplistic – Anselmier does nothing more than listing potentially dangerous ingredients and symptoms, without experimental evidence or substantiation. After briefly analysing the most important factors, Anselmier comes to the conclusion that there are two types of absinthe poisoning. The first, *la forme aiguë*, is characterized by acute symptoms like forgetting one's name and address in the morning, or sight problems.[42] The second and more severe one, *la forme chronique*, consists of pains in the brain, muscle problems and general *folie.*[43] This last symptom in particular will play an important role in the continuing debate surrounding the dangers of absinthe. Anselmier's strongest evidence for the problem of absinthism is found in the rising number of '*folie'* cases throughout the country – despite many of these cases being caused by alcoholism in general, rather than absinthe in particular.[44]

Ib) Moreau

Anselmier was not the only voice in the public absinthe debates in the early 1860s. Another Parisian doctor, Ferdinand Moreau, published *De la liqueur d'absinthe et de ses effets* in 1863. Moreau was professor in clinical medicine at the medical faculty in Paris, as well as doctor in the *HotelDieu* hospital and member of the *Académie Impériale de Médecine.*[45] His book was dedicated to his teacher, Armand Trousseau, who was a famous figure in Parisian medicine. Opening with "Dear and enlightened Professor, would you accept this humble essay of your

une des nécessités de la journée, heure fatale qui décide souvent de l'avenir des jeunes, officiers." From Anselmier (1862) 11.

[40] Anselmier (1862) 10. "A Charenton, en 1857, on compta 60 folies de même origine, et en 1858, 42."

[41] Translated by author : "car l'alcool est rarement pris pur." From Anselmier (1862) 12.

[42] Anselmier (1862) 18-19.

[43] Ibid., 22.

[44] Moreau (1863) 15.

[45] Ibid., 5.

respectful and devoted student?"[46]Moreau argued that the case of absinthe was in need for reconsideration and evaluation. He observed that absinthe has become a vital part to French society and that it is used throughout all social classes. As a comparison, he states that absinthe will become "for us what opium and hashish are to oriental civilizations."[47] However, there is a clear difference in the analysis of its users. While the effects of opium use can all be described to the use of a single substance, the heavy absinthe drinker often mixes absinthe consumption with a few glasses of wine, some beer and an occasional glass of cognac during the day.[48] This makes the boundary between alcoholism and absinthism blurry: the effects of both substances often occur simultaneously and might strongly influence each other. However, in making his argument, Moreau neglects the fact that many drugs are consumed in combination with other substances; opium, for example, was often mixed with alcohol to produce laudanum.[49] His point was: absinthe was rarely consumed as a single drug, but usually mixed with an overall lifestyle of heavy drinking. Therefore, Moreau was one of the first to advocate a milder stance towards absinthe from a medical perspective. His aim was not to show that absinthe is harmless – unregulated intake of *any* type of alcohol is dangerous for the body – but to argue that its effects are comparable to other types of alcohol. Hence, absinthe is not a poison, and its effects should be treated similar to those of any other alcohol.[50]

What follows is a literature overview of previous studies on absinthe, dating from 1620 up to Anselmier's work of 1862. However, it is important to note that medieval and seventeenth-century accounts of absinthium and wormwood have little to do with the absinthe of the nineteenth century. Predominantly an alcoholic beverage, the absinthe from the 1850s and onwards had a completely different purpose (i.e. popular consumption) then its medicinal progenitor. It was produced for the masses and should be enjoyed like any other luxurious alcoholic spirit, admittedly enhanced with some botanicals, but solely for the consumer's enjoyment and distinctive character of the drink.

Despite this incongruity, Moreau argues that rather than being toxic, absinthe is more commonly known for its energizing effects. When the French army was in Algeria, for example,

[46] "Veuillez, cher et illustre Maître, accepter la dédicace de cet humble Essai de votre élève respectueux et dévoué" From Moreau (1863) 5.
[47] Moreau (1863) 7.
[48] Ibid., 8.
[49] Van Hout & Hearne (2015) 598.
[50] Moreau (1863) 9.

absinthe was initially drunk to clear the polluted drinking water. Soon, however, the moment of absinthe drinking became popular and ritualized: soldiers liked the taste of absinthe and everyone looked forward to *l'heure verte.* For Moreau, absinthe acted as a social glue between social classes, first in the army and later in French society. "Suppose absinthe didn't exist; do you think that a gentleman would think of taking a glass of rum or cognac? I don't think so."[51] Thus, despite having similar effects as other alcohol, the function of absinthe differs in a social sense. In order to understand the popularity and impact of absinthe, it suffices to walk around Paris between 4 and 6 in the afternoon: in any café – big or small – from the *Boulevard des Italiens* to the poorest suburbs outside of Paris. In all these places, people are taking their absinthe in the same way and at the same moment, connecting the gentleman to the ragman.[52] Of course, Lierre presents us with a highly romanticised picture: most cafés had their own particular audience, varying from working-class taverns to elite cabarets. That being said, it is true that nearly all social classes participated in *l'heure verte.*[53]

Moreau stresses that, naturally, absinthe abuse will lead to unfavourable consequences, similar to those of general alcohol abuse. Many of his quoted studies argue that there is no difference – whether tests are done with pure absinthe or alcohol: "Tout agent spiritueux produirait les mêmes effets."[54] From his literature study, Moreau eventually concludes that absinthe (in a normal dose) is equally harmful as other spirits with the same alcohol percentage and that the effects caused by drinking absinthe are simply those of alcohol intoxication.[55] Moreover, the element of excitement connected to the drink is caused by its *mode d'emploi.* The way in which absinthe is consumed, slowly diluted by water and turning into an emulsion, contributes to the energizing effect of the drink. And of course, the social aspect of drinking in cafés and taverns influences the overall absinthe consumption experience. In other words, the context and situation seems to be of vital importance to drinking absinthe.

[51] Ibid., 13. "Supposons que l'absinthe n'existe pas, croyez-vous que l'homme du monde penserait à prendre un verre de rhum ou de cognac? Pour moi, je ne le crois pas."
[52] Ibid. "Pour se rendre compte des immenses quantités d'absinthe absorbées journellement, il suffit d'aller, entre quatre et six heures de l'après-midi, dans un café, depuis le plus élégant jusqu'au plus infime, depuis le boulevard des Italiens jusque dans nos faubourgs les plus reculés: l'homme du monde et le chiffonnier ont un point de contact; tous deux, à la même heure, prennent leur absinthe."
[53] Adams (2004) 25.
[54] Moreau (1863) 26.
[55] Moreau (1863) 36.

Ic) Lierre

A third voice in the public absinthe-debate, Henri Lierre, adopted precisely this experience-based and social focus in researching the effects of absinthe. In his 1867 work, *La question de l'absinthe*, he addresses an even bigger audience than both Anselmier and Moreau. Addressed to both heavy drinkers and those who do not drink at all, his goal is to "judge absinthe without prejudice, without bias, without hatred, without love, with the most scrupulous impartiality."[56] After short chapters on the production, ingredients and some arguments on the effects of absinthe, the most interesting part is found in his fifth chapter, which is dedicated to the consumer-experience of absinthe consumption. In this section – *La soirée d'un buveur d'absinthe* – Lierre describes his experience of an absinthe-fuelled night in a Parisian café. With this method, Lierre fits the image of nineteenth-century self-experimentation. Many of the great scientists were personally involved with their scientific experimentations. The British chemist Humphry Davy, for example, is said to have conducted many experiments with nitrous oxide in the company of his friends, nicknaming the potential anaesthetic 'laughing gas' because of its specific properties.[57] Lierre's attempt must be understood in this fashion. While contemporary science demands a certain distance between the observer and the subject, these early scientists held other beliefs: what better way to understand a phenomenon than to witness it first-hand?

For this reason, Lierre devoted himself to the following experiment. At the usual time, when the clock sounded 4 hours in the afternoon, he ordered his first absinthe in a bar. It was a regular type of absinthe – with an alcohol percentage of 72%.[58] After receiving the strong spirit, Lierre slowly dilutes his beverage with water, drip by drip, resulting in a cloudy and aromatic emulsion in his glass. He takes his first sip, from a drink that is diluted to an alcohol percentage of 18% – less than half of the percentage of other eau-de-vies. This seems to indicate some desire for objectivity, or exactness, through the expression of numbers.[59] Although it is very unlikely that Lierre was able to precisely measure the alcohol content of his drink, he chooses to express this step in his 'experiment' with an exact quantity. More likely, the drink was diluted with water,

[56] Lierre (1867) 5.
[57] Cartwright (1972) 295.
[58] Lierre (1867) 29.
[59] More on this role of objectivity in the history of science can be found in Porter, Theodore M (2001) *Trust in Numbers : The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

so that a ratio of approximately 1 part of absinthe against 3 parts of water is achieved (18% is a quarter of the original 72% alcohol by volume).

Lierre states that, although the mixed drink might not be very strong, its effects are felt immediately; much quicker than with a glass of cognac.[60] After the first glass, Lierre experiences joyful thoughts, while his concerns and dark moods quickly disappear. At the time of the second glass, some friends gathered around his table. Lierre starts to talk vividly and has intriguing conversations about philosophy and literature. His ability to find new, interesting words increases and his speech is full of *expressions pittoresques*.[61]

The third glass of absinthe, however, changes a few things. Strong images and clear conversations make way for dreamy thoughts and a lack of focus. While Lierre is unsure about ordering another absinthe, he tries his luck at the bar, as he fears that the waiter will refuse to give him more of the green liquor. However, the absinthe is served, which feels both as a triumph and a treasure to Lierre. While taking some sips of his fourth (or already fifth?) glass of absinthe, Lierre tries to read the newspapers to give himself a posture. He cannot make sense of the words, misses the overall mes (Cartwright) (Cartwright)sage of the papers, and ironically states "*Que m'important M. de Bismark?*"; not foreseeing that the German chancellor would win the Franco-Prussian War some years later.[62] Lierre's vision is similar to that in dreams: blurry, unclear and slightly hallucinatory. He encounters courtesans, gala carriages and self-proclaimed members of the cultural elite. After making numerous sketches and drawings – that will be hard to decipher the morning after – Lierre reaches the outer boulevards of Paris and falls down, devastated, on a street bench. "To say what happened to me, from that moment until the moment when I regained complete possession of myself, is an impracticable task", he states.[63] Lierre vaguely remembers entering some restaurant and eating a duck dish – *canard aux navets* – and mindlessly wandering around the streets after his dinner with a heavy head and gloomy eyes, before finally finding himself in his bed, falling into a deep sleep.

Interestingly, although *l'heure verte* usually started around 4 in the afternoon, its effect impacted the full remainder of the day. This makes absinthe an interesting case for the increasing popularity of aperitifs. In contrast to other aperitifs – which were usually drunk as

[60] Lierre (1867) 30.
[61] Ibid., 31.
[62] Ibid., 32.
[63] Ibid., 35.

one to two glasses of alcohol before dinner, to stimulate appetite – absinthe dominated the individual's consumption from l'apéro, through dinner and ending in the bedroom. Drinking absinthe was, in other ways, a full evening programme.

Lierre distinguishes three periods in his absinthe-drinking experience: first exhilaration, then fierce over-excitement, and finally numbness. Although there are many parameters – the pure amount of absinthe consumed, the person's alcohol tolerance, body weight, etc. – nearly everyone experiences these three periods. However, the direct effects of absinthe remain hard to distinguish, as most other alcoholic beverages show a similar pattern in its consumers. According to Lierre, the only difference between drunkenness caused by absinthe and drunkenness from other alcohols, is that the latter is often accompanied by nausea, vomiting and heavy hangovers.[64] Interpreted this way, absinthe is by no means more dangerous than other alcohols, as its effects may even be less harmful – of course, that is without taken into account other factors such as degree of addiction, societal impact, etc. For that reason, Lierre argues that we should treat absinthe no differently than other alcohols; there should not be extra taxes or restrictions for the production and selling of absinthe. If we were to make an analogy, should we equally eliminate all rivers because there are people drowning in them?[65] According to Lierre, moderation is key, since absinthe is unharmful in small quantities and only becomes dangerous in abusive cases. This argument illustrates the opinion of many recreational absinthe consumers: if other types of alcohol are perfectly legal, then what is the problem with absinthe?

While the short-term effects might not be the biggest problem in absinthe consumption, the stories of miserable lives of *absintheurs* are countless. In his book, Lierre describes one of these cases in the persona of Erminaud du Châtelet.[66] Originally chief editor of *Patriote de la Meurthe*, a journal from the French city of Nancy, Du Châtelet was planning to marry a young lady from there. He went to Paris for business, having to stay a bit longer due to unforeseen complications, and returned to Nancy to find out that his fiancé was married to his rival. When he found out, Du Châtelet went mad and had to be locked up in the Méréville asylum for a year. After that, his *folie* was cured, but the pain remained. He started working for the newspaper *Siècle*, where he wrote factual stories about Parisian history and authorities. It is as if Du Châtelet wanted to have nothing to do with his previous residence in Nancy, and started to

[64] Lierre (1867) 38.
[65] Ibid., 65. "En somme, condamnons l'abus sans flétrir l'usage; faut-il supprimer les rivières parce qu'il y a des gens qui s'y noient?"
[66] Ibid., 45-48.

submerge in Paris' bohemian culture. While being a first-class *bibliophile* and loyal employee, his lifestyle was accompanied by systematic drunkenness. He lived at Rue Dauphine 4, in the heart of Paris and in front of Pont Neuf, with his apartment conveniently located above a wine merchant. One day, Lierre met Du Châtelet on the streets of Paris and started to analyse his behaviour. The encounter between them and the drinking places that Du Châtelet visited are plotted on the map on the following page.

Lierre met Du Châtelet at Rue de l'Arbre Sec, between the Louvre and Les Halles, together with another man in a café. They offer him an absinthe and he joins them at the bar. After the first glass, Du Châtelet proposes tasting the absinthe of his local innkeeper. Lierre refuses, and Du Châtelet leaves with his companion to the cabaret opposite of his apartment on the rue Dauphine. In the following two hours, Lierre walks around the Faubourg Saint-Germain in the 7th arrondissement. At six o'clock, he wonders if the two men are where he expects them to be, as he passes the rue Dauphine. There they were: sitting in a cabaret, facing each other, enjoying their thirteenth (!) glass of absinthe.[67] They were too intoxicated to notice Lierre, staring through the window, standing in the shadow, observing the *absintheurs* from outside. Du Châtelet and his companion, Charles Chabot, were sitting in a cloud of smoke from their pipes. Their glowing eyes were like stars in the night, sparkling from their swollen faces.

After this observation, Lierre returns to his house, shaking his head about Du Châtelet's absinthe consumption, which did not yet seem to have ended for today. Du Châtelet could never withstand a short visit to the absinthe cabaret at the rue Mazarine: "It was impossible for him to pass its doors without entering."[68] This drinking place thus inevitably formed the third stop of absinthe binge drinking of the day for Du Châtelet and his companion.

[67] Ibid., 46.

[68] Lierre (1867) 48. "Il lui était impossible de passer devant la porte sans entrer".

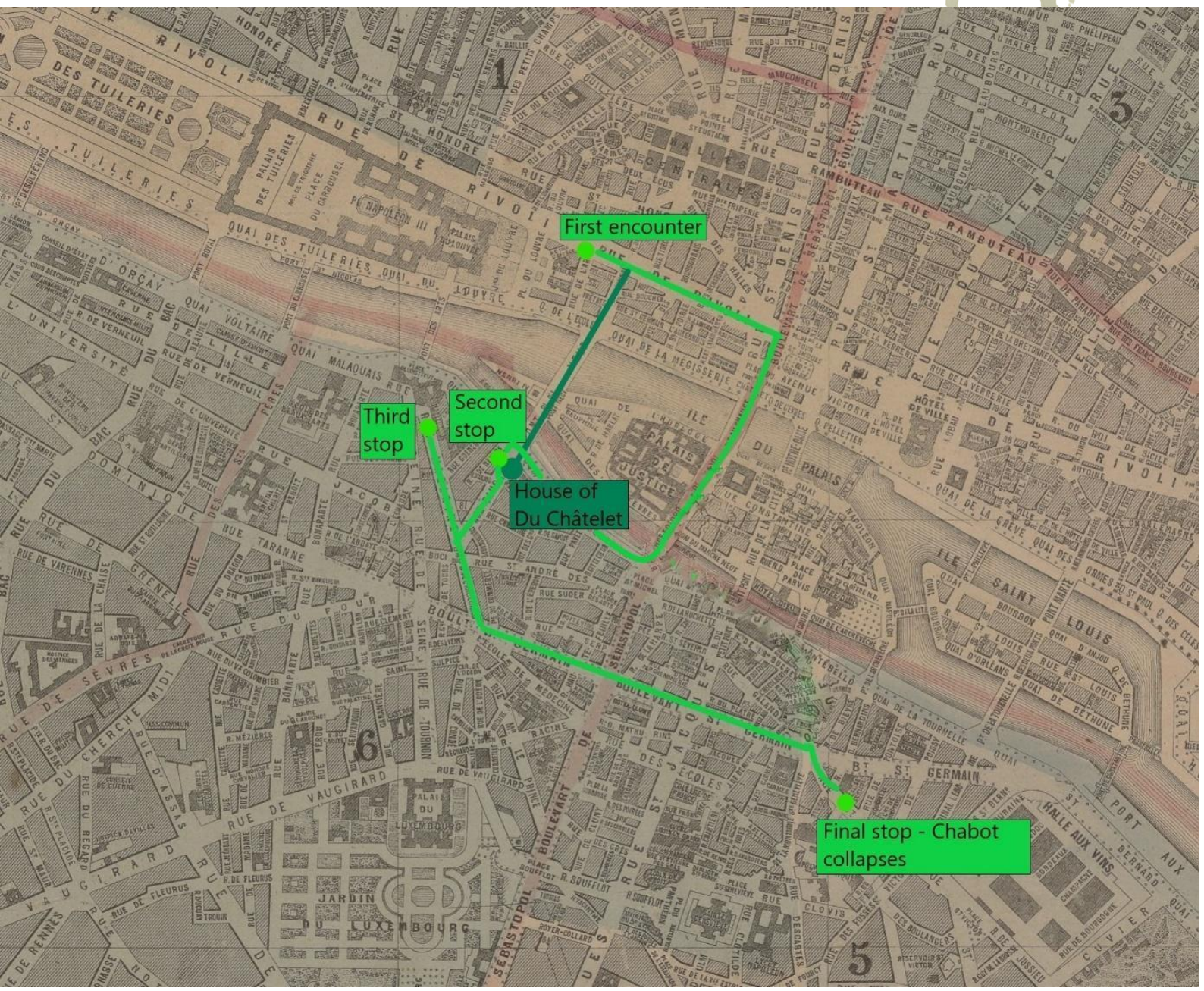


Image: the movements of Du Châtelet and Chabot on the day Lierre met them. Map from BnF

Later that evening, the poor Charles Chabot would feel the consequences of the evening, as he collapsed in a drinking establishment at the rue Saint-Victor, in the 5th arrondissement. Instead of seeing this as a warning, Du Châtelet changed nothing about his lifestyle. Du Châtelet was by no means an unknowing man, and he knew the consequences of his abuse of absinthe. However, he chose to continue, by means of dealing with the incurable pains he had suffered in Nancy. According to Lierre's interpretation: "he has voluntarily searched for death, and his drunkenness has been nothing more than a form of suicide."[69] This sad conclusion marks the

[69] Lierre (1867) 48. "il a volontairement cherché la mort, et que son ivrognerie n'a été qu'un mode de suicide."

end of an already miserable life of a talented writer – one of which we will encounter many more when exploring the question of absinthe in nineteenth-century Paris.

What becomes clear from Lierre's interpretation is, amongst other things, the social aspect of absinthe drinking. After the first glass, absinthe is mainly consumed in the company of others, whether they are old friends or new encounters. Even when Lierre starts to feel the effects of the absinthe, becoming increasingly drunk, his conversations, creative thoughts and company keep pushing for another glass, to the point where one loses count. Even Du Châtelet, being an experienced absinthe-drinker himself, rather spends the day drinking in the company of others. Compared to other cases of substance abuse, one could thus say that absinthe is a *social drug* in the first place. From the French army in Algeria to the men meeting each other in cabarets: absinthe is drunk together with others. In the next chapter on consumption and café culture, I will elaborate more on this social aspect of absinthe drinking.

The difference between one's first and sixth glass of absinthe. *Image : « Les Chinois de Paris » Le Charivari*, 1863 © METNY

From the three interpretations that are discussed in this section, it becomes clear that there are certain approaches to conduct the absinthe debate. Anselmier represents a rather conservative view, starting with the observation that there are more and more cases of *folie* and that France should deal with the problem of this way of absinthism. His diagnosis is clear and, albeit superficial, points towards observable symptoms. However, he leaves out the option that symptoms related to drinking absinthe – such as general 'folie' – might have other causes, such as rapid urbanization or the changing working conditions in an industrial society. While Anselmier mentions some numbers of hospitalization but mainly talks from experience and his title as a Parisian doctor, Moreau uses the authority of other famous doctors and researchers on the topic of absinthe. From this, he presents a more sound image of the effects of absinthe, which are in essence nothing different from other alcohols. This viewpoint seems to represent more the ideas of the scientific community at the time, but Moreau fails to contribute with that through his own experiments and observations. After all, his work is primarily a literature study of some (previous) arguments and studies within the absinthe-debate. Lastly, Lierre brings the aspect of consumer-experience to the table. According to him, absinthe in itself is not more dangerous than any other type of alcohol. It is the social setting and unfortunate events that make people particularly vulnerable for the *green fairy*. For Lierre, the answer to the question of absinthe is moderation, and should be left to the individual.

Of course, these three interpretations do not give a complete representation of the whole medical and scientific debate in the 1860s. They are, however, good illustrations of the public debate on the question of absinthe. With prices of respectively 50 centimes and 1 franc, the books were aimed at a wider audience.[70] This means that the debate on absinthe transcended the domain of hospitals and psychiatric institutes, and became a matter of popularized science and public interest. However, most of the claims were still made by people from within the medical-scientific domain of knowledge. Lierre offers a third perspective via focusing on the absinthe consumer, but still uses the authority of doctors and medical studies to substantiate his arguments.

After having discussed the early absinthe debate through popular scientific publications, it is now time to look at the geographical embedding of absinthe within the medical domain of

[70] Challand (1871) 82. Anselmier's *De l'empoisonnement par l'absinthe* could be purchased for 50 centimes (contemporary value : 2,25 euros) ; Moreau's *De la liqueur d'absinthe et de ses effets* cost 1 franc (contemporary value : 4,67 euros). Converted via the online currency converter of *Historicalstatistics.org*, edited by Rodney Edvinsson: https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html.

knowledge. To do so, the following section will discuss the Parisian hospitals as important places of knowledge. century?

II: La Salpêtrière and the Parisian hospitals

When walking from the Ile de la Cité towards the southeast of Paris, one encounters numerous of these research hospitals and former asylums. Often known as noble residences during the ancient regime, many of these former palaces in the surroundings of the city core were changed into hospital institutions for the rapidly growing city in the eighteenth century and onwards. L'Hopital Sainte-Anne, La Salpêtrière and Le Bicetre – all situated in the 13th and 14th Parisian arrondissement – exchanged their previous life as part of the nobility to their new function as centres for medical research and an asylum for its patients. Because of this, many of the Parisian hospitals did not only facilitate a lot of room for bringing in and treating patients, but also brought with them an image of glory, authority and grandeur. If we look, for example, at the Salpêtrière again, we can see that its history and image support this observation.

In a 1833 article, the Salpêtrière is described as "Sans contredit, le plus bel hospice qui soit en Europe."[71] Not only one of the prettiest hospitals in Europe, but also an important centre of medical development and treatment, both in terms of knowledge and raw numbers. With its immense buildings, courts and gardens, a headcount of the general population of the hospital complex was determined at the end of 1833 to be 5.148 people, consisting of the following categories: [72]

Healthy indigents	2831
Sick indigents	191
Indigents on leave	116
Incurable *folies*	923
Treated *folies*	117
Sick *folies*	105
Epileptics	231

[71] Source material can be viewed via https://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histmed/image?CISB0652.
[72] *Vue de la Salpétrière* (1883) Collection BIU Santé Médecine, Réf. image : CISB0652.

Sick epileptics	15
Blind people	70
Elderly people	184
Working staff (men, women and indigents)	338
Doctors, students and pharmacists	27

The majority of people at the Salpêtrière – around 60% – consisted of so-called *indigents*: the extremely poor and pauperized people that were admitted to the hospital instead of being left to their own devices on the streets of Paris. From this broad category, only a small fraction was considered sick. This means that besides being a hospital for sick people, the nineteenth-century Salpêtrière functioned as a shelter for impoverished paupers. Indigents could even start working in the hospital complex, as they are included in the working staff. This is an important observation for the character of the Salpêtrière, as the numbers show that the complex was as much a hospital as it was a shelter for impoverished people.

Then there are the *folies*: patients that were often suffering from psychiatric diseases or those who expressed (symptoms of) mental illnesses. Because knowledge around mental health and the human brain was very limited at the time and psychiatry only started to develop as a medical science in the later nineteenth century, there were not many treatment methods for these patients. As the numbers show, most of the *folies* were deemed incurable. The significant population of psychiatric patients formed a great source and inspiration for researching mental disorders, and gave birth to psychiatry as a medical-scientific discipline, as we will see later in this chapter.

Besides these categories, there were elderly people, blind people and patients that suffered from epilepsy – divided into sick and healthy epileptics. For the people working at the Salpêtrière, there was a working staff of more than three hundred people, while medical specialists made up a meagre 0,5% of the total population of the hospital complex. Twenty-seven doctors, pharmacists and medical students had to provide professional care for the enormous population of the Salpêtrière.

Under normal circumstances, the Salpêtrière hospitalized approximately 1.500 new patients a year. From this number, around 500 patients successfully left the hospital after their treatment, while more than 900 patients died in their time at the Salpêtrière.[73] With these shocking mortality rates, roughly 3 out of 5 patients died in the hospital, life at the Salpêtrière was constantly connected to death. Especially compared to modern standards – the UMC Utrecht, for example, hospitalized 28.402 patients in 2019, resulting in 551 deaths[74] – the patient's odds of surviving a nineteenth-century Parisian hospital were much less favourable. For this reason, the Salpêtrière complex had its own cemetery: an extensive terrain which was often jokingly called '*la sixième division*' by the patients.[75] Nonetheless, the Salpêtrière was one of the most important and prestigious hospital complexes at the time, and its appearance helped emphasize its relative superiority.

Image;https://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histoire/images/index.php?refphot=CISA0617

[73] Ibid.

[74] https://www.umcutrecht.nl/nl/sterftecijfers

[75] *Vue de la Salpêtrière* (1883) Collection BIU Santé Médecine, Réf. image : CISB0652

Originally a gunpowder factory – from which the complex got its name, derived from the ingredient 'saltpetre' – it was turned into a hospice for poor women, epileptics, mentally disabled women and prostitutes by Louis XIV. Despite belonging to the largest hospitals in the world, their methods of treatment remained rather old-fashioned. The main goal of hospitalizing patients was to keep them from the streets, contain the spread of diseases and protect the public from sick beggars. While progressive nineteenth-century medicine aimed to treat and diagnose patients more scientifically, their approaches were still imbued by speculative medicine and doubtful experiments. To learn more about the status of medicine during the nineteenth century, we must consider the methods and practices that were dominant within the Parisian hospitals and asylums. Before turning to the later experiments that were done in the context of absinthe – as will be done in section three – let us turn to the history of the modern hospital and medicine in the nineteenth century.

In academic literature, the nineteenth century is often seen as the birthdate of modern medicine, accompanied by previous scientific revolutions in chemistry and physics. Paris has a special place in these developments, as it became the early centre of modern medicine in Europe. The French Revolution and its aftermath played a crucial role in the establishment of new research hospitals: taken from the Church, who had used them to shelter the sick and poor, they were transformed into public hospitals including teaching rooms, lecture halls and laboratories.[76] In 1838, there was a new law enforced regarding the protection of hospital patients. According to this new law, every French department should provide an asylum or arrange a certain number of beds in an interdepartmental hospital. Signed by Louis-Phillipe, *le Roi Citoyen*, the public authorities oversaw the execution of this law and controlled the admission and administration of patients.[77] There were two forms of admission: either voluntary placement (sometimes at the request of one's family) or placement by the Prefecture de police, in case of danger to the public. Many of the severe cases – the very poor, homeless or abandoned – were brought in via this second way.

The Prefecture de police was located in the heart of Paris' centre, on the Île de la Cité. From there, those who were brought in were transferred to the asylums in the outer parts of the city, like Bîcetre, Salpêtrière or Sainte-Anne. This law of 1838 played an important role in the rise of asylums all over France. Paris, being the capital and biggest city of France, created multiple

[76] Porter (1999) 306.
[77] Pélicier (1971) 75.

Figure (this and previous page): the Prefecture de Police (1850-1854) before the big rebuilding of 1871[78]

of these asylums during the nineteenth century. From the 1850s, when Morel published his thesis of dégénérescence, the amount of hospitalized people rose even more. From that moment, cases like alcoholism, 'idiotism' or other mental diseases were seen as signifiers of the degeneration of French culture.[79] But besides the growth in asylums, there were other changes in the Parisian public health system.

Social developments like industrialism and growing urbanism caused a continuous influx of residents, which made for a huge body of potential patients to be dealt with in the Parisian hospitals. Besides, medicine in the city was completely different from rural medicine, as it was widely believed that the poorer rural population was healthier than the urban population.[80] For a countryside doctor, it sufficed to have general medical insights and knowledge of the more frequent acute conditions. However, for specialized medicine, patients had to visit the doctors that were working in the city, preferably those in the French capital. This contributed to the role of Paris as a centre for medicine, both in terms of quantity – the amount of medical institutions, doctors and hospitalized patients – and quality – with the most ambitious physicians and a growing field of medical specializations.

Since the French Revolution, Paris had seen a wave of progressive and reactionary management, both in politics and science. In line with the ideals of the Revolution, it was thought that people should learn from medicine and treat patients as research material. Soon, a group of prominent physicians controlled the Parisian hospitals, lecturing up to five thousand students at the same time in their exhibition halls.[81] The strength of their new approach to medicine was the hands-on experience that was offered to students. Instead of studying books and theories, which was the traditional way of doing medicine, Parisian medicine continuously experimented and practiced on deceased human bodies and cadavers. Nowhere in the world could students get so many chances of experiencing dissections and medical procedures than in Paris, where they had – "apart from the wine [and] women" – a free run of the public hospitals.[82] Naturally, this attracted a great number of potential researchers and doctors in the making, including international students from Vienna, London and the United States' East Coast. When

[79] Morel's theory of dégénérescence will be explained further in a later section (see page 42).
[80] Manuel (2004) 11.
[81] Porter (1999) 306.
[82] Ibid., 314-315.

these students returned to their homeplaces, they spread the methods of Parisian medicine to other parts of the Western world.

Paris thus became a hub for medical professionals and students from all over Europe and the American East Coast. In Diana Manuel's *Walking the Paris Hospitals*, this dynamic is described on the basis of a diary from a medical student from Edinburgh. The diarist, who remains anonymous, described his experience during an academic year in Paris from 1834 to 1835. During his time abroad, he first lived at Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, in the third arrondissement (north of the Seine) and later in Rue N. St. Étienne, near the Panthéon.[83] At the time, these neighbourhoods were more suitable for students to find affordable housing. It must be noted that the experiences of this student took place *before* the Hausmann-transformation, when huge parts of Paris were changed, renovated and upgraded.

Paris' *Quartier Latin* in the fifth and sixth arrondissement is historically known as the student quarter. In the 1830s, when Paris was the centre of European medicine, the Latin Quarter housed much of the institutions allied to medicine, like "medical booksellers, instrument and equipment makers and suppliers, medical artists and wax educational model makers as well as those who prepared natural and artificial human skeletons."[84] Many European students used this opportunity to purchase medical equipment and enrich their book collection. The prices in Paris were lower, while the offer was much more extensive than in other cities. Some physicians even travelled to Paris or London to exclusively shop for medical equipment and tools.[85] This market did not only draw many continental buyers to Paris, but also many American students – especially those from Louisiana and New Orleans, who had an advantage over other international students due to their knowledge of French language.[86]

The relation between Paris and other European cities was interesting. In the late eighteenth century, Edinburgh was considered the capital of medicine. Following the Scottish Enlightenment, many students from all over the world travelled to Scotland to learn and understand this more empirical approach to medicine. However, from the 1830s onwards, many North American students favoured Paris over Edinburgh as their medical study abroad. Interestingly, Manuel's diarist has a similar background. Having obtained his primary education

[83] Manuel (2004) 6.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 6-7.
[86] Manuel (2004) 7.

in Edinburg, he travels to Paris to learn the tricks of the trade and really understand the practice and profession of medicine. In this specific case, "By continuing and completing his studies in Paris, which had taken over the mantle of excellence from Edinburgh, the diarist could be said to have had the best of both worlds."[87]

There were no cities who could compete with Paris in terms of available teaching hospitals. This was primarily achieved in the wake of the Revolution, when institutions previously owned by the church, such as hospitals, were transferred to the state.[88] This development was crucial in facilitating (foreign) students with practical experience in performing medicine: there was no place in the world where medical students had a bigger chance of working with actual patients than in the French capital.[89] Besides, many of the medical clinics offered free attendance to foreigners, making its education even more popular.[90]

Typically, the Parisian educational model consisted of three components. First, there was the visiting of the hospital, where a group of students was guided by the chief surgeon or physician through the different departments.[91] The group stopped by each patient, checked the ward notes and made some comments on the patient's condition or progress, before continuing to the next patient. For the second part of the clinic, the group turned to the lecture hall. Here, the doctor usually gave an informal lecture on the observed cases and discussed the patient's possible diagnosis and prognosis.[92] In the final part of the clinic, there was the possibility for an autopsy. These autopsies could only be carried out on unclaimed bodies (usually the really poor) and were never done by students, but solely by doctors or their assistants.[93] After the autopsy, some final comments were made on the patient's disease and cause of death, before turning to the next patient.

While the practical knowledge gained by these experiences was extremely useful, the drier lecturing part of the educational model remained popular. Students could choose which lectures to attend and which doctors to keep a close eye on during their studies. For example, there was the "handsome, rich and self-assured" surgeon Guillame Dupuytren, who was very popular

[87] Ibid., 37.
[88] Porter (1999) 306.
[89] Manuel (2004) 15.
[90] Ibid., 16.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 17.
[93] Ibid.

amongst students.[94] He was professor of operative surgery at the Faculté de Médecine, chief surgeon at the Hôtel Dieu, a member of the Académie de Médecine and a "great surgical showman."[95] For popular lectures like those of Dupuytren, students had to reserve a spot by attending the preceding lecture – sometimes of a much less interesting calibre – to obtain a good spot in the lecture hall.[96] At the same time, medical titles became more prestigious. After many medical specializations, one could no longer speak of general 'doctors', but rather of surgeons, nurses, professors and physicians. This is illustrated by the diarist, who complains that the general public is unable to identify the difference between different types of 'dentists'. While this process of specialization had been going on for a while – already in the eighteenth century it was considered inappropriate to "place an equal footing with the Surgeon-Dentist, the Tooth-drawing Barber and the itinerant Mountebank"[97] – the specialization of medicine really began in the nineteenth century. Especially in the time of the diarist's study abroad in Paris, during the mid-1830s, Paris was by all means the centre of medical development and education.

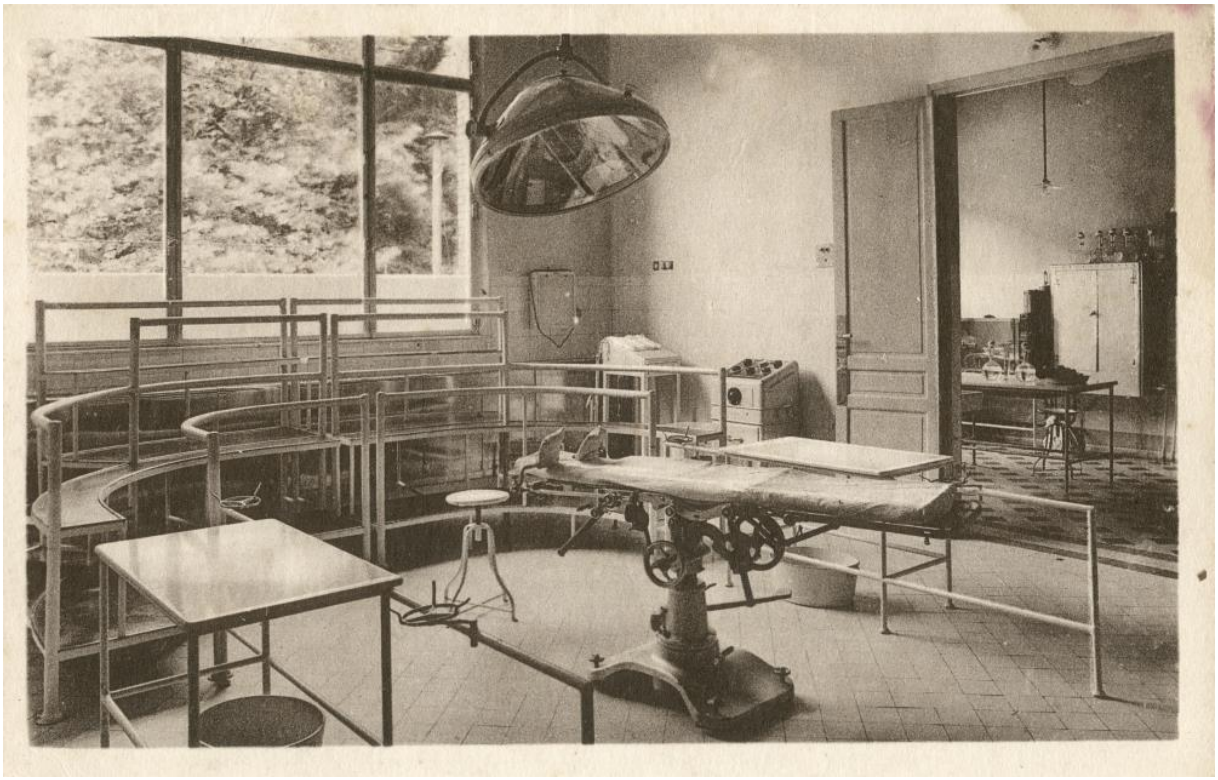


Figure 6: Image: Salle d'opérations du Dr Gosset, Surgical clinic at the Salpêtrière (20th century)[98]

[94] Manuel (2004) 22.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 23.
[97] Ibid., 36 ; originally from Thomas Berdmore, *A treatise on the disordes and deformities of the teeth and gums* (London 1768) 5.
[98] Collection BIU Santé Médecine https://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histmed/image?CISA1021.

However, in the later nineteenth century, the connection between Parisian medicine and its hospitals became problematic. While European countries like Britain and Germany were doing promising experimental research in the medical faculties of their universities, France was stuck with and limited to its public hospitals. Moreover, as a strongly centralized culture – a result of the Revolution – Paris was the one and only undisputed centre of medical activity in France, which discouraged new initiatives.[99] For many upcoming doctors, it was hard to penetrate the ceiling that first generation Parisian physicians had built for themselves.

A counterexample of this strong hospital culture is found in the persona of Claude Bernard. While he lacked a tenure in any medical institution, Bernard conducted many insightful experiments and enjoyed chairs at the Sorbonne, the Museum of National History, the Académie française and a seat in the Senate.[100] The basis for his research was experimental: through dissecting and experimenting with animals, he contributed to early endocrinology, haematology and drug research. According to Bernard, the conventional way of Parisian 'hospital medicine' had two limitations: being an observational (passive) scientist and having to deal with a diverse body of sick patients.[101] Both factors problematize the research practice of medicine, as there are too many variables to make solid scientific observations. In order to conduct scientific research, medicine should be studied in regulated laboratory environments.

A good friend of Bernard was Bénédict Morel, another very influential figure in nineteenth century medicine. In fact, Morel and Bernard were such good friends that, according to secondary literature, they even shared each other's clothing.[102] Morel was born in Vienna and studied at the Salpêtrière, where he became secretary and translated studies into English and German.[103] After a brief time back in Vienna, Morel returned to Paris in 1845. However, his situation was unsure, as he had not been successful in obtaining any medical post in any of the Parisian institutions. Luckily, a good friend of his, Phillipe Buchez, could help him out. After the Revolution of 1848, Buchez became president of the National Assembly, and therefore obtained much political power. It was through his patronage that Morel received a medical post at Maréville, near Nancy, in 1848.[104] This is where his journey as a true doctor started. However,

[99] Porter (1999) 337.
[100] Ibid., 338.
[101] Ibid., 339.
[102] Pélicier (1971) 87.
[103] Pick (1989) 45.
[104] Ibid., 49.

disputes over methods of treatment and personal rivalries with the new director at Maréville eventually guided him somewhere else. In 1856, Morel transferred to Saint-Yon, near Rouen, where he would work until his death in 1873.[105]

Morel's theory of dégénérescence can be traced back to his writings on cretinism in the 1850s. Morel was convinced that cretinism as a disease could not really be treated or cured. Interestingly, as a consequence, Morel was a supporter of 'ancien' methods of hospitalization, contrary to other developments in nineteenth century medicine: "Morel advocated the efficacy of establishing 'retreats' in the mountains for the worst cases of cretinism and other hopeless conditions, as a means of safeguarding society against the harmful moral and physical effects of social and sexual intercourse."[106] While this may sound old fashioned, Morel's theory of dégénérescence was, to a certain degree, inspired by the revolutionary Darwinian ideas of evolution and adaptation. According to Morel, mental degradation was a hereditary condition, which could be observed in the differences between generations. '*Dégénérescence'* was a broad term, referring mostly to deviations from the 'normal type' of human behaviour.[107]

Crucial is the fact that dégénérescence does not only influence the individual person's behaviour, but has consequences to the whole society. In the time of Morel's thesis, during the 1850s, France was by no means a uniform nation-state: it was a diverse country, both linguistically and culturally.[108] These differences fed the idea of a 'cultural crisis' in the French nation, which came to a climax after the lost Franco-Prussian War in 1871. In general, signifiers of this cultural crisis were found in alcoholism, crime, insanity and prostitution.[109] All of these signifiers are to a greater or lesser extent connected to alcohol, as it was one of the bigger societal issues at the time. Absinthe, a drink coming out of nowhere to become France's most popular spirit during the mid-nineteenth century, was frequently linked to this idea of crisis. While absinthe's popularity grew, the feeling of decay and degeneration of the French nation grew accordingly, to the point where absinthe was explicitly seen as one of the great contributors to dégénérescence.[110] Their relationship often remained implicit, but there is evidence for strong associations between absinthe and degeneration during the nineteenth

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 48.
[107] Morel (1976) 5.
[108] Pick (1989) 50.
[109] Ibid., 43.
[110] Adams (2004) 188.

century. For example, in his later studies, Magnan "connect[ed] absinthe with the degeneration not of an individual but the entire race."[111] Absinthe was no longer a particular alcohol amongst other substances, but became one of the signifiers of the degeneration of the French race.

In Morel's thesis, degeneration was a medical condition – an observable disease – that could be investigated and diagnosed. This inspired scientists like Magnan to research its symptoms (e.g. alcoholism) to learn more about the decline of the French race. More generally, the influence and popularity of Morel's theory of dégénérescence stimulated the area of mental research, insofar that psychiatry became one of the most promising fields in Parisian medicine. In his active years as a doctor, Morel often attended meetings of the *Medico-Psychological Society* in Paris, a network that was established in 1852.[112] But despite developing his influential thesis on dégénérescence from the 1850s onwards, he never obtained a rockstar-like image like other doctors at the time who were active in the French capital. A fitting example of this is Jean-Martin Charcot, whose *Leçons du Mardi* at the Salpêtrière became a popular weekly event. While his Tuesday lectures were attended by a crowd of medical colleagues and students, Charcot also organised banquets for politicians, artists, scientists, and princes.[113] This illustrates the cultural prominence of psychiatry in the late-nineteenth century.

Psychiatry in the nineteenth century was a new and exciting field. Already in the early nineteenth century, doctors began to distinguish different types of psychiatric conditions. Instead of overall and undefined '*folie*', diagnoses included mania with spontaneous delirium, mania accompanied by violence, melancholia ("délire sur un seul objet"), dementia and the remaining, less specific labels of idiotism and retardedness.[114] As one of the first specializations in medical practice, this new approach of treating and diagnosing patients was promising and extremely popular in European scientific circles, and Paris was the centre of psychiatry at the time. Many of the great nineteenth century psychiatrists like Morel, Charcot, Magnan, Gilles De la Tourette and even Freud were connected to the Parisian institutes. The focus of these psychiatrists was often on case descriptions, with methods like analysing family trees, (medical) history and with special attention to the circumstances of a patient. An example of this is the table below, where Albert Londe, Paul Richer, Georges Gilles De La Tourette, under the

[111] Ibid., 183.
[112] Pick, (1989) 60.
[113] Ibid., 99-100.
[114] Pélicier (1971) 74.

direction of Jean Martin Charcot, made the following genealogical analysis of a patient named Pauline.

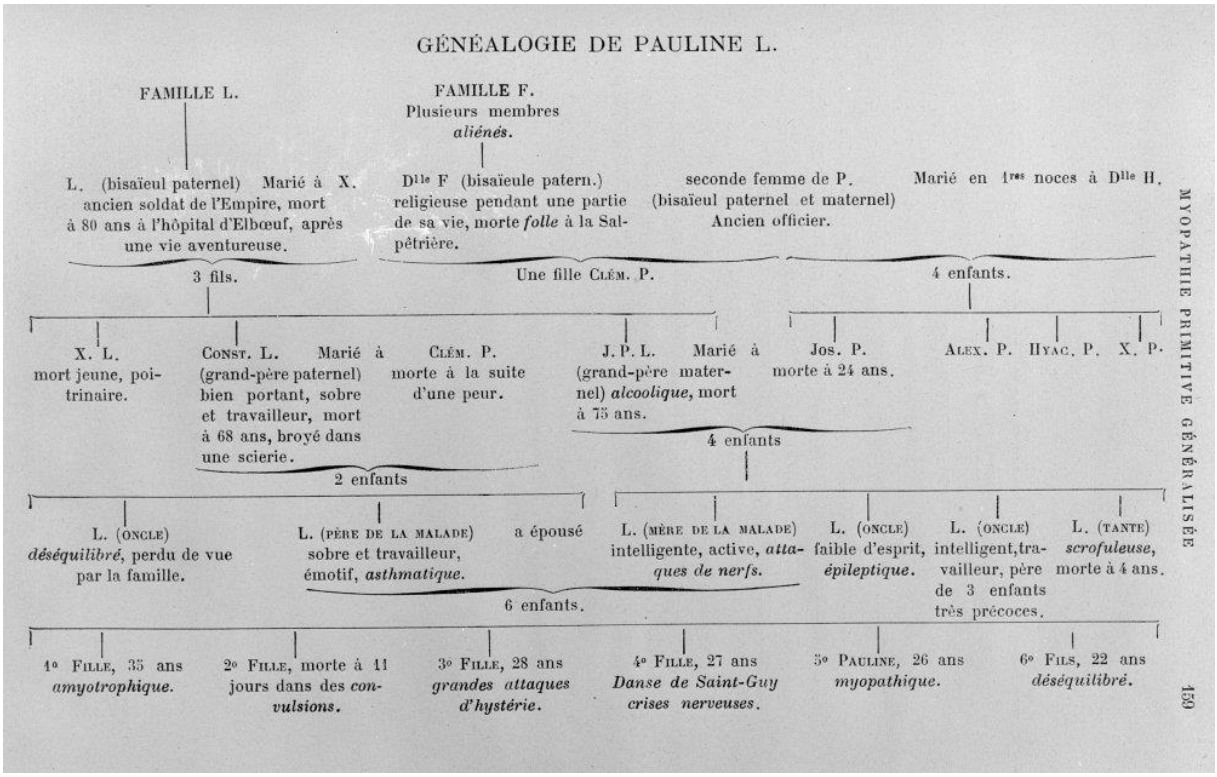


Image: a genealogical analysis of the family history of a neurological patient at the Salpêtrière (1894) [115]

These new developments were different from traditional medical treatment and made way for the evolution of the contemporary medical field of psychiatry. In the case of absinthe, where does this leave us? It is the 1870s, and Paris has become the centre of European psychiatric research. Many of the first-generation psychiatrists had become famous celebrities whose lectures were visited from all over Europe. In the following section, let us focus on one of them in particular. The following case study will discuss the experiments and observations done by Valentin Magnan while researching the effects of that seemingly poisonous spirit – absinthe.

[115] Accessed via https://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histmed/image?09468.

III: The Laboratories of Valentin Magnan and Théodore Challand: experimenting with animals, alcohol and absinthe around 1870

When researching the scientific history of the absinthe debate, one quickly encounters the name of Valentin Magnan.[116] As an influential doctor and psychiatrist, he was an authority in the fields of substance abuse and psychoses. Having done much research on the effects of alcohol – e.g. on *delirium tremens* – Magnan concluded that absinthe in particular was a treat to French public health. Contrary to 'regular' alcohols, absinthe caused additional effects, like a particular type of epileptic seizures.

In the following case study, I will discuss two scientific studies from 1871. Compared to the popular arguments made by Anselmier, Moreau and Lierre in the 1860s, the laboratory studies will tell more about the scientific experiments that were done to produce knowledge about absinthe. In terms of knowledge circulation, this means that experimentation and observations are well-documented and more transparent for other researchers and readers. Besides deepening our understanding of the nineteenth-century absinthe debate, this case study will shine light on the laboratory practices that were done during the 1870s in conducting experimental research.

The first study, done by Magnan in the hospital Sainte-Anne – where he was working as a doctor – aimed to investigate the link between alcohol, absinthe and *épilepsie absinthique* (a special form of epilepsy, explicitly caused by absinthe consumption).[117] Compared to the Salpêtrière, Saint-Anne was a smaller hospital, and was more specific in terms of its patients. While the Salpêtrière treated all kinds of unfortunate souls, the Saint-Anne was focused on psychiatric disorders and addiction. It is for this reason that people often refer to Saint-Anne as an *asylum* instead of a hospital.

[116] Adams, 181 ; Luauté, J. P. (2007). *L'absinthisme; la faute du docteur Magnan,* Pick, Daniel (1989) *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848 – c. 1918,* 99.

[117] Magnan (1871) *Étude expérimentale et clinique sur l'alcoolisme : alcool et absinthe, épilepsie absinthique.* Paris : Typographie de Renou et Maulde, 144 Rue de Rivoli.

Image: the hospital Sainte-Anne, located in the 14th arrondissement (1869) [118]

As Magnan states in his studies, people have long thought (and many still think) that spirits, wines, eaux-de-vies, liquors, ciders and beers act on the human organism via alcohol, and with regards to their alcohol amount only.[119] However, many of a drink's consequences have to do with the composition of ingredients, especially those that are added to the drink. In the case of absinthe, there are quite a number of additional ingredients other than alcohol and absinthe: anise, garden angelica, calamus, oregano, lemon balm (melisse), fennel and mint are all included in some of the recipes.[120] With absinthe's distinct qualities in comparison with other alcoholic spirits, these added ingredients seem to be the source of some complications of absinthe consumption. A good friend of Magnan, Auguste Motet, had coined the term 'absinthism' in 1859 and had argued for absinthe's distinctive qualities in comparison with alcohol.[121] Interestingly, Motet's thesis is highly criticised by other doctors in the Parisian

[118] https://bibliotheques-specialisees.paris.fr/ark:/73873/pf0000608644

[119] "Pendant longtemps on a pensé, et l'on croit encore généralement aujourd'hui, que les boissons spiritueuses vins, eaux-de-vie, liqueurs, cidres, bières, agissent sur l'organisme par l'alcool qu'elles renferment et proportionnellement à sa quantité ». (Magnan, 7)

[120] Magnan (1871) 8.

[121] Luauté (2007) 518.

medical circles, claiming that Motet unjustifiably places absinthe in a different category than other alcohols. However, since Motet and Magnan were both member of the prestigious *Académie de Médicine*, their work was generally met with praise and approval. Motet personally lauded Magnan during the latter's jubilee in 1908, where over 200 students and friends paid tribute to the Parisian psychiatrist.[122] Their social connection seems to have been leading in Magnan's believe in his friend's studies. To confirm Motet's thesis of absinthism, Magnan set up the following experiment.

Although Magnan published his studies in 1871, the process of these experiments has been going on for a longer period. Before conducting the actual experiment, Magnan was given the opportunity to run a trial at the Bicêtre in 1864 with the help of an intern named Belin, in order to research the influence of alcohol on the human body.[123] At this laboratory, different experiments were carried out by injecting laboratory animals with certain doses of alcohol concentration. After having seen the results of these types of experiments, Magnan decided to set up his own experiment at Sainte-Anne, where he focused on one particular type of alcohol: absinthe. For both of the dominant ingredients in absinthe – alcohol and absinthe-extract, as well as a combination of the two (which should represent the consumption of absinthe) – a certain dose was injected into a laboratory animal. "The brain and marrow are regularly injected; the grey substance, either in the cortical layer or in the central area, takes on a more or less dark pink colour, and, in some circumstances, resembles a meat-like colour of ham."[124] After the injections, Magnan and his assistant Chatenier – who was a pharmacy intern at Sainte-Anne – recorded the respective amounts of alcohol that were present in the brain and marrow, in the liver, in the blood and (in smaller quantities) in the lungs and kidneys.[125] The procedure was repeated in some experiments with humans, wherein similar results were achieved. This means that the relationship between humans and the animals in the laboratory was established; and that the experiment could continue.

[122] *La Revue philanthropique* (Paris) 1916-11-15 by Strauss, Paul (1852-1942). Éditeur scientifique, p. 542.
[123] « Pour notre part, en 1864, nous avons eu, a Bicetre, l'occaston de répéter ces analyses avec le concours de M. Belin, interne en pharmacie. » Magnan (1871) 15.
[124] Translated by author: " Le cerveau et la moelle sont généralement injectés; la substance grise, soit de la couche corticale, soit des centres, prend une coloration rosée plus ou moins foncée, et, dans quelques circonstances, une teinte chair de jambon assez remarquable. » Magnan (1871) 16.
[125] Magnan (1871) 15.

Image: Magnan (the man in the middle) during his time as a doctor at Sainte-Anne © Académie nationale de médecine [126]

After creating some first result and test cases, it was time for the following experiment. This time, animals were given an injection of pure alcohol, starting with a low dose but growing increasingly. In one specific experiment that was carried out on four laboratory dogs, the results were as follows. The first dog, which was subject to a prolonged alcohol poisoning, died of hypothermia. However, its direct cause of death seems to have been different than a mere alcohol poisoning: the dog was laying for hours on a freezing tile beneath an open window, with an outside temperature of around 10 degrees.[127] While the dog was freezing to death on the ground, albeit immobilized by alcohol intoxication, his death was caused by external factors. By contemporary standards, such a complication undermines the overall experiment. The incapability of realizing a consistent testing environment makes the experiment results much less valuable. After all, the dog's death cannot solely be ascribed to its alcohol intoxication, but

[126] https://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histmed/image?anmpx39x0110b
[127] Magnan (1871) 22.

might have been a result of multiple factors. Interestingly, this was not a problem for Magnan and his colleagues. The complication of hypothermia did not problematize the experiment, since drunkards often died due to external factors like these : "C'est ainsi, vous le savez, que finissent certains ivrognes."[128] For Magnan, the value of this observation was that alcohol intoxication, apparently, made it impossible for the dog to fight the outside colds causing its hypothermia.

Dogs spending the nights on ice-cold tiles in the laboratory was not uncommon in Magnan's experiments. Another dog, after having collapsed from various alcohol injections, had spent an entire night on a cold, humid floor without changing position. The day after, the dog was found with a fever and respiratory problems; and two days later, the dog died of bronchopneumonia.[129] Again, Magnan does not put into question his experimental methods or the actual cause of death: "Is it necessary to recall the gravity and frequency of lung diseases by alcoholics?"[130] Instead of sound scientific evidence for a substance's effects, these experiments show that the aim was to find correlation rather than causation. Moreover, "the mere enumeration of these accidents is sufficient to show new analogies between alcoholism in dogs and in humans."[131] For Magnan, his experiments were successful insofar they corresponded with and resembled the cases of human victims.

Besides hypothermia, there were more similarities between victims of alcoholism and the dogs who were injected with high doses of alcohol. One of the test dogs started hallucinating and escaped the experiment room through a door that was left open. He was found barking heavily at the staircase, and 'talking' to the hospital walls of the Sainte-Anne.[132] Magnan interprets this again, unsurprisingly, as typical behaviour for heavy absinthe consumers. The dog barking at the stairs should resemble the nonsensical observations of an avid absinthe drinker. Instead of analysing the behaviour of the dog in terms of laboratory environments, the behaviour of test animals and the factor of immense stress and confusion, its behaviour is unmistakably interpreted as a hallucination, similar to those sometimes occurring by absinthe drinkers.

[128] Magnan (1871) 22.
[129] Ibid.
[130] "Est-il nécessaire de rappeler la gravité et la fréquences des affections pulmonaires chez l'homme alcoolique?" Magnan (1871) 22.
[131] « La simple énumération de ces accidents est suffisante pour montrer de nouvelles analogies entre l'alcoolisme du chien et de l'homme » Magnan (1871) 23.
[132] Ibid., 22.

A third dog died, very unfortunately, of suffocating in his own vomit. According to Magnan, remains of the dog's food were found in the bottom of its throat.[133] Lacking the power to throw it out, due to a severe state of alcohol intoxication, the dog was no longer able to breathe and eventually suffocated. The final dog who was put on an alcoholic diet, found its problem in a loss of appetite. After three months of losing weight, the dog was emaciated to a dead end, and its death followed not long after.[134] What this teaches us, besides the extreme cruelties that laboratory animals had to undergo, is the following. In many of these medical experiments, the focus was on finding similarities with real-life events and human behaviour. The effects and dangers of a particular substance were measured not in scientifically determined quantities, but rather in illustrations of potential outcomes. To argue for the negative consequences of alcohol abuse, doctors presented a wide scale and variety of possible diseases and outcomes – ranging from suffocation to dogs dying of hypothermia – without giving much information on, for example, the actual dose that was given to a laboratory dog.

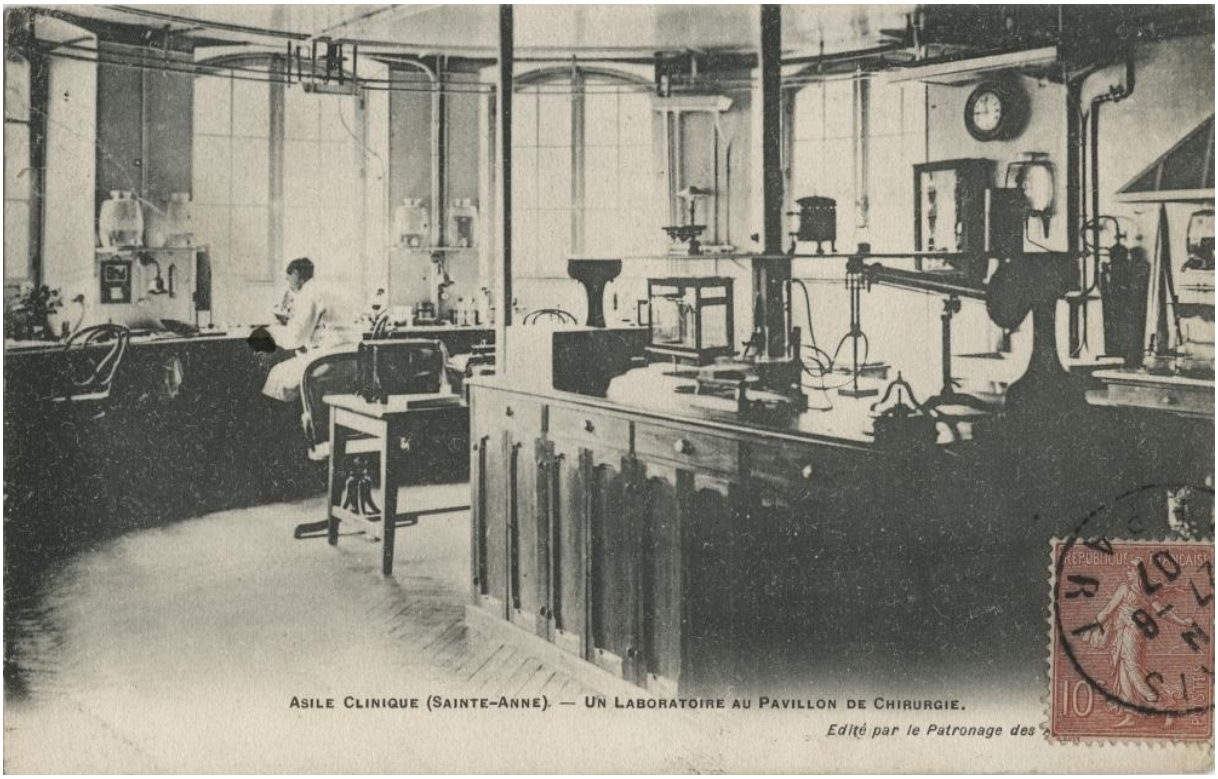


Image: Laboratory in the surgical wing of the Sainte-Anne asylum (20th century)[135]

[133] Magnan (1871) 22.
[134] Ibid.
[135] https://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histmed/image?CISA0997

The previous experiment on laboratory dogs was particularly conducted to research the consequences of alcohol abuse in general. Absinthe, however, was another story. Many doctors, like Anselmier, had already claimed that absinthe was much more dangerous than other types of alcohol.[136] For this reason, Magnan continued his experimentations on substance abuse, this time not on alcohol *in general*, but on that *one, specific* evil: absinthe.

From this point on in the study, the information on the doses and substances that are injected become more explicit. The central hypothesis of Magnan's study is that absinthe consumption produces a type of epilepsy that can be distinguished from similar diseases and the effects of other alcohols.[137] This means that the test results with absinthe should differ from that of pure alcohol. To investigate this hypothesis, Magnan experiments with different types of regular absinthe, absinthe with varying degrees of alcohol content, pure absinthe essence (absinthe in concentrated form) and other botanicals that often occur as an ingredient in absinthe. He starts with an experiment on pure substance injections. This means that the effects of alcohol intoxication, in this case, are left out of the equation. Magnan tries distillates of anis, fennel, melisse and mint, all in 'doses énormes' from 15 to 20 grams, which are injected directly into the stomach of a 'medium-sized' dog.[138] In general, the dog's breathing and pulse accelerate after the injection, but besides that, the dog's behaviour does not change much. In comparison to previous experiments with alcohol injections, the dogs do not lose appetite or feel very uncomfortable. Importantly, in contrast to Magnan's original hypothesis, not a single case expresses symptoms of epileptic activity, which was associated strongly with absinthe consumption. Magnan recalls an experiment he conducted with his friend and colleague, doctor Jolyet, who was *préparateur* at the Sorbonne.[139] The test was carried out on a young dog that weighed 6 kilogrammes. First, it was injected with a dose of pure absinthe essence of 5 centigrams. After some first results, a second dose of 12 centigrams was injected into the young dog. The animal experienced some convulsions, but not epileptic and only in the face.[140] 20 minutes after the injection, the young dog eventually died. The conclusion that follows from these experiments, is that the pure essences found in absinthe do not affirm the expected symptoms of epilepsy that are seen in absinthism.

[136] See page 21 of this thesis.
[137] Magnan (1871) 7, 36.
[138] Ibid., 24.
[139] Ibid., 27.
[140] Ibid., 28.

After testing doses of alcohol and doses of pure essence on laboratory dogs, it is now time to combine both substances into a single experiment. With another two laboratory dogs, Magnan carries out the following experiment. The first dog takes in 60 grams of alcohol, together with 4 grams of wormwood essence. At first, only the effects of alcohol intoxication are visible, as the animal is physically numbed. Later, some convulsions are visible, but it is difficult to distinguish the effects of alcohol from those of wormwood essence. The second dog, however, provides us with a clearer picture. After taking in 70 grams of alcohol, the dog enters a state of *résolution complète*.[141] While laying on its side, Magnan is able to inject "quelques centigrammes" of wormwood directly into the dog's veins.[142] Surprisingly, the effects of this absinthe injection are seen much faster than the case of the first dog. After a few minutes, the dog starts making convulsions, and eventually experiences an epileptic seizure.[143] After the seizure, the dog returns to its state of complete resolution, still being numbed by alcohol intoxication. The explanation for these different results are found in intake; while the first dog's intake was compromised and slowed down by the absorption of alcohol in the stomach, the second dog's effects were amplified by injecting the absinthe essence directly into its veins. Thus, the existence of alcohol in the stomach influences the effects of absinthe on the body, both in slowing down its emergence and in masking its effects. To a certain extent, absinthe mixed with alcohol has a similar effect on the body than absinthe in pure form, only with some delay and less intensive convulsions.[144] Besides numbing the mind and body in general, alcohol thus seems to also numb the effects of absinthe on the body.

The last part of Magnan's study is devoted to the effects of absinthe on actual humans. The so-called *folie alcoolique aiguë*, or delirium tremens, plays a central role in this section. This condition occurred only in the very heavy drinkers, and was characterized by both intellectual symptoms – hallucinations and emotional moments of great astonishment or fear – and physical symptoms – like buzzed hearing, blurry vision and overall hyperesthesia.[145] What is missing from these claims, however, is substantial evidence. Magnan uses his experience and observations as a practicing doctor at the Sainte-Anne to argue for the symptoms that often

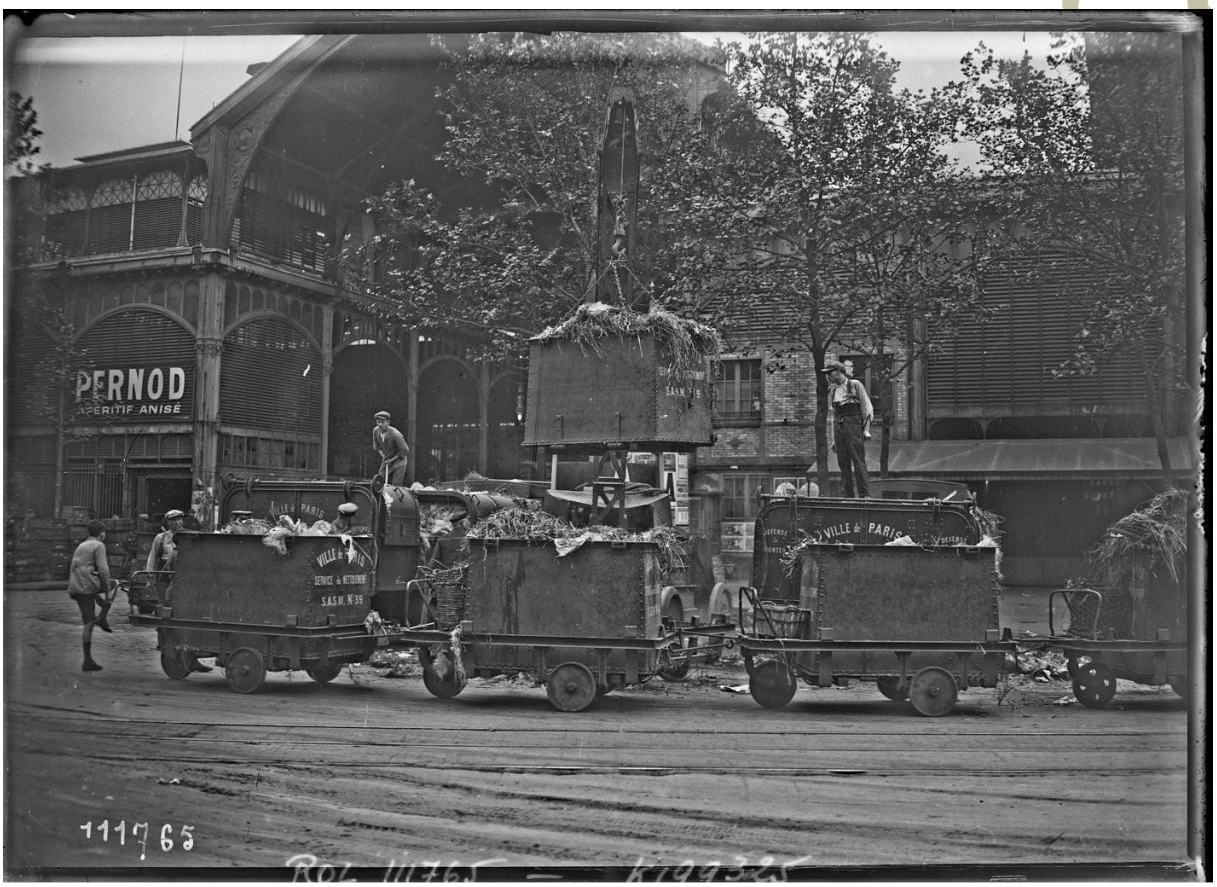
[141] Magnan (1871) 29.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., 32, 34-35.

occur in absinthe victims. According to him, the obtained results from his experiments on laboratory dogs provide enough evidence to make the following claim:

> Alcohol in the human, similar to alcohol in animals, is incapable on its own to evoke epilepsy. It contributes to trembling, and sometimes even to minor convulsions, but that is all. If, on the other hand, epileptic seizures arise, there is usually another substance involved – which turns out to be, in many cases, absinthe. Epilepsy is thus, I repeat, a superimposed phenomenon that cannot be considered a manifestation of alcohol poisoning.[146]

Being one of the leading psychiatrists in mid-nineteenth century Europe, Magnan held onto his hypothesis of the *épilepsie absinthique* that he discovered and first diagnosed. Magnan describes two recent cases as an illustration of this medical condition. The first is a recently hospitalized 41-year old male, who was a carrier at Les Halles, the greatest market in the centre of Paris. The man was known for his extensive consumption of wine and eau-de-vie, and had recently discovered absinthe. As a result of his absinthe consumption, he experienced some trembling and an occasional hallucination. One day, he was having an epileptic seizure in the middle of Les Halles and collapsed on the ground. While he was laying there, unconscious, his arms and legs were having heavy convulsions. The man was hospitalized and brought to the *bureau d'examen* for a physical inspection. What is most particular to this case, as Magnan states, is that although there was some trembling in the body – nothing more than with other 'regular' alcohol poisonings – there were almost no traces or evidence for the epileptic seizure.[147] The epileptic attack seems to have been a superimposed phenomenon, which occurred at the same time and on top of the already devastating effects of alcohol poisoning. Interestingly, it acts as a separate symptom, with its own effects and direct consequences.

[146] Translated by author. "L'alcool chez l'homme comme chez les animaux est incapable à lui tout seul de provoquer l'épilepsie, il donne lieu à du tremblement, quelquefois même à des petites convulsions cloniques, irrégulières, mais c'est tout. Quand, d'autre part, les attaques épileptiques surviennent, vous ne manquez pas de trouver un agent différent de l'alcool qui les a provoquées, et cet agent est habituellement l'absinthe. L'épilepsie est donc, je le répète, un phénomène surajouté qui ne peut pas être considéré comme la manifestation la plus élevée de l'alcoolisme aigu." Magnan (1871) 36.
[147] Magnan (1871) 37.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Image: carriers working to clean the market stalls after a busy day at Les Halles. On the left, the marketing letters of Pernod are visible, France's biggest producer of absinthe during the nineteenth century (31-07-1926).

The second case that is described by Magnan is that of a certain Louis: a thirty-two year old man who entered the Bîcetre on the 31th of October in 1863.[148] Louis had enjoyed excellent health and had been sober until two years before his hospitalization. In 1861, he became a wine merchant and started the habit of drinking – starting with wine and eau-de-vie, and later absinthe. In the course of 1863, Louis started drinking more and more absinthe, resulting in frequent dizziness and occasional trembling. Things got worse, and Louis suffered from heavy convulsions and memory loss. Twice, he had had an epileptic seizure in public, whereof one was during a funeral ceremony in a church.[149] Eventually, these crises led to his sequestration into *l'asile* Bîcetre. He first entered the Bîcetre at 31 October 1863 with symptoms that were common amongst cases of alcoholic poisoning. Louis recovered quite rapidly, and was discharged from the asylum a month later.[150] He returned home, but fell back into his old habits

[148] Magnan (1871) 37.
[149] Ibid., 38.
[150] Ibid.

very soon. With similar symptoms, he was hospitalized for the second time in the Bîcetre at 28 April 1864. He rested and his health was restored, resulting in a discharge in early June. After this second intake, Louis renounced absinthe, but occasionally drank a glass of wine or eau-de-vie. Unfortunately, the good weather and the sun got the best of him; he started enjoying absinthe again in small quantities, resulting in epileptic seizures and Therefore, Louis was sequestrated again to the Bîcetre asylum on December 5th 1864. In less than 14 months, this young man was hospitalized three times for the same condition connected to absinthe consumption, while being discharged twice in the meantime. For Magnan, the conclusion is clear: the man was no longer just an alcoholic, but absinthe had turned him into an epileptic: "Il commence par des excès de vin et d'eau-de-vie, il devient alcoolique puis il s'adonne à l'absinthe, il devient épileptique."[151] What this case illustrates is the decay of alcoholism into absinthism, caused by the toxic properties of absinthe, that dangerous little green spirit.

Despite Magnan's strong beliefs in his experiment results, there was much discussion in the medical community at the time. An outspoken critic of Magnan was Auguste Voisin, who had argued since the early 1860s that absinthe should be treated similar to other alcohols. Moreover, he questioned Magnan's methods, claiming that the experiment results were "by no means comparable to what happens with absinthe drinkers."[152] The biggest problem was found in the composition of actual absinthe, and the ingredient doses that were tested on laboratory animals. The dose of absinthe essence, for example, was the equivalent of 60-200 glasses of absinthe – depending on the quality and brand of the absinthe.[153] Moreover, many doctors feared that in such high quantities, other ingredients, like anise, would be even more dangerous than wormwood: proposing a replacing the term absinthism by "anisisme".[154] But besides criticising the used ingredients and doses, one could also question the methods used in experimentation. In a later work, Magnan stated that he initially fed laboratory dogs with pieces of bread containing absinthe essence, so that the absinthe would be absorbed via the stomach, similar to human consumption. However, because he was unsatisfied about the experiment results, Magnan decided to inject the absinthe essence directly into the veins: "a quick and easy way to

[151] Magnan (1871) 38.
[152] Luauté (2007) 521.
[153] Ibid., 522.
[154] Ibid.

evoke epileptic attacks".[155] Of course, this way of experiencing a substance strays far for the day-to-day absinthe consumption that was popular at the time. It is therefore a question to which extent the results of Magnan's experiment can be transferable to the context of human consumption. Nonetheless, these studies have played an important role in the developments surrounding the medical absinthe debate. Given his great reputation and fame, Magnan was usually taken as a starting point in assessing the potential dangers of absinthe consumption.[156] Eventually, his publications can be considered a driving force behind the scientific arguments of later nineteenth-century temperance movements, resulting in the banning of absinthe in 1914.[157]

Interestingly, in the same year wherein Magnan published his studies, there was another publication – with nearly the same title – done by Théodore Challand. In *Étude expérimentale et clinique sur l'absinthisme et l'alcoolisme*, he starts by expressing his gratitude and showing his respect to his "maître et ami, M. le Dr. Magnan", who had helped him with the valuable advice and experience.[158] Challand was a medical doctor at the Faculté de Paris, and a chirurgical intern at the Bîcetre.

Compared to Magnan's study, he pays more attention to describing the procedures and methods used in the experiment. In the first part, for example, there is a section on the distillation of grande absinthe into absinthe essence. Challand states that the amount of essence that can be distilled varies throughout the years: during the hot years, one obtains less liquid from the absinthe plant, but its essence is usually more active.[159] This indicates that, besides quantity, the qualitative properties of absinthe essence influence the results of the experiment. To keep the absinthe essence active, it needs to be stored directly into an airtight bottle, leaving no room for oxidation.[160] If the distillation practice and storing procedure has been followed rightly, you end up with the following substance: *absinthe essence*, with a chemical formula of $C^{20}H^{16}O^{2}$, a boiling point of 240 degrees and a density of 0,973 at 24°C.[161] For experimentation,

[155] Magnan, *Recherche de physiologie pathologique. Épilepsie : alcool et essence d' absinthe*. Arch Physiol Norm Pathol 1873;5:115–42.
[156] Luauté (2007) 525.
[157] Luauté (2007) 516. « C'est en grande partie à Magnan que l'on doit d'avoir vu la Suisse en 1908 et notre pays en 1914 interdire la fabrication et la consommation de l'absinthe »
[158] Challand (1871) 5.
[159] Ibid., 7.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid., 8.

it was important that the quality of absinthe essence was good, that the substance was pure, recently distilled and well preserved in a closed-off bottle.

To put preparation to use, Challand describes five methods of conducting the experiment on laboratory animals. The first is an injection in the stomach, resulting in a similar intake to that of human consumption. For the stomach absorption to be successful, it is necessary to prevent the animal from vomiting. This first procedure was usually done with laboratory dogs, and 4-6 grams of absinthe essence were prescribed to medium-sized dogs.[162] The second method of experimentation was inhalation, which was suited for smaller animals like cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, hens and pigeons. For this procedure, the animal was placed under an airtight bell with a small plate of absinthe essence. The vapours of absinthe quickly fill the bell and the animal is forced to inhale the evaporated substance. A third method, also particularly suited for smaller animals, is carried out by injecting absinthe essence into the cellular tissue. However, the effects of the injection arise very quickly and are sometimes hard to distinguish from other stress reactions. A fourth and more adequate approach is an injection into the veins of an animal. This method is only suited for dogs, since the other laboratory animals are too small for this procedure. The absinthe essence is ideally injected into the crural vein, and only requires a small dose of 5-20 centigram. The final method is a rectal insertion into the animal. However, due to complications and the difficulties of keeping the essence inserted, this approach is considered inferior to the other four.

Strikingly, Challand recalls an experiment done by Magnan whereof he rejects the methods used, despite Magnan being his superior. During the first experiments at the Bîcetre, Magnan used to mix the absinthe essence into white bread or flour, or he put it into a gelatine capsule.[163] After that, these *boulettes* were fed to the dogs. However, by entering the body of the laboratory dogs this way, the expected results were not achieved, and the experiment was compromised. Therefore, this method of experimentation was considered inferior and was eventually rejected. It was easier to inject absinthe essence directly into the laboratory animals: a "fast and easy way to evoke epileptic attacks".[164] For Magnan, there was no scientific research

[162] Challand (1871) 9.

[163] Ibid., 8.

[164] Translated by author : « moyen facile et rapide pour amener l' attaque épileptique » Luauté 512 ; originally from Magnan V. Recherche de physiologie pathologique. Épilepsie : alcool et essence d'absinthe (1873), résumé In : Exposé des titres et travaux scientifiques du Dr V. Magnan (1886), (p. 11–13).

problem in adapting this more effective way of experimentation, and so the previous method of feeding animals and letting them absorb the absinthe via digestion, was rejected.

While Challand was in close contact with Magnan, there was also criticism from outside of the laboratory walls. As stated before, the conclusions of Magnan and his companions have been disputed since their publication. Because the status of absinthe continued to puzzle many physicians and public authorities, some counter-experiments were set up. In one of these experiments, the two physiologists Cadeac and Meunier found that the dose that Magnan used in his experiments was by no means representative for human consumption. For example, 1 gram of pure absinthe essence used in the laboratory was the equivalent of more than hundred glasses of regular absinthe consumed in a café.[165] In another study, carried out by Couleru in 1908 – who was Procureur de la République in Pontarlier, the historical heart of absinthe – it was found that one had to drink 66 glasses of absinthe to arrive at the precise dose of 1 gramme of absinthe essence per litre.[166] This makes Magnan's results completely non-comparable to the regular absinthe drinker. Also, more recent studies have shown that many of the assumptions surrounding absinthe and its effect have been highly exaggerated in the past. For example, the amount of wormwood – especially its active component thujone – seems to have been considerably low, similar to modern alimentary regulations.[167]

Of course, Challand's experimentation does not live up to contemporary scientific research standards either. But while some of his results point towards a certain direction, Challand is more conservative in making the same claims as his master. He acknowledges that, in isolated form, most of the substances (e.g. wormwood, alcohol, anise) have a different outcome. However, in the human consumption of absinthe, all substances are taken in simultaneously, making it impossible to trace its effects back to individual ingredients. Since absinthe consists of a mixture of ingredients, its effects should equally be understood as a complex of different factors.

Besides, in contrast to Magnan's arguments, Challand states that the effects of absinthe on its consumers are hard to study, given that the majority of the *absintheurs* drinks a variety of different alcohols throughout the day: "tantôt du vin rouge ou blanc, tantôt de l'eau-de-vie ou

[165] Delahaye (1988) 481.
[166] Ibid., 482. Original study: E. Couleru, « Au pays de l'absinthe y est -on plus fou ou plus criminel qu'ailleurs ? » Paris, Rivière, 1908.
[167] Luauté (2007) 528.

de l'absinthe, etc. On ne trouve que très-rarement des individus qui ne boivent que de l'absinthe."[168] Absinthe is rarely drunken completely on its own, making the conclusions of these types of experiments difficult to interpret and translate into human behaviour.

Another difficulty arises in the social position of most absinthe drinkers. As Challand observes, most of the heavy absinthe drinkers seem to come from the wealthier classes, instead of the (more visible) working class. This makes them, in his words: "moins faciles à observer".[169] The working class visits public taverns and gets intoxicated with wines and spirits of inferior quality, rather than enjoying a high-quality drink like absinthe.[170] Besides, as one can expect, those of the wealthier social classes were accused of alcoholism much less often, let alone being brought into an asylum.

What this shows is, again, that absinthe cannot be understood from a mere medical or scientific perspective. The *absintheur* can only be understood in its complete context, including the ritualization of absinthe consumption, the social aspects of public drinking and the distinct café culture of the mid-nineteenth century in Paris. Therefore, in the second chapter, we will look more into these aspects of absinthe consumption.

In this case study, we have encountered the documentations of scientific experiments done by Magnan and Challand around 1871. Both cases contained information on the procedures that were carried out. These included, for example, testing different types of (concentrated) substances, (lethal) injections to animals and dissecting them after they had died. Animals that are frequently named in the experiment reports are predominantly dogs, but also cats, rabbits and guinea pigs. But besides these 'practical' experiments scientists also worked on more theoretical levels like molecular structure and composition of ingredients. Also, many members of the scientific community were in close contact with each other. In the sources, doctors refer to each other constantly and are very aware of new publications and the experiments that are carried out. The Parisian scientific-medical community at the time seems to have been very close.

In conclusion, we have encountered different places of knowledge during this first chapter. Within the medical domain, there were different settings and contexts wherein knowledge

[168] Challand (1871) 59.
[169] Ibid., 60.
[170] Ibid.

around absinthe was produced. All of these places produce different types of knowledge that cannot necessarily be interchanged or transferred to other settings. Lierre went out on the streets to research absinthe consumption through participatory observation, documenting his experiences and engaging with seasoned *absintheurs.* In the Salpêtrière, the influence of absinthe was mainly seen in the number of admitted patients, which consisted of both the sick and very poor people. Paris was the centre of medical science during the mid-nineteenth century, and especially the new field of psychiatry was rapidly progressing. With Morel's theory on *dégénérescence*, absinthe was connected to the presupposed demise of the French race. This conception was strengthened by Magnan's hypothesis of medical conditions that were explicitly linked to absinthe consumption. His studies on laboratory dogs in the Sainte-Anne yielded some clear scientific results, but the relationship between these experiments and human absinthe consumption remained dubious. While these places produce different types of knowledge about absinthe, there is some overlap in the general conception of absinthe consumption. It is often mentioned that the context wherein absinthe is used, plays an additional role in the manifestation of its effects.[171] Thus, as this chapter has shown, it is indeed impossible to tell the story of absinthe from a mere medical-scientific viewpoint. For this reason, the focus in the second chapter will be on another context of absinthe consumption.

For now, we depart from the nineteenth-century laboratories, hospitals and asylums. We have seen that, although there was much experimentation on the substantive properties of absinthe, there might be more to understand before explaining absinthe as a phenomenon. In the next chapter, we go out on the streets of Paris: focussing on café culture, the ritualization of absinthe drinking, artistic bohemian culture and the blooming entertainment industry that took off in the 1880s. After discussing physical properties, medical experiments and scientific experiments, it is now time to research the magical aspects behind it all. So get ready, and pour yourself another glass, because we are about to enter the streets of Paris during that wonderful time in the nineteenth century: *l'heure verte est arrivé!*

[171] Moreau, 13 ; Lierre, 27 ; Magnan, 23, 38 ; Challand, 35, 59-60, 63.

Chapter 2: Cafés, Cabarets and Le Chat Noir

In the first chapter, *places of knowledge* consisted mainly of hospitals, asylums and laboratories: places that have a certain degree of institutionalization and (a hierarchical) structure. During the nineteenth century, many of these institutions were in close contact with each other. Next to the asylums, hospital beds and laboratory experiments were the taverns, cafés and cabarets, which will be the focus in this chapter. In these places, absinthe played a completely different role than in the medical-scientific domain. The substance was seen in a completely different fashion, and its properties were assessed quite differently. Lierre's study from 1867 formed an exception to this, since it explicitly mixed knowledge from the scientific domain with the context of public drinking in order to research the effects of absinthe consumption.[172] In general, however, the conception of absinthe was much different in the public drinking places than it was in the hospitals and research laboratories. Rather than focussing on chemical construction, the use of different ingredients and physical properties, absinthe was simply enjoyed by mixing ice cold water with the spirit. This does not mean that the people drinking, serving and talking about it in cafés knew any less about the green fairy than personnel working in the Salpêtrière hospital. The knowledge they possess is of a completely different nature than that of the laboratory, but by no means irrelevant. Especially in the case of this thesis, when researching the broader phenomenon of absinthe from a socio-geographical perspective, the knowledge that is communicated in cafés and cabarets plays an important role. As stated earlier, it is precisely this cognitive aspect in combination with particular social contexts that explains absinthe's massive success. The immense popularity of absinthe is rather due to its socially ingrained place in late-nineteenth-century French society than to its physiological makeup. That being said, one does not go without the other. Therefore, after assessing the knowledge produced in the medical-scientific realm, it is now time to look at other places of knowledge.

While many of the Parisian hospitals were located in the city centre – with higher concentrations in the fifth and sixth arrondissements – the popular drinking establishments were located both in the city centre as well as in the outskirts of Paris, as illustrated in the next section. By placing their taverns just outside of the city, shop owners tried evading special taxes on serving

[172] See page 24 of this thesis.

alcohol.[173] This practice led to complete clusters of cafés and bars that were daily visited by all sorts of people. Besides these geographical differences, it is important to remark on the rise of a new social culture wherein absinthe is embedded. The culture of cafés, cabarets, entertainment and leisure is typical for the way in which absinthe developed from an ordinary herbal liquor to France's most popular *apéritif*.[174] Besides, this domain tells us a great deal about the knowledge that was transferred, formed and created around absinthe. Therefore, to fully understand absinthe as a phenomenon, the public drinking places of Paris must be taken into account.

In this chapter, we will walk alongside the Parisian boulevards, where much of the public story of absinthe took place. In doing so, we discover different forms of drug, set and setting than those we encountered in the previous chapter. On the basis of different key locations – primarily cafés and cabarets – these aspects will be discussed. First, the constructed map will be explained and analysed accordingly, focussing on geographical assumptions and arguments in the story of absinthe. After that, we start at the old city of Paris – the early centre of absinthe consumption during the nineteenth century. Gradually, we will move Northwards through different cafés and cabarets towards the neighbourhood of Montmartre. Along the way, important aspects of absinthe in café culture will be found in consumption rituals, social contexts, the role of women, literary circles and the growing entertainment industry.

I: *l'Heure verte est arrivée !* Absinthe on the streets of Paris

To research the embedding of absinthe in Paris, it is important to get an overview of its presence and movement throughout the city. Therefore, it is now time to take a look at the place where absinthe reigned supreme: in the streets and cafés of Paris. For the constructed map on the following page, I used two important texts from the period to make an inventory of the important places that proudly served absinthe or had a particular public reputation. The first is from 1862, written by Alfred Delvau and entitled *Histoire anecdotique des cafés & cabarets de Paris*. In this 300-page book, Delvau describes a total of 44 major cafés and cabarets in Paris in the 1860s. From this collection, I selected those places that are relevant in order to investigate the story of absinthe. These relevant places can be explicitly linked to absinthe consumption, either because they are described as places where absinthe was frequently drunk, when its

[173] Marrus (1974) 130.
[174] Prestwhich (1979) 308.

visitors were known to be perfervid consumers of absinthe, or because they are mentioned in the stories of famous absintheurs.

The second work is an article from 1889 by Theodore Child called *Characteristic Parisian Cafés.* In a similar fashion, Child describes the Parisian café culture and nightlife in terms of its public drinking places. From this text, I have similarly selected those locations that were of particular interest to this thesis. After this initial selection, research had to be done on the exact location of these establishments. As one can imagine, many streets in Paris have changed or were rebuilt in the last 150 years. This applied particularly to many of the 1862's cafés as described by Delvau, as some of them did not survive the Hausmann transformation between the 1850s and 1870.[175] With the help of older maps and precise descriptions, I was able to retrace many of the important cafés and match them to their current coordinates.

The result of this research is the plotted map on the following page, marking the important locations in the story of absinthe from 1860-1890 in Paris. By thoroughly observing these sites and their interrelationships, one can get a better understanding of the way in which absinthe moved throughout the French capital during the nineteenth century. For now, let us follow that green fairy.

What immediately becomes clear when analysing this map, is the fact that there are certain 'hubs' within the city of Paris. First, there is the ancient and medieval centre of Paris. Cafés such as Le café Voltaire, Le café Racine, Le Procope and Le Vachette are all situated in the fifth and sixth arrondissements of Paris, more commonly known as the *Quartier Latin.* Interestingly, some of these cafés have an extensive history – such as café Procope – while others find their clientele primarily in younger students – like café Racine.[176] While the Boulevard Saint-Michel forms the lifeline of this area, many of the cafés are situated in the smaller side streets. Secondly, we can see a conglomeration of absinthe cafés around the Opéra. This makes sense, given that many visitors and spectators of the Opéra look for a place to eat and drink before or after the show. Besides, this particular Parisian area has a more upper-class population and the neighbourhood is relatively wealthy. In relation to secondary literature, these cafés fit the image of the typical wealthy-bourgeois boulevard café, wherein absinthe was flowing but the clientele was more exclusive.

[175] Delvau (1862) 199-201.
[176] Ibid., 244.


18TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
19TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
17TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
8TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
10TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
CHAMPS-
ÉLYSÉES
OPÉRA
BELLEVILLE
SENTIER
1ST
ARRONDISSEMENT
3RD
ARRONDISSEMENT
20TH
ARRONDISSEM
7TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
Paris
11TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
CHARONNE
6TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
GRENELLE
15TH
ARRONDISSEMENT
12TH
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Third, towards the northern part of the city, there is a group of several cafés in the surroundings of the Place Pigalle. This is the area that is most commonly associated with the 'Montmartre spirit' of bohemian culture, while the neighbourhood of Montmartre actually lays a bit further north still. Many of these cafés – Le Chat Noir, Le Rat Mort, and Nouvelles-Athènes – are known for their artistic clientele and creative *habitués.* It is here where the cafés are found that are typically linked with the image of the *Belle Époque*, like the Moulin Rouge, which opened in 1889 at the Boulevard de Clichy.[177] Interestingly, these cafés were established quite late in comparison to the other locations on the map. All of the cafés in the Montmartre area mentioned by Child (in his 1889 description) or in secondary literature were established mainly in the 1880s or later. This is an interesting fact, given that around 20 years earlier (in Delvau's description) cafés were mainly concentrated elsewhere.

Fourth, an interesting observation is that some of the cafés around the Île de la Cité – the left island in the middle of the Seine – have disappeared in the time between the descriptions of Delvau and Child (from 1862 and 1889, respectively). Nearly all of the old roads where these cafés were located were rebuilt during the infamous Haussmann transformation in the 1850s and 1860s in Paris. Streets like the rue aux Fèves, the quai de l'École and the place des Trois-Maries have all disappeared in the 1860s and made way for new streets and other buildings. It is striking that the three cafés located in this area – la Duriot, la Mére Moreau and Le Cabaret du Lapin-Blanc – were all described by Delvau as the centres of absinthe consumption. In other words, the Haussmann transformation displaced three important centres of absinthe in the centre of Paris. Later, in Child's description from 1889, there are more cafés in the Northern part of Paris who have taken over this role.

When comparing these results to the dominant narrative within the secondary literature, there are some interesting differences. Originally, the centres of absinthe in Paris are considered to be found in Montmartre and (to a lesser extent) in the Quartier Latin.[178] However, as is illustrated by the constructed map, there is an abundance of cafés in, for example, the richer neighbourhood around the Opéra. These areas are usually left out of the story of absinthe in secondary literature, while they might have played an important role – especially the *boulevard des Italiens* is often mentioned in primary source material.[179] The narrative of absinthe consumption outside of the city (i.e. Montmartre) seems to apply to descriptions of artistic

[177] Adams (2004) 130.
[178] For example, see Adams (2004) 4 or Shaw & Cate (1996) 19.
[179] Delvau (1862) 152, 224, 295; Lierre (1867) 27; Child (1889) 3,7.

circles only, creating a distorted image of the common absinthe consumer and overall consumption of absinthe in Paris.

There is another important point of nuance to be made with regards to the narrative of public drinking in Paris. In secondary literature, it is often mentioned that new establishments were created on the outskirts of the city to avoid tax regulations.[180] However, this fact does not explain the rise of cafés in Montmartre from the 1880s onwards, since Montmartre had become an integral part of the city of Paris in 1859.[181] While Montmartre thus became part of the city of Paris in 1859, the rise of important cafés came much later, therefore disproving the importance of tax laws on alcohol during the 19th century. Some of the earlier drinking establishments might have chosen their location on the basis of tax regulations, but this does not explain the rise of Montmartre as a centre for festivity and entertainment in the later nineteenth century.

Finally, it is interesting to witness a shift in the centre of gravity through the decades. From Delvau's description from 1862 to Child's 1889 description, there is a trend of drinking establishments that move from the city centre to the outer neighbourhoods of Paris – with Montmartre in particular. This shift was not only geographically substantiated, but also came with a different consumer profile. When most cafés were still located at the heart of Paris, absinthe was seen as an elite drink and primarily consumed by the upper class. With the spread towards the outer regions, however, the audience changed to artists, middle-class fanatics and *bohemians.* A significant drop in prices added to this some poorer people from the working class, occasional drunkards and seasoned alcoholics. The distinction between different locations and a different social clientele was made already at the time of Child's observations: "We have just been in the Pays Latin; we are now in the Pays de Boheme, a country inhabited by painters, sculptors, poets, budding novelists, struggling journalists, starving musicians, and even by well-to-do citizens, but essentially a country where all that is conventional is held in supreme abomination, so much so that Montmartre has come to be one of the most congenial camping grounds in Paris for the modern personifications of those immortal prototypes of moral untidiness."[182] Montmartre, in other words, facilitated a different environment for absinthe to

[180] Brennan (2005) 30.
[181] « Loi sur l'extension des limites de Paris (du 16 juin 1859) » *Bulletin des lois de l'Empire français*, t. XIV, XIe série, no 738, 3 novembre 1859, p. 747-751.
[182] Child (1889) 12.

freely roam; and by doing so, turned it into a different type of drink: no longer a bourgeois *aperitif*, but a drink for all that identified themselves with the bohemian artistic lifestyle.

It is sometimes argued that the shift from Paris' city centre to the neighbourhood of Montmartre was deliberately encouraged by the local government. The poor were particularly swept out of the centre and found their new homes in the surrounding *faubourgs*. The urban planning project that was carried out by baron Haussmann played an important role in this process: "The newly created boulevards and parks for the bourgeoisie had pushed back the poor from the centre of Paris into outlying areas (126) such as Montmartre."[183] But not only the poor had to leave the city centre. Artists, whereof the majority was without stable income or financial security, had been colonising Montmartre since 1880: "The bohemians were advancing in search of cheap rents to the steep packed-earth footpaths and narrow lanes with clusters of dance-halls and cafés and street prostitutes working in the shadow of the scaffolding used to build the Sacré-Coeur church."[184] Previously, they found most of their artistic and literary circles in the Quartier Latin or Montparnasse area; but as these neighbourhoods became more and more expensive, they started looking for an alternative hub. In other words, people lived in Montmartre mainly because they could not afford to live in Paris. There might have been more factors that *pushed* people towards the outer neighbourhoods than there were to *pull* (i.e. *attract*) them to Montmartre. Of course, in the later nineteenth century the area around the *butte de Montmartre* had created its own attractions and identity, but in the decades before the *Belle Epoque*, the north of Paris seems to have been a place predominantly for those who wanted to leave the city.

When focussing particularly on the audiences that visited the Parisian cafés, there are even more observations to make. Take the student population, for example. Historically, the Quartier Latin is seen as the heart of Paris' student life. When observing the data from the map, we see that not only students but also professors and academic clubs were gathering in this neighbourhood. Some cafés are close to the Sorbonne University, while others lay in the richer area around the boulevard Saint-Germain (next to the more prestigious bourgeois-cafés). The Quartier Latin indeed seems to be the place where students enjoyed their occasional absinthe drinking.

[183] Adams (2004) 126.
[184] Ibid., 127.

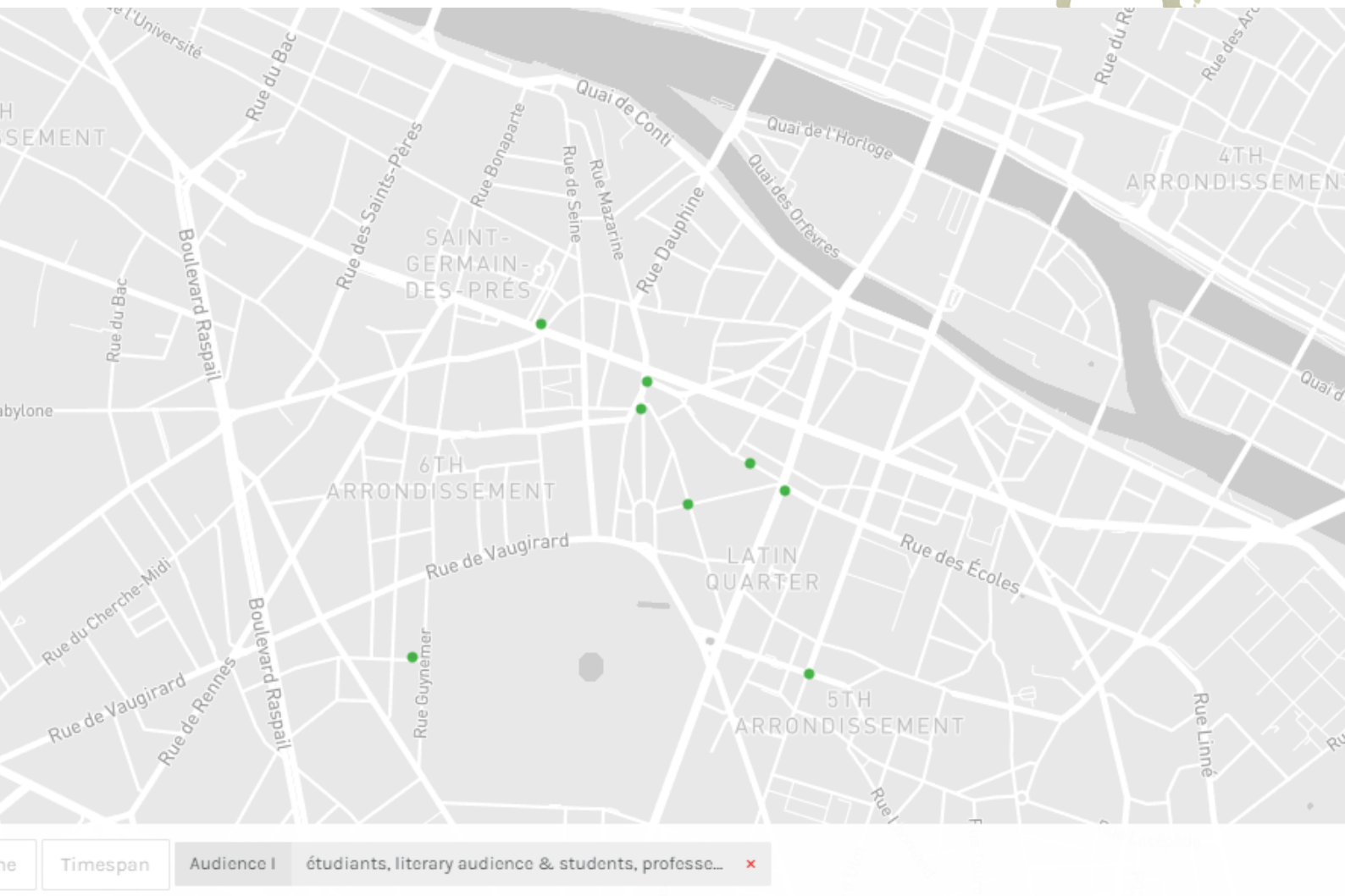


Image: all cafés frequented by the student population (i.e. students, professors)

Despite all these cafés being located in roughly the same area, they had a different type of audience. The *Café de l'Europe* – located close to the boulevard Saint-Germain at the height of the Odéon – was only visited by the richer students. Others, like the café *Soufflot* (lower right), were primarily visited by law school professors, while the café *Racine* had a mixed clientele of both students and a literary audience – given its location between the Odéon on the one hand, and the university on the other.

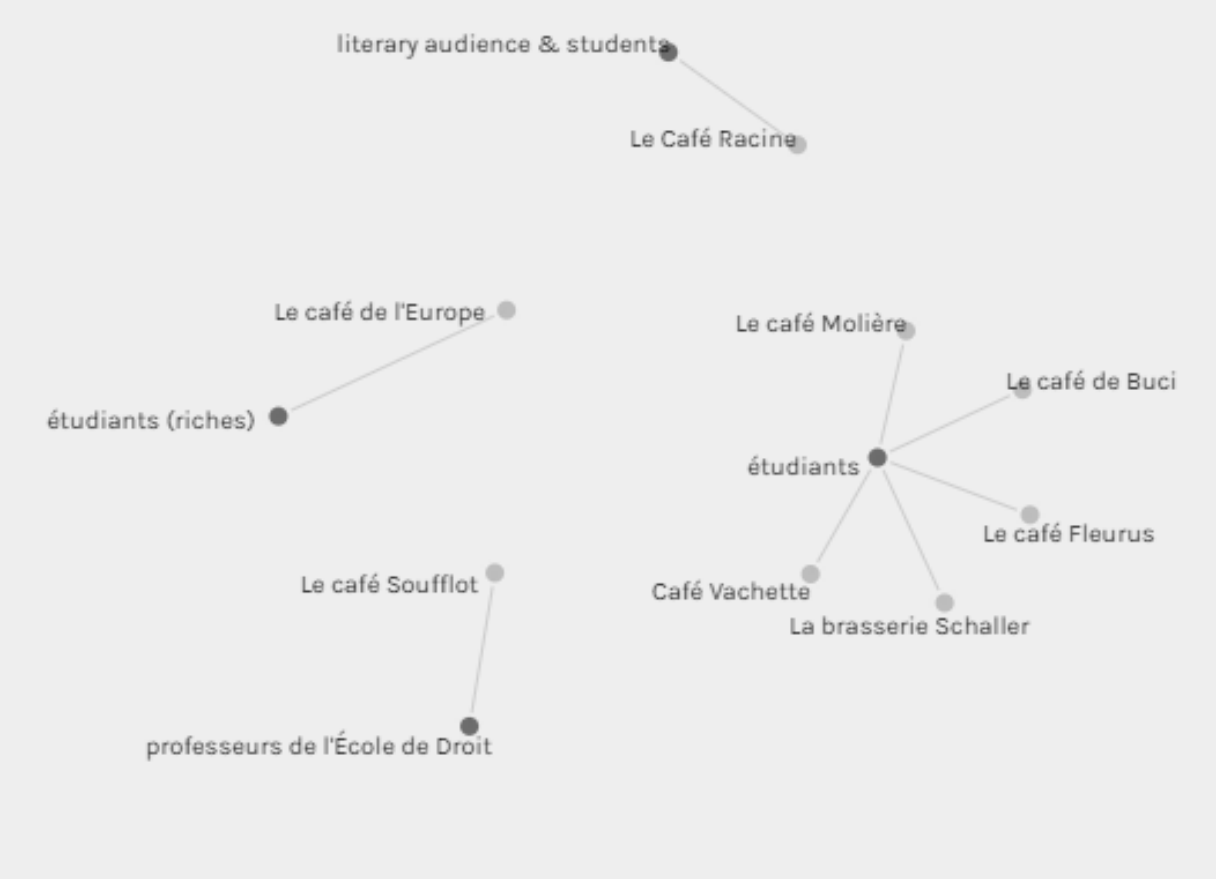


Image: different types of student cafés and academic audiences

While these analyses provide interesting insights, I will not treat every social group one by one in this manner. Rather, I discuss them on the basis of several exemplary cafés and their stories, to get a better understanding of the different sub-stories of absinthe from inside the café walls and within their specific social context.

In summary, over the second half of the nineteenth century, the cafés that played an important role in the story of absinthe have either closed or moved towards the northern part of Paris. By 1890, at the wake of the Belle Époque, the North of Paris had taken over the role of the older quarters as the centre of absinthe in the French capital. Many of the older establishments had to close shop during the Hausmann transformation, being forced from the city centre to the outer neighbourhoods or faubourgs. Additionally, a great part of their previous clientele left the city centre with them: searching for cheaper places to live due to increasing rents in the old quarters. Many of them found their new homes in Montmartre, and soon enjoyed the newly opened cafés and cabarets in their own distinct *bohemian* spirit.

After having drawn these conclusions on the basis of socio-geographical analysis, it is now time to dive deeper into the question of absinthe. In the remainder of this chapter, the focus will be

on the consumption and ritualization of absinthe, as well as the distinct café culture and social contexts wherein these practices took place. The second section will discuss how absinthe was consumed and which settings were typical for taking a glass of absinthe. The third section investigates different categories of public drinking places that served absinthe and often attracted specific audiences. Moreover, this section explores which type of knowledge was transferred, produced and created around absinthe in each of the different places of knowledge.

II: *Proffesseurs de l'absinthe:* consumption and ritualization

When walking along the *grandes boulevards* during *l'heure verte,* one can witness different activities and rituals that are related to the green fairy. From the group of *absintheurs* sitting outside on the terrace, slowly diluting their liquors with dripping water from a carafe; to the lonely absinthe drinker that is sitting at the bar, ordering his fifth (or sixth?) absinthe of the day. All of the people involved have either obtained or created some sort of knowledge about absinthe. While the newcomer might have read stories about sparking philosophical conversations and artistic inspiration, the seasoned *absintheur* mixes his drink with great precision to the strength of his liking. From Henri Balesta's *Absinthe et Absintheurs*, published in 1860, we learn that the preparation of absinthe was a serious matter for many of its consumers. It is here where the term *'professors of absinthe'* originates, as Balesta describes how the absintheurs valued the correct preparation of their favourite beverage:

> By late morning the professors of absinthe were already at their station, yes, the teachers of absinthe, for it is a science, or rather an art to drink absinthe properly, and certainly to drink it in quantity. They put themselves on the trail of the novice drinkers, teaching them to raise their elbow high and frequently, water their absinthe artistically, and then, after the tenth little glass, with the pupil rolled under the table, the master went on to another, always drinking, always holding forth, always steady and unshakeable at his post. [185]

This fragment already shows that there are certain 'professors of absinthe' that show their students how the drink should be prepared. This knowledge transfer takes place at their *station,* which is found at one of the public drinking places in Paris. Aspects of both the preparation –

[185] Henri Balesta, *Absinthe et absintheurs* (1860). English translation from Cecil Munsey (2008).

lifting one's elbow and watering it 'artistically' – and consumption of absinthe – "drink absinthe properly, and certainly to drink it in quantity" – make up the whole that is considered the *science* or *art* that is absinthe consumption. Let us focus some more on these preparation and consumption rituals in the following section.

Consumption and ritualization

In order to successfully understand the phenomenon of absinthe, we have to take a closer look at the consumption of this mysterious liquor. In the first place, absinthe could not be served straight away, or, at least, was rarely enjoyed in its pure form. Understandably, as a liquor circling around 70% alcohol per volume – at least the absinthe of *superior* quality[186] – absinthe was usually diluted by water to make the consumption of it more pleasurable. Later, people also added sugar to make the drink less bitter – but this was only done by occasion.[187] This simple preparation quickly turned into a ritual that was inseparably connected to the consumption of absinthe. Absinthe spoons, fountains, glasses and carafes were created to optimally enjoy the drink, as well as a certain etiquette of how to 'take one's absinthe'.

The consumer was an integral part of the consumption ritual. In the work by Moreau from 1862, which we encountered in the previous chapter , it is mentioned that the 'buveur' is often given a glass – either an ordinary drinking glass or specifically designed verre d'absinthe – with around 30 grammes of absinthe.[188] Next to this glass, one can find a carafe with ice-cold water. Then, it is the consumer's task to dilute the liquor with water to the taste of their liking (with a recommended ratio of 1 part absinthe against 3 parts of water). This meant that the task of the consumer laid in measuring out this exact ratio and diluting the drink. Of course, not everyone followed this advice, and some of the more seasoned *absintheurs* enjoyed their absinthes in a specific way. However, people that did not follow the etiquette of slowly diluting their absinthe with water were often frowned upon. The Englishman George Saintsbury recalled from his travels to Paris that the few people than drunk absinthe in its pure form formed a minority. He describes them as follows: "A person who drinks absinthe neat deserves his fate whatever it may be. The flavour is concentrated to repulsiveness; the spirit burns "like a torch-light

[186] As we will discuss on page 105 of this thesis, there were different types of absinthe that were produced.
[187] Le Chat Noir, 25-07-1885.
[188] Moreau (1862) 18.

procession"; you must have a preternaturally strong or fatally accustomed head if that head does not ache after it. Moreover, you lose all the ceremonial and etiquette which make the proper fashion of drinking it delightful to a man of taste."[189] This illustrates that although the consumer could individually determine how to take one's absinthe, there was definitely a common way and etiquette in doing so like a 'man of taste'. However, there was also a moral component in the knowledge surrounding absinthe. While the preparation rituals were general knowledge during the second half of the nineteenth century, this did not necessarily mean that everyone loved it. Whether one was a fan of absinthe or detested it completely, everyone knew how absinthe should be consumed, as is illustrated by the following poem:

> Versez avec lenteur, l'absinthe dans le verre,
> Deux doigts, pas d'avantage ; ensuite saisissez
> Une carafe d'eau bien fraîche, puis versez, ;
> Versez tout doucement, d'une main bien légère !
>
> Que, petit à petit» votre main accélère
> La verte infusion, puis augmentez, pressez
> Le volume de l'eau, la main haute, cl cessez
> Quand vous aurez jugé la liqueur assez claire...
>
> Laissez-la reposer une minute encor,
> Couvez-la du regard comme on couve un trésor,
> Aspirez son parfum qui donne le bien-etre!
>
> Enfin, pour couronner tant de soins inouïs,
> Bien délicatement prenez le verre, et puis
> Lancez, sans hésiter, le tout par la fenêtre. ! [190]

Despite being a fierce opponent of the green fairy – he advises to "launch, without hesitation, everything out of the window" – the poet knows how the disputed drink should be prepared. While this method was the common way of preparing absinthe, there is evidence of other rituals that were performed. A second preparation ritual of absinthe – the so-called *'verre dans la verre'* method – was done by placing a tiny glass filled with liquor in a wide, flat-bottomed glass. Then, water should be poured into the tiny glass of absinthe, making the emerald green liquor overflow and transfer to the bigger glass, thus creating an opaque-greyish mixture of

[189] Saintsbury (1920) 146.
[190] Monin (1889) 180.

water and absinthe. When the tiny liquor glass contains nothing but pure water – meaning that all of the liquor has transferred to the bigger vessel, the drink is ready to be consumed. If this preparation is done well, one should be left with a glass of absinthe that is both refreshing and comforting, both in odour and in taste.[191] While this method differs from the traditional serving of absinthe, its principle remains the same: diluting the green spirit with water so that a cloudy water-absinthe mixture arises.

Already in the early 1860s, there was a collection of popular expressions with regard to the consumption of absinthe. In the *Dictionnaire de la langue verte*, published in 1866 by Alfred Delvau, numerous expressions and sayings are to be found.[192] For example, the famous *heure de l'absinthe* is defined as "Le moment de la journée où les Parisiens boivent de l'absinthe dans les cafés et chez les liquoristes. C'est de quatre à six heures.»[193] Also, consumers of absinthe are usually referred to as *absintheurs*, with the person serving absinthe (the débitant d'absinthe) being the *absinthier*.[194] Amongst other names, one can use *herbe sainte*, *fée verte*, *perroquet* or the abbreviation *abs* to refer to a glass of absinthe. When mixed with other bar ingredients, like anisette, the drink is referred to as *mêlé.*[195]

Besides referring to the drink itself, there were also expressions that referred to the consumption practice of absinthe. In bohemian slang, for example, 'faire/jouer son absinthe' meant playing your absinthe against someone else, in order to drink it without paying for it.[196] In the Parisian cabarets, one should not be surprised when writers, artists or poets swapped their literary discussions for such an intervention. This was common practice amongst these *bohemians*, as similar games were played to receive free dinner, coffee or billiards. Besides this typical social

[191] Saintsbury (1920) 146-147. "When you have stood the glass of liqueur in a tumbler as flat-bottomed as you can get, you should pour, or have poured for you, water gently into the absinthe itself, so that the mixture overflows from one vessel into the other. The way in which the deep emerald of the pure spirit clouds first into what would be the colour of a star-smaragd, if the Almighty had been pleased to complete the quartette of stargems, and then into opal; the thinning out of the opal itself as the operation goes on; and when the liqueur glass contains nothing but pure water and the drink is ready, the extraordinary combination of refreshingness and comforting character in odour and flavour—all these complete a very agreeable experience. Like other agreeable experiences it may no doubt be repeated too often. I never myself drank more than one absinthe in a day, and I have not drunk so much as one for some thirty years. But the Green Muse is *bonne diablesse* enough if you don't abuse her; and when you land after rough handling by the ocean she picks you up as nothing else will."

[192] Note that the title of this dictionaire – *la langue verte* – is not a reference to absinthe, but rather to the language spoken on the streets, or 'urban language'.

[193] Delvau (1866) 3.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid., 248.

[196] Ibid., 144.

phenomenon in the cabaret, there was also the more common expression 'faire son absinthe', which meant putting water over one's green liquor to create that typical water-absinthe mixture. This preparation method existed in all public drinking establishments. For the most basic action within the spectrum of consumption rituals – the actual drinking of absinthe – there was even an expression: *absinthage.*[197] What this collection of sayings and expressions illustrates is that, above all, absinthe was a *thing.* It was experienced differently than other alcohols and stood out amongst other popular drinks. While all sorts of spirits and liquors gained popularity during the nineteenth century, there was not one that received the similar status as absinthe in the 1860s. From the ingredients used in its production to the rituals of consumption, absinthe was more than an industrially produced alcohol diluted by water. It was an experience, an investment and, for many, a *mode de vie.*

Le Turbabsine

Luckily, the absintheur was not always left to his own devices and capabilities – which quickly deteriorated from the third glass or so. In the more luxurious establishments, the waiter poured the water over one's absinthe, making the serving of *une verte* even more spectacular. Much like today's wine sommeliers that open bottles at the restaurant table, the serving of the drink was part of the experience. The preparation of absinthe was taken to an even higher level by all the equipment that was particularly designed for serving the green liquor. The aforementioned absinthe spoon and glasses that were introduced contributed to this consumption ritual even more. However, one of the most remarkable inventions in the domain of absinthe-equipment was a device designed to serve several absinthe's at the same time, called *le Turbabsine.*

The affiche below is from 1853 and addresses all amateurs that occasionally consume absinthe: "*Arrêtez! Amateurs d'absinthe – voyez et lizez".* What is interesting about this source, is that admirers ('amateurs') of absinthe are profiled as experts by experience. According to its advertisers, everyone knows that "this appetizing drink [absinthe] acquires a superior quality when it is mixed perfectly." Like the previous rituals, the mixing of water and absinthe is considered crucial to the quality and enjoyment of the drink. In a way, the *absintheur* is complimented about one's knowledge in relation to absinthe; about its strength, properties and preparation. This is a huge difference from the role of the consumer in the previous chapter,

[197] Delvau (1866) 3.

where consumers were mainly considered patients or alcoholics. In the café culture, absinthe is not directly understood on the basis of its potentially dangerous properties. On the contrary, the affiche adds that when absinthe and water are mixed perfectly, the drink obtains healthy properties: "[il] devient *hygiénique* dans cet état." Because of its particular shape, the *Turbabsine* is praised as "better than all other equipment" in the absinthe consumption industry. In essence, the only thing that is done by the *Turbabsine* is diluting absinth with water: the focus of the absinthe ritual. The water bin is placed above a set of glasses that are filled with a bottom of absinthe. When filled with water, the *Turbabsine* equally distributes the water amongst the glasses and, by doing so, slowly mixes the absinthe in the glass with water. As mentioned before, when absinthe is slowly diluted by water, the spirit turns cloudy and changes colour. This chemical process adds to the feeling of 'mixing' absinth and creating a completely new drink, making the use of the *Turbabsine* even more fascinating.

Besides being the best absinth-mixer on the market, the heavy materials that are used to create the *Turbabsine* provide a protection for falling, which makes it safer to use. The device is made from a combination of materials: metal, silver, *vermeil* (silver-gilt), double silver, silver plated copper and tin.[198] Later, in 1855, both the design and production of the *Turbabsine* was patented. When looking at the official documentation and patents of the *Turbabsine*, we find that its main manufacturers in Paris were two jewellers *Mesnage Pierre* (bijoutier at rue Albouy) and *Ménage Pierre Charles* (bijoutier at rue Saint-Louis). Apparently, absinthe equipment was no less profitable than the jewellery business. In the *Courrier des chemins de fer et la gazette des étrangers*, a Parisian weekly magazine, the *Turbabsine* is regularly mentioned in the '*gazette de l'acheteur à Paris*' – the buyer's guide in Paris, next to the newest deals in pianos and portefeuilles.[199]

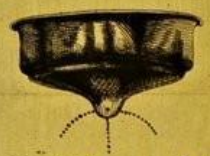
[198] Translated by author. Original text from *Brèvet* (1855): "*Les turbabsines se confectionnent en métal, argent, vermeil, doublé d'argent, cuivre argenté, fer blanc, unies ou ornementées en relief.*"
[199] *Courrier des chemins de fer et la gazette des étrangers,* 1856-07-05, 6.

ARRÊTEZ!
Amateurs d'Absinthe

VOYEZ ET LIZEZ

TURBABSINE

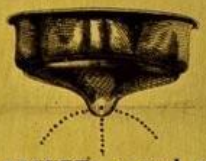
ou Trouble-Absinthe



BREVET, s. g. d. g.

TURBABSINE

ou Trouble-Absinthe



BREVET, s. g. d. g.

LES AMATEURS D'ABSINTHE savent que cette boisson si APPÉTISSANTE ET AGRÉABLE; surtout prise avant le repas, acquiert une qualité supérieure lorsqu'elle est parfaitement mélangée, ressemblante alors, (comme on dit), à une purée et devient HYGIÉNIQUE dans cet état.

La TURBABSINE, par sa forme, fonctionne, mieux que tout autre appareil, à la satisfaction des amateurs.

La TURBABSINE est en doublé d'argent fin et d'une jolie forme, pas casuelle, et sa légèreté la préserve des accidents à provenir de chûte. Son bout est muni de petits trous, sur sa circonférence, pour l'écoulement du liquide (servant au mélange) Troubleur.

Sa capacité est moyenne et suffisante.

Il suffit pour la conserver belle et propre de l'essuyer légèrement avec un linge.

AMATEURS !

DEMANDEZ QU'ELLE VOUS SOIT SERVIE AINSI:

L'absinthe étant dans le verre, on place dessus la TURBABSINE, on l'emplit vivement en versant de la hauteur de 10 centimètres. Une minute suffit au mélange.

Les **TURBABSINES** se vendent chez MENAGE (et Cie), Bijoutier, *rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Ile*, 6. } PARIS

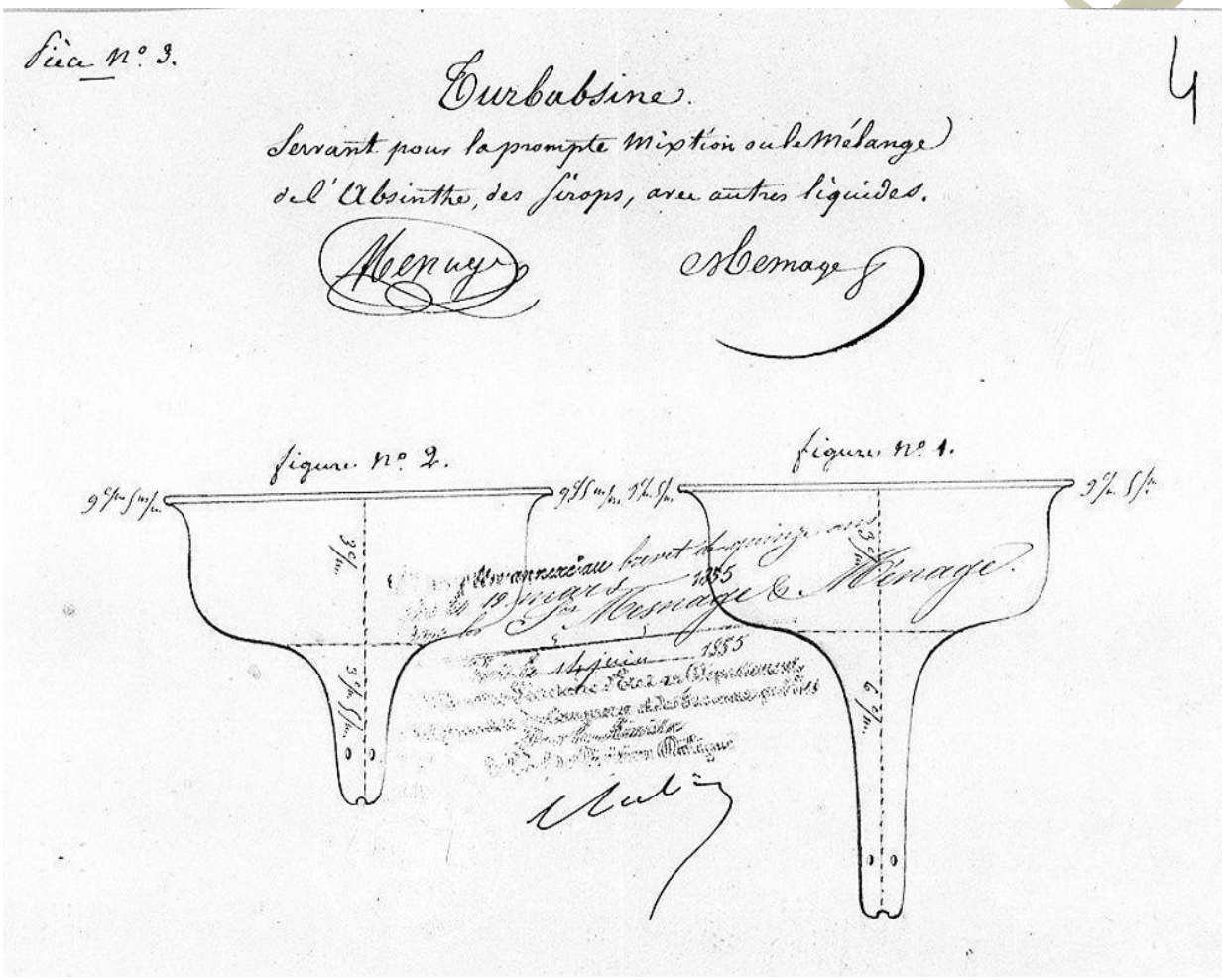
Il y a un Dépôt chez M. MESNAGE, *rue Albouy*, 9.

Les demandes seront reçues par la Poste (affranchir).

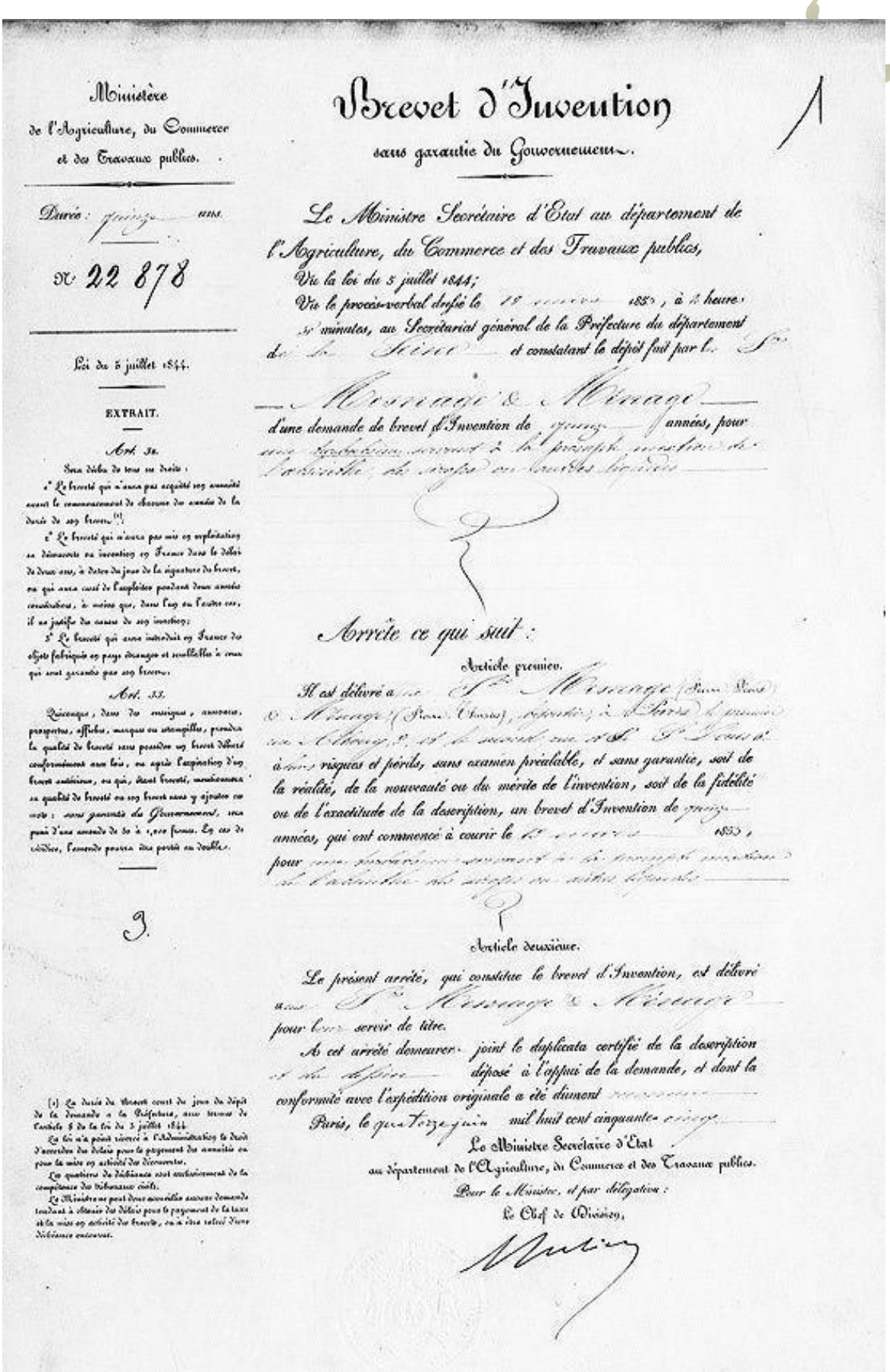
On les portera à domicile à Paris.

TYP. BOISSEAU et Cie

lith. Delaveau s. Honoré 122



Section on page 4 of the *Brevet de l'invention de Turbabsine* © INPI



Ministère
de l'Agriculture, du Commerce
et des Travaux publics.

Durée : quinze ans.

N° 22 878

Loi du 5 juillet 1844.

EXTRAIT.

Art. 30.

Sera déchu de tous ses droits :

1° Le breveté qui n'aura pas acquitté ses annuités avant le commencement de chacune des années de la durée de ses brevets [1].

2° Le breveté qui n'aura pas mis en exploitation sa découverte ou invention en France dans le délai de deux ans, à dater du jour de la signature du brevet, ou qui aura cessé de l'exploiter pendant deux années consécutives, à moins que, dans l'un ou l'autre cas, il ne justifie des causes de ses inactions;

3° Le breveté qui aura introduit en France des objets fabriqués en pays étranger et semblables à ceux qui sont garantis par son brevet.

Art. 33.

Quiconque, dans des enseignes, annonces, prospectus, affiches, marques ou estampilles, prendra la qualité de breveté sans posséder un brevet délivré conformément aux lois, ou après l'expiration d'un brevet antérieur, ou qui, étant breveté, emploiera en outre la qualité de breveté ou son brevet sans y ajouter ces mots : sans garantie du Gouvernement, sera puni d'une amende de 50 à 1,000 francs. En cas de récidive, l'amende pourra être portée au double.

3.

[1] La durée du brevet court du jour du dépôt de la demande à la Préfecture, sauf le terme de l'article 8 de la loi du 5 juillet 1844.

La loi n'a point accordé à l'Administration le droit d'accorder des délais pour le payement des annuités ou pour la mise en activité des découvertes.

Les questions de déchéance sont exclusivement de la compétence des tribunaux civils.

Le Ministre ne peut donc accueillir aucune demande tendant à obtenir des délais pour le payement de la taxe et la mise en activité du brevet, ou à être relevé d'une déchéance encourue.

Brevet d'Invention

sans garantie du Gouvernement.

1

Le Ministre Secrétaire d'État au département de l'Agriculture, du Commerce et des Travaux publics,

Vu la loi du 5 juillet 1844;

Vu le procès-verbal dressé le 19 janvier 1855, à 2 heures 30 minutes, au Secrétariat général de la Préfecture du département de la Seine, et constatant le dépôt fait par le Sr Messager & Monnoyer d'une demande de brevet d'Invention de quinze années, pour une turbabsine servant à la propulsion mécanique de l'eau, de la vapeur ou autres liquides;

Arrête ce qui suit :

Article premier.

Il est délivré au Sr Messager (Jean Louis) & Monnoyer (Jean Claude), ingénieurs à Paris, le présent brevet d'Invention de quinze années, qui ont commencé à courir le 19 janvier 1855, pour une turbabsine servant à la propulsion mécanique de l'eau, de la vapeur ou autres liquides, à leurs risques et périls, sans examen préalable, et sans garantie, soit de la réalité, de la nouveauté ou du mérite de l'invention, soit de la fidélité ou de l'exactitude de la description, un brevet d'Invention de quinze années, qui ont commencé à courir le 19 janvier 1855, pour une turbabsine servant à la propulsion mécanique de l'eau, de la vapeur ou autres liquides.

Article deuxième.

Le présent arrêté, qui constitue le brevet d'Invention, est délivré aux Sr Messager & Monnoyer pour leur servir de titre.

A cet arrêté demeurera joint le duplicata certifié de la description déposé à l'appui de la demande, et dont la conformité avec l'expédition originale a été dûment reconnue.

Paris, le quatorze juin mil huit cent cinquante-cinq.

Le Ministre Secrétaire d'État
au département de l'Agriculture, du Commerce et des Travaux publics.
Pour le Ministre, et par délégation :
Le Chef de Division,

Brevet de l'invention Turbabsine (1855) © Institut national de la propriété industrielle (INPI)

LES AMATEURS D'ABSINTHE savent que cette boisson si APPÉTISSANTE ET AGRÉABLE; surtout prise avant le repas, acquiert une qualité supérieure lorsqu'elle est parfaitement mélangée, ressemblante alors, (comme on dit), à une purée et devient HYGIÉNIQUE dans cet état.

La TURBABSINE, par sa forme, fonctionne, mieux que tout autre appareil, à la satisfaction des amateurs.

La TURBABSINE est en doublé d'argent fin et d'une jolie forme, pas casuelle, et sa légèreté la préserve des accidents à provenir de chûte. Son bout est muni de petits trous, sur sa circonférence, pour l'écoulement du liquide (servant au mélange) Troubleur.

Sa capacité est moyenne et suffisante.

Il suffit pour la conserver belle et propre de l'essuyer légèrement avec un linge.

AMATEURS !

DEMANDEZ QU'ELLE VOUS SOIT SERVIE AINSI :

L'absinthe étant dans le verre, on place dessus la TURBABSINE, on l'emplit vivement en versant de la hauteur de 10 centimètres. Une minute suffit au mélange.

Les **TURBABSINES** se vendent chez MENAGE (et Cie), Bijoutier, *rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Ile*, 6. PARIS

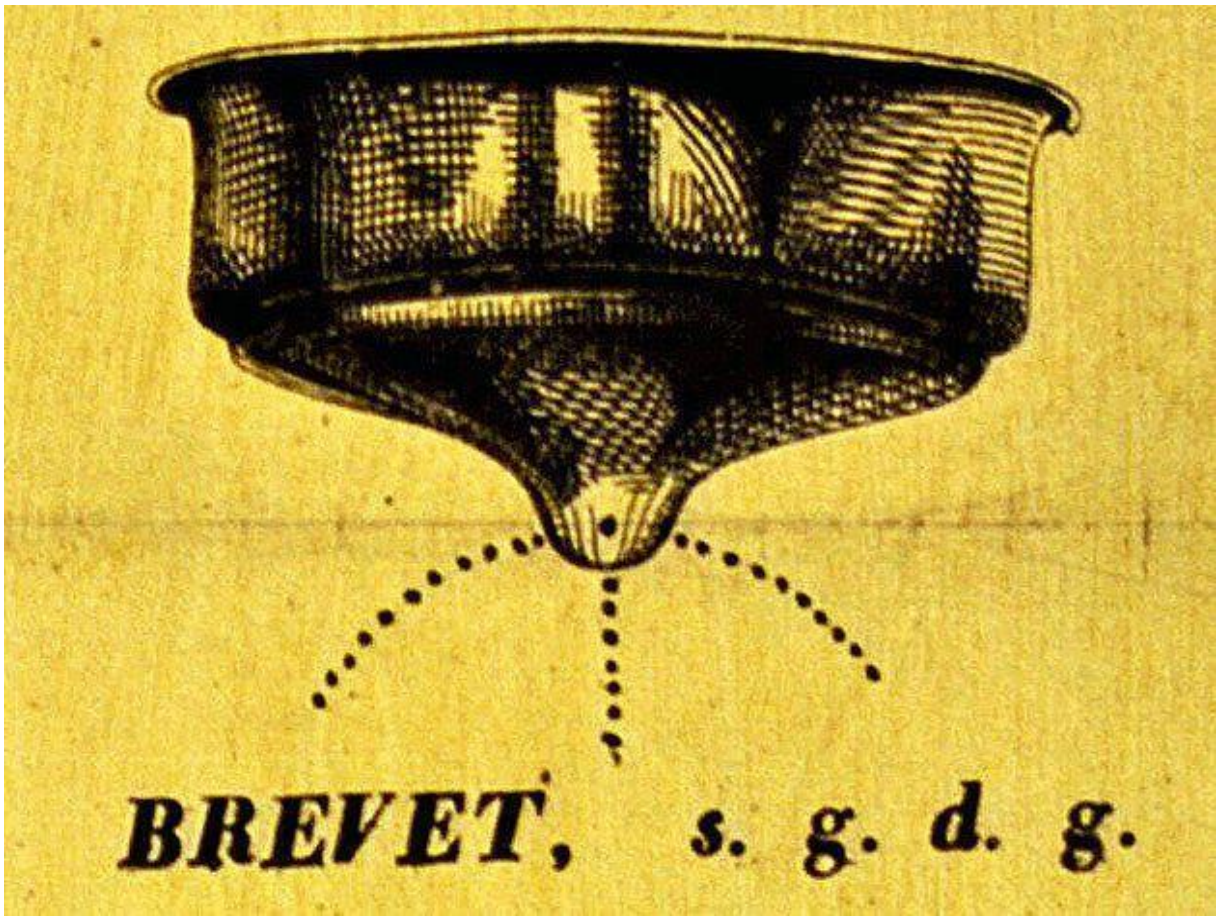
Il y a un Dépôt chez M. MESNAGE, *rue Albouy*, 9.

Les demandes seront reçues par la Poste (affranchir).

On les portera à domicile à Paris.

TYP. BOISSEAU et Cie

Lith. Delaye rue St-Honoré 121



On the previous pages, you find images of the signed patent and fragments from the 1853 affiche that show the functioning of the *Turbabsine*. What this illustrates, besides the simplicity of the machine, is an important social dimension that comes with drinking absinthe. As we can see on the images, there are four holes at the bottom of the water bin. This means that, when mixing absinthe, the machine will produce several trickles of water at the same time. To avoid water spillage, one should thus prepare four glasses of absinthe before using the *Turbabsine*, in order to get optimal results. In other words, the *Turbabsine* is best enjoyed in the company of others. With this new device, people could impress their friends with the latest technology and enjoy their joint absinthe drinking even more.

What becomes clear from this small case study is the following: for absinthe consumption, it is crucial for the experience to be amidst other consumers or *connoisseurs* of the drink. As soon as 1853, when absinthe was still relatively new and unknown, devices were built to make the enjoyment of *la fée verte* in the company of others easier and more pleasurable. Besides, absinthe was first profiled as a drink for the upper class, as advertisement was directed towards 'admirers' of absinthe that could afford the purchase of a device that elegantly prepared the drink in the comfort of one's own house. As the pinnacle of absinthe-consumption equipment, *le Turbabsine* perfectly illustrates the importance of the consumption ritual that was connected to absinthe drinking from the very beginning of its popularity.

Absinthe in relation to other alcohols

Besides its consumption, there were more things that made absinthe stand out with regards to other spirits. Absinthe was drunk for completely different reasons than other alcoholic beverages. In the nineteenth century, the strength of an alcoholic drink was not only measured in quantity, but also in quality. Instead of comparing beverages in the amount of pure alcohol per volume, drinks were categorized on the basis of their origins, ingredients and even production methods. In France, common drinks like wine, beer and cider belonged to a different category than the stronger alcoholic beverages. They were even called *boissons hygieniques*, amplifying their supposedly beneficial function even more. In general, the drinks belonging to this category contained a lower percentage alcohol per volume, and were produced via fermentation. Interestingly, distilled spirits that used these fermented drinks as their base – e.g.

brandy (made from wine) or calvados (from cider) – were also considered distinctive from alcoholic spirits that used different ingredients.

Absinthe did not belong to this category. It was labelled *alcool industrielle* because of its production methods and the use of additional ingredients. Historically, the rise of industrial alcohol can be traced back to a crop disease phylloxera that struck nearly all of the French vineyards in 1853.[200] This made wine extremely scarce (and expensive), which is often interpreted as one of the great factors in the rise of absinthe's popularity. As a consequence, distillers had to look for other ways to produce their alcohols. Many were innovative and turned towards grains, cereals and beets as the bases for new alcoholic drinks, which became known as the new category of *alcool d'industrie.*[201] Since working with these ingredients was completely different from distilling the traditional fruit beverages, new methods had to be found and new 'industrial' machines had to be designed. In the first decades, there were often impurities found in the industrial distillates. Throughout the nineteenth century, many of these impurities were masked by adding colouring or aromatic ingredients. Absinthe is a prime example of such a product, retaining much of its distinct flavour and character from the botanicals that are added quite late in the production process. Nonetheless, despite being of a different character than 'traditional' spirits like brandy and calvados, industrial alcohol became immensely popular during the nineteenth century. While industrially produced alcohol constituted only 7.7% of the total of spirits during the 1840s, it made up for 96,5% in 1880.[202] The biggest reason for this immense success was its price: industrial alcohol was relatively cheap, elusive for disastrous grape-diseases, and could be produced on a much larger scale than the traditional spirits. Later, at the turn of the century, this distinction between absinthe and other alcohols became one of the central arguments to ban absinthe.[203]

Moreover, what made absinthe stand out from other spirits, was the fact that it was generally enjoyed within a particular social context. As mentioned before in the case of the *Turbabsine*, absinthe was best enjoyed in the company of others. Soon, cafés began to profile themselves as absinthe-cafés and organized their spaces so that *la fée verte* could be enjoyed optimally. But besides these external factors, there was an additional reason why the context in which absinthe was consumed is so important. As Henri Lierre illustrates, whom we already encountered in the

[200] Marrus (1974) 128
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] This development will be briefly addressed later in this chapter at page 94 of this thesis.

previous chapter, drinking absinthe had a different function or purpose than other types of alcohol. If one were to arrange a festive house party in the 1860s, one makes sure to cancel any serious affairs the day after; so that nothing can get in the way of enjoying a great evening. One should not have to worry about work, plans or duties when enjoying drinks at the party with their friends. That way, if the champagne goes towards your head, there is only a minor problem, since the day after is kept free from important tasks.[204] The drinks consumed at these festivities – e.g. champagne – thus bring a feeling of liberty and relaxation. Absinthe, on the other hand, is a different story, as it was drunk on many occasions. For example, when one had a negotiation to make, a debt to collect or an important job to finish. Usually, these meetings were held at a local tavern; and while waiting for the arranged time, people often indulged themselves into a few glasses of absinthe.[205] For encouragement, idleness or simply to have a chat with others, absinthe was consumed in between business meetings and appointments. The same was done while waiting for a good dinner to be prepared in the fancier establishments, or when one has to meet a lovely woman, as a means of encouragement. However, as Lierre argues, these decisions almost never turn out right. After a few glasses of absinthe, the ideas behind your project collapse; you are unable to discuss your business interests; you cannot work seriously anymore; you will not have any appetite nor thirst and your dinner will turn out gloomy and dull; and you will no longer dare to present yourself to that lovely woman whom you were going to meet. In the end, "you are good for nothing, only to sleep over your over-repeated libations."[206] Therefore, despite being used as a means of encouragement, absinthe delivers a contra-productive outcome: one will be unable to carry out the activities that were planned for that day. For Lierre, the reason behind this is precisely the moment when absinthe is traditionally consumed: from four to six in the afternoon. The fact that absinthe is drunk as an apéritif (before a meal) contributes to the strong reaction and disturbance of the human mind and body on this already strong alcohol. Contrary to brandy and whisky, which are usually drunk as *digèstif* (after the meal) absinthe is often consumed on an empty stomach. This specific way of consumption, together with its popularity, price and common availability quickly turned many Parisians into 'slaves' of the green fairy, unable to properly function otherwise.[207]

[204] Lierre (1867) 39.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.

This observation stresses the fact that the moment whereupon one's first absinthe was consumed is crucial to its reception. Naturally, strong alcohols that are taken on an empty stomach cause greater disturbances to the human body. It is therefore no surprise that many *absintheurs* were unable to function properly after some glasses of strong liquor without having eaten anything to fill up their stomachs.

Despite these understandable pitfalls of high-dose alcoholic beverages, absinthe was also ascribed some positive effects. Sometimes, it was listed on the menu in the *boissons hygièniques* section, especially when the served absinthe was of superior quality. In the 1880s, there were also experiments with *absinthe oxygénée* – adding oxygen during the production process – which were thought to improve one's respiration and overall health.[208] Also, more generally, absinthe was known to help restore the human body after sea-sickness.[209] These ascribed health benefits were promoted on a large scale, from the posters like those of Cusenier to the menus in the cafés. With these advertisements, producers tried to blur the division between science and non-scientific statements. With developments in the production process and terms like oxygenation, producers constructed claims about scientific properties and health benefits without extensive substantiation. On the avenue des Gobelins, located dangerously close to the Parisian hospitals (just a few hundred metres from the Salpetriere) there was a sign that read: "*La santé pour tous ! Chacun pourra boire sa verte ! 20 centimes le grand verre!"*[210] Despite fierce criticism from the medical and scientific communities, the public drinking places seemed to have their own conceptions on the relation between one's health condition and a glass of absinthe.

[208] *L'Absinthe Cusenier oxygénée, c'est ma santé* (1896) affiche by Nicolas Tamagno. Bibliothèque Forney AF173154GF.
[209] Saintsbury (1920) 125. "Even absinthe, the most open to abuse, is sovereign sometimes, as for instance, after sea-sickness."
[210] Bonneff (1913) 16.

L'Absinthe Cusenier oxygénée, c'est ma santé (1896) affiche by Nicolas Tamagno. Bibliothèque Forney AF173154GF.

III: From bourgeois drink to popular spirit: absinthe in Paris' *places of knowledge*

The price and production quality of absinthe was not the only thing that distinguished the sophisticated absinthe drinker from the alcoholic from the streets. The *place* where one's absinthe was consumed varied greatly amongst different social classes. Besides, the type of absinthe that was served (i.e. cheap or expensive) could vary between these different places as well. In an article from 2005, Thomas Brennan argues that historically, there were three distinct types of public drinking places in Paris, and associated with them three distinct social groups.[211] The first was the café, whose clientele was fairly exclusive and consisted of a well-informed network of rich, upper-class people with a special interest in politics and philosophy. The café as a place of knowledge will be explored further in section IIIa.

Second, there existed spirit shops, "catered to those without reputation, passbook, or morals – the "public woman" and *gens sans aveu."*[212] Spirit shops became increasingly associated with troublemakers and agitators. Brandy was especially seen as having a negative impact on the behaviour of the poorer working classes. During the eighteenth century, brandy was becoming increasingly popular amongst the lower classes.[213] This audience consisted mainly of the poor, misfits and marginal people. Many of the brandy sellers felt the consequences of their audience through increasing police intervention: as many drunkards and disreputable people were arrested, the spirit shop became known as "a site of misbehaviour and marginality."[214] Already at the end of the eighteenth century, the "recent and deadly taste" of brandy was seen as a destructive drink for the working classes: "these laborers who drown their cares with their reason," and their women, "who, like them, drink this dangerous liquor."[215] Interestingly, much of this rhetoric is used again in the debate on absinthe in the nineteenth century. While brandy used to be popular amongst the higher classes of society, it was considered too dangerous for the general working class people. In a similar fashion, absinthe started out as a new and exciting drink that was enjoyed by the elite, but soon fell into the domain of demonization when it reached a bigger audience.

[211] Brennan (2005) 33.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid., 36.
[215] L.-S. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris,* 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1782-88), 2: 19-22. As found in Brennan (2005) 33.

Third, there was the tavern. As Brennan argues, this third type of establishment formed a separated category in terms of public drinking places. In contrast to both spirit shops and cafés, they drew little notice from police spies or the night watch.[216] Spirit shops were prone to police intervention due to their aforementioned attraction of dubious troublemakers, while cafés on the other hand were frequently kept an eye on by government spies. Taverns, however, were considered more innocent, while in fact they were serving the bulk of Parisian society.[217] Being both the drinking place and meeting place for the Parisian working classes, the tavern had a multifaceted role in nineteenth-century social life and played an important role in the history of absinthe. The tavern as a place of knowledge will be discussed further in section IIIb.

Between the cafés, spirit shops and taverns, there is another important category to consider in the context of this paper. Especially from the 1870s onwards, the *cabaret* started to play an increasingly important role in the history of absinthe. The cabaret was a public drinking place that was tailored to writers, artists, poets and others who identified themselves with the bohemian spirit of nineteenth-century Paris. In section IIIc, the history of the cabaret and its role as place of knowledge will be discussed.

To understand the differences between each place of knowledge in relation to the topic of absinthe on the streets, a distinction between three types of public drinking establishments – the café, the tavern and the cabaret – will serve as a framework for the following sections of this thesis. In doing so, we will visit different places of knowledge that serve as an example for a certain social group or aspect in the history of absinthe. Consecutively, they are France's early café culture, its working class drinking establishments and the artistic cabarets of the *bohemians*.

[216] Brennan (2005) 33.
[217] Ibid.

IIIa) Le Procope and early café culture

There is a crucial difference between the café and other types of nineteenth-century drinking establishments in terms of its audience. Rather than appealing to people that sought distraction from their everyday working conditions or those who simply wanted to enjoy themselves, the café became known as a place for conversation, meaningful encounters and political debate. This popular image is mainly constructed in secondary literature about cafés during the eighteenth century.[218] In reality, it is likely that cafés were still often dealing with excessive behaviour, bar fights and drunkenness. The picture of an enlightened café audience that politely discussed philosophy and politics seems highly romanticized. However, in order to make a clear distinction between the café and other types of public drinking establishments, it makes sense to elaborate on this popular image, as it was still believed and promoted highly during the second half of the nineteenth century. In relation to this thesis, investigating this romanticized caricature of the café together with factual information and nuance, will tell us most about the café as a place of knowledge.

The history of the café

The birth of the café is often placed in the eighteenth century, as a result of an emerging middle-class (*bourgeoisie*) between royalty, clergy and peasants. Of course, there were working class inns and elite guesthouses, but neither of them were considered 'public'. They were targeted to a very specific (often local) audience and could not be visited by everyone. Therefore, although they were places of encounters, there was not much interaction with other social groups taking place in these establishments. The café offered a different type of social meeting place than the already existing ones. Instead of the segregated *etablissements* of the elite or the clergy, and different from the working class taverns, a third type of social drinking place arose. In much of the literature, this is seen as the beginning of the constitution of a *public opinion.*[219] It must be noted, however, that the 'public opinion' was by no means the opinion of *all* – eighteenth-

[218] For example Habermas (1989), Chartier (1991) etc.

[219] See, for example, Brennan taverns 37, Original: J. Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. T. Burger (Cambridge, MA, 1989). Or Chartier (1991) 21.

century 'public spaces' were by no means open to all, but remained highly exclusive to a small audience of rich, white, learned males.[220]

The café is an interesting space to consider as a place *of knowledge*. Cafés were constantly trying to physically distinguish themselves from other public drinking places. This meant that their interior was often decorated with crystals, marble and chandeliers, aimed to resemble that of a luxurious mansion or *hotel particulier*.[221] Instead of the light atmosphere and cosy interior of the taverns, where guests were seeking leisure and entertainment, the café conveyed an atmosphere of sophistication and eloquence: "These cafes became a kind of public salon, where news and ideas were exchanged and conversation, rather than recreation, was prized."[222] Gaining knowledge was thus an important aspect of the café experience. The café patrons contributed to this by providing their clientele with letters from abroad, literature and other news from outside. Shop owners often collected interesting letters from abroad to share with their customers. Periodicals and newspapers were frequently available to read for the customers, as well as writing material and games, which could be borrowed at the café.[223] Interestingly, many of the advertisements for absinthe – like the one by Cusenier which shows a man enjoying his absinthe in front of a newspaper – refer to this aspect of café culture. [224] The accumulation of knowledge for its customers was an important aspect of the Parisian café.

Despite the public display and accessibility of periodicals, it was not the materials but moreover the *interaction* with the material that turned cafés into places of knowledge. Daily news was a topic of debate and discussion, and obtained a new meaning and importance in conversation with others. This way, cafés became the meeting place for critical thought and enlightening conversations. Besides one-to-one encounters, the café facilitated rooms to gather with groups. Usually, there were two separate meeting rooms: one for regular business and one for political groups, trade unions and popular societies.[225] However, not every café owner was successful in providing one's audience with meeting rooms and social security.

Public drinking places formed a heterogenous group of establishments, varying both in audience and police intervention. Although there was no official distinguishment between

[220] R. Chartier, "Culture populaire et culture politique dans l'ancien regime," in K. Baker, ed., *The Political Culture of the Old Regime, 4* vols. (Oxford, 1989), 1: 248; Brennan 33.
[221] Brennan (2005) 32.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Marrus (1974) 130.
[224] See page 85 of this thesis.
[225] Marrus (1974) 131.

different kinds of public houses, the police's surveillance was quite narrowly targeted in practice: "The police were particularly concerned about those places that catered to the disreputable elements in society, and their patrols led them time and again to the same neighbourhoods and the same offending shops."[226] This way, certain areas of the city became accustomed to regular police patrolling. Some of the shop owners maintained good relations with the police, but others moved their establishments to different parts of Paris. This contributed to the forming of several 'clusters' of cafés during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century – for example along the *grands boulevards* or in the Quartier Latin. The outskirts of Paris, on the other hand, housed most of the taverns and working class establishments. When looking at the heyday of absinthe, we can still detect this pattern during the 1860s, where most of the bourgeois cafés are still located around the great boulevards – primarily the boulevard des Italiens – or in the Quartier Latin. During the 1880s, however, this image shifted: many new public drinking places were established around the place Pigalle and in Montmartre. The bourgeois cafés, which were clinging tightly to their identity of enlightenment and politics, stayed behind in the old city centre.

Le Procope

To illustrate the concept and identity of the café more clearly, this subsection will give a concrete example of such a public drinking place. One of the famous Parisian cafés that is mentioned both by Delvau in 1862 and Child in 1889 is the *Café Procope.* Although being relevant during the nineteenth century, the history of this place goes back much further. Café Procope was established in 1688 at the rue de l'Ancien-Commedie, near the Boulevard Saint-Germain.[227] Situated on the Left Bank, the café was located quite close to the Quartier Latin and the neighbourhood around the Odéon.

[226] Brennan (2005) 36.
[227] Delvau (1862) 91.

Image : the Café Procope around 1900, Rue de l'ancienne Comédie, 13 © BnF, gallica [228]

Besides its convenient location, the café was popular because of its history with the great names of the French Enlightenment. Writers like Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot gathered here and held many of their public meetings at the Procope. It was one of the first cafés with such an intellectual audience, and the *philosophes* and *encyclopédists* set an example for many later academic and political groups to hold their gatherings in a café. The frequent visits of intellectual heroes gave the Procope a great name and status. Importantly, the *philosophes* often held their meetings and discussions under the influence of coffee, that "delicious black poison."[229] Coffee thus became the drink of the revolting upper class – although many cafés were serving beer, wine and other alcohols as well.

Despite its grand reputation as an intellectual café, the Procope lost most of its previous *grandeur* during the second half of the nineteenth century. Delvau mentions that the café has lost its image as the home of writers and intellectuals, since most of the literary circles in Paris

[228] Accessed via https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105190583/f1.item.r=caf%C3%A9%20paris#
[229] Delvau (1862) 91.

have moved to the heights of Montmartre: "It is a shame that, although Le Procope provides an ideal setting to read, meditate and remember, it is now [around 1862] mostly occupied by billiard players and drunkards."[230] Its downstairs and first floor rooms are deliberately ignored in Delvau's description of the café, as they are 'invaded' by students during the evening.[231] Some twenty-five years later, in Child's description, the situation is not much better:

> In the Latin Quarter there are but few cafés of historical interest, and even those that have survived the transformation of the district do not retain even a vestige of their pristine glory. Thus the Café Procope, with its souvenirs of Diderot, d'Alembert, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Holbach, Voltaire, and Mirabeau, exists now with difficulty as a very cheap eating-house.[232]

The descriptions of both Delvau and Child illustrate that much of the popular story about France's café culture has been romanticized. The relation between Voltaire, Diderot and the Procope is often stressed and exploited, but has become irrelevant already in the 1860s. Le Procope was no longer an intellectual coffeehouse of the *Enlightenment*: visitors were playing billiard, students were partying, and – most importantly – people were getting drunk from absinthe instead of sipping their coffee.[233]

[230] Delvau (1862) 95. Loosely translated for readability.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Child (1889) 9.
[233] Delvau (1862) 95.

Image: Encyclopedic serie of the industrial history of coffee (1881) Série encyclopédique des leçons dechoses illustrée. Feuille n° 5, Histoire industrielle. Le café :[le Café des gourmets de l'usine Trébucien][234]

Alcohol versus coffee and tea

Many of the early Parisian cafés could be considered faded glory, but parts of their status and imagination stayed strong nonetheless during the nineteenth century. For example, a cup of coffee was still identified with the great *philosophes* of the eighteenth century. One of the essential differences between cafés and other drinking establishments is the importance of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. While many places served great quantities of alcoholic drinks on a daily basis, the *café* remained inevitably connected to tea and coffee, from which the public drinking establishment derived its name. Interestingly, the type of drinks that were served reflected, to a certain extent, the audience that was visiting different meeting places. In the coffeehouses, "coffee and tea were touted as sober, intellectual drinks suited to a literate, discriminating clientele."[235] Besides being a means of conversation, coffee was an interesting topic in itself. Produced in the Americas, it formed a new and exciting beverage for the European elite. The knowledge about coffee harvesting and production was widely spread, as one can see in the affiche on the previous page. It displays, in great detail, an *encyclopaedic* explanation of the 'industrial history' of coffee.

Up until the late nineteenth century, coffee and tea were still considered luxury drinks. This was better suited for literary audiences, authors and members of the parliament. The Café Henri IV for example, a bourgeois café located on the left bank near the Pont Neuf, was known to serve the best English tea in Paris. According to Delvau, this café was the only place where they served *thé à l'Anglaise* during the French Second Empire (1852-1870).[236] Coffee and tea were promoted to attract a specific audience to one's café.

In the affiche below, one can find an advertisement for *essence de café* from 1 franc for 15 cups.[237] With the title '*A Voltaire, le Roi du Café'* the connection with early café culture becomes evidently clear. Even halfway through the nineteenth century (the affiche is from 1857), coffee was still considered an intellectual beverage, completely different from other (alcoholic) drinks. It must be stressed that the clientele for coffee in the 1850s still consisted mainly of upper-class and bourgeois audiences. With a stunning amount of approximately 110 euro – making roughly 7 euro per cup of coffee – it is very unlikely that the less wealthier classes indulged themselves in a cup of coffee each day. Public drinking places that were most

[235] Brennan (2005) 32.
[236] Delvau (1862) 294.
[237] In comparison, 1 Franc in 1857 would have the same relative value as 110 euro in 2015. Calculated via https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html

famous for their coffees and teas, were usually considered as typical elite and bourgeois cafés in primary source material from the later nineteenth century.[238]

Image : 'A Voltaire, le roi du café' (1857) Affiche from the café at Passage Choiseul 21 © gallicaBNF[239]

[238] For example, the café Henri IV (which was famous for their English tea) had an exclusively bourgeois audience. Delvau (1862) 294.

[239] Accessed via https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9004262b.r=caf%C3%A9%20paris?rk=1802584;0#

So far, absinthe has not really found its explicit place in the typical Parisian bourgeois café. However, there is much evidence that absinthe was drunk in the higher-end establishments; especially during the 1850s, when absinthe was still considered a drink for the elite. In the mid-nineteenth century, the old city centre of Paris was packed with cafés and pubs, from the previously bourgeois *Procope* to the absinthe paradise of *l'Ile de Calypso.* The name of another café – the *Laiterie du Paradoxe* – raises questions for Delvau, when he writes about the place in 1862. After all, there was not much milk consumed or produced at the place (*laiterie* translates to 'dairy farm' or 'dairy factory'). Delvau recalls one of the customers who started his lunch with a *petit verre* (presumably wine), continued with black coffee, a piece of brie, a beef-steak, watercress, *un litre* (again, probably wine) and he finished off his meal with a glass of absinthe.[240] No sign of milk at all, but many other drinks that flowed. According to Delvau, the café's name derives from its guests' reputation to generate dizzying conversations and paradoxical statements. Under the influence of wine and absinthe, the guests of the *Laiterie* produce "conversations abracadabrante" that are inimitable for the average passerby.[241] Even in the upper class cafés, loudmouths and drunkards were very normal.

Especially in the 1850s and 1860s, when absinthe was still fairly exclusive, cafés were the centres of absinthe consumption. If absinthe admirers had not yet purchased their own *Turbabsine*, the 'professeurs de l'absinthe' were most likely enjoying their spirits and talking about its proper preparation in the café. An important book in the social history of absinthe – primarily in its ban and demonization – is Balesta's *Absinthe et absintheurs*. It provides us with one of the first caricatures of the *absintheur* sitting in a café*:* "Dull, brow-beaten, eyes lifeless, hollow cheeked, he stays for whole days with elbows on the table, staring with a sombre mien at his empty glass and extinguished pipe."[242] Published in 1860, this description marks an important shift in the exclusivity and availability of absinthe. Before 1860, absinthe was still a quite expensive drink – at least compared to wine – and its use was limited to an exclusive clientele. We have already seen that the drink was first introduced by the French army, who brought the bitter taste for absinthe over from Northern Africa when they returned from the Algerian War. In the first place, to drink absinthe meant to glorify the French Nation, as the

[240] Translated by author « Je me rappelle avoir vu Privat commencer son déjeuner par un petit verre , le continuer par du café noir, un soupçon de brie, un beef-steak , du cresson, un litre, et le terminer par un verre d'absinthe » Delvau (1862) 86.
[241] Delvau (1862) 87.
[242] Balesta (1862) 62. Translation by Adams (2004) 4.

drink was associated with patriotism, vigour, the army and the overseas empire.[243] It was therefore primarily drunk by the military and those who had great affection with the French army. This did not immediately turn absinthe into a phenomenon: the military had quite a reputation for enjoying their strong alcoholic spirits.[244] Later, the richer middle class *bourgeoisie* and elite artists started appreciating the drink more and more. There were cheaper alternatives to absinthe, but these imitations were completely different than the prestigious green drink: "In the 1850s and 1860s the poor were not drinking the same absinthe as the rich: small operators were producing cheap copies of absinthe, often made with adulterated ingredients but always highly alcoholic."[245] In the next section on working-class taverns, the differences between expensive absinthe and cheaper alternatives will be discussed further.[246] For now, Balesta's description shows that seasoned absintheurs could already be distinguished in 1860, regardless of the café being somewhat more exclusive than other public drinking places.

This shows, once again, that the popular image of the café as a modest place with a moderate, intellectual audience is both romanticized and exaggerated. Coffee was consumed, yes; but so where wine, spirits and absinthe. For now, the most important observation is the relative difference between cafés and other types of public drinking establishments in terms of audience, interior and its social context as a place of knowledge. While many historical developments can be linked to cafés like the Procope, we must not overestimate their prolonged influence on Parisian social life. Cafés might have been the driving force between Paris' seventeen- and eighteen-century social life; but taverns and cabarets were the key players in the nineteenth century.

[243] Adams (2004) 4.
[244] Monin (1889) 89.
[245] Adams (2004) 5.
[246] See page 105 of this thesis.

IIIb) Les Halles and the working class taverns

The history of the French tavern is a research topic on its own, but its development and importance during the nineteenth century is worth mentioning in relation to the story of absinthe. While cafés were undoubtedly destined for a wealthy bourgeois audience, the tavern was the alternative social meeting place for the rest of French society. Much like the café, the tavern was a public drinking place that facilitated a public place, room for encounters and (not unimportantly) the consumption of drinks.

The multifaceted role of the tavern

For the middle and lower classes, the tavern was the central meeting hub where much of the daily news and gossip was discussed. Not that there was much choice: the drinking *debit* was "the principal if not sole place in which popular sociability could take place."[247] The majority of the Parisian working class was living in cramped neighbourhoods with poor heating and minimal lighting. Therefore, to escape their poor living conditions and unattractive houses, people often visited taverns or bistros where the working man could feel *chez lui*.[248] In the tavern, people did not have to worry about work, warmth or feeding their families. The drinking debit provided a place for social encounters and de-stressing (or escaping) from everyday life. However, the tavern culture did not originate as a place for leisure. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was still very common to pay workers during the day, often in terms of food and (primarily) alcoholic beverages. Later, as a typical effect of the industrialized society, the difference between work and not-work became clearer, with alcohol consumption finding its place in the latter category.[249] The working-class now had to find independent places where they could consume their daily drinks, since drinking at the workplace became less tolerated. Naturally, they turned to local taverns for this daily moment of relaxation.

The role of the shop owner (or *débitant*) was crucial in the functioning of public drinking places. The patron was an important and respected figure in the neighbourhood by taking up the role of 'social confessor'.[250] Much like today, the *habitues* in a tavern shared their deepest secrets and confessions to the man behind the bar and asked for advice to those who served them their

[247] Marrus (1974) 130.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 133.
[250] Ibid., 130.

drinks. Besides this role of social confessor, it was quite usual for shop owners to take responsibility for the personal finances of their customers. Relatively easy banking activities were done by the patron: accepting deposits and withdrawals, providing credit or cashing money (with a lower commission fee than the authorities) and taking charge of workers' salary.[251] In the same fashion, *debits de boissons* were usually places where one would look to find employment. Candidates for heavy manual work were found especially in these establishments, turning the local tavern into a placement agency.[252] Besides this role, the debits – usually the local taverns; cafés not so much – provided basic needs such as daily meals and lodging. As a consequence of this, some taverns in the larger French cities were accused of becoming the centres for prostitution during the nineteenth century.[253] However, most importantly and to the majority of people, the public drinking debits were a place to meet: "where ordinary people celebrated a birth or a wedding, and […] to which mourners would repair after a funeral."[254]

Its facilitation as a social meeting place and business centre was unique and played an important role in its nineteenth century character and popularity in France. At the end of the nineteenth century, Paris alone had around 40.000 debits de boissons, with a stunning rate of 11.25 debits for every 1.000 residents – the greatest proportion of any major city in the world.[255] In 1900, France had "by far the most drinking places of any country in the world, and was second only to Belgium in having the fewest inhabitants (87) per outlet."[256] How did drinking places get from a new type of public place to the thousands of debits that were engrained in social dynamics and everyday life of Paris within two centuries?

When we look at the figures, there have been drastic changes in public drinking since the Franco-Prussian War, both in terms of scale and quantity. From the mid-1870s, the total amount of public drinking places rapidly increased. One of the reasons for this rise was new law enforcement by the Republican government in 1880, which made it much easier for businessmen to set up debit de boissons.[257] This was also reflected in the numbers of consumed

[251] Marrus (1974) 130.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid., 130-131.
[256] Ibid., 130.
[257] Ibid., 129.

alcohol, which nearly quadrupled from 1830 to 1890.[258] Besides quantitative differences, there are signs of a qualitative change in consumed alcohol. In France, there was a big difference between fermented alcohols – brandy, calvados, beer and wine – and industrialized alcohols, like aperitifs and (of course) absinthe. Traditionally, industrial alcohols were met with relatively more criticism and deemed more dangerous, while fermented alcohols were generally considered unharmful and healthy. It is therefore striking that while industrially produced alcohol made up for only 7,7% of the total alcohol consumption in the 1840s, it constituted 96,5% of the total in 1880.[259] This explosion of industrially produced alcohol reflected a different setting of consumption – in a domestic sphere, at the dinner table, wine remained king; but in local bars, taverns and guinguettes, spirits became more and more popular. According to Michael Marrus, the increase in alcohol intake suggests a major extension of social drinking that emerged between the late 1870s and 1880s: "people were drinking more from this time, but they were also drinking more socially."[260] Apparently, spirits were better suited for this social drinking than the traditional dominant alcoholic beverage in France: wine.

Geographical aspects of the working class taverns

Geographically speaking, there are some interesting differences between the different types of public drinking places. In most large French cities, there were so-called *guinguettes* located at the outskirts, just beyond the city limits that were subject to special taxes on alcohol.[261] The *Taverne du Bagne* is an example of this fashion: located at the Boulevard de Clichy (near Montmartre) it was, at first, not officially located within the city of Paris, but just outside of it.[262] This way, by placing their establishment just outside of the city, shop owners could evade special taxes and serve their drinks at a reduced price. The success of this concept showed: guinguettes became increasingly popular during the nineteenth century and many people – especially during the weekends – walked in to "pass the day drinking away from the urban core."[263]

[258] Marrus (1974) 127.
[259] Ibid., 128.
[260] Ibid., 126.
[261] Ibid., 130.
[262] As mentioned on page 100 of this thesis, Montmartre became part of the city of Paris in 1856. Before that, it was counted as a separate village in the Parisian surroundings.
[263] Marrus (1974) 130.

Image : Taverne du Bagne (1885) at the Boulevard Clichy © gallica/BnF [264]

Much of the guinguettes were established by wine merchants who set up their new taverns in the outskirts of Paris to sell wine at a discount.[265] As an additional advantage, guinguettes were more spacious than the crowded city taverns, making it possible to host larger crowds and even create dancing floors. In other words, the formula of the guinguette worked:

> Guinguettes offered cheap wine at an inconvenient distance from most of Paris, yet they turned this handicap into their chief attraction. Away from the familiar scenes of the neighbourhood, and with enough space to accommodate dancing and attract crowds, the guinguette offered a new commodity: entertainment.[266]

[264] Accessed via https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8456928g.r=taverne%20paris?rk=364808;4
[265] Brennan (2005) 30.
[266] Ibid., 31.

It is important to note that there is still a great difference between the guinguette and the café in terms of atmosphere. The guinguette found its 'glamour' not in elegance, or eloquence, but rather in "frenzy and festivity".[267] Different from the café or spirit shop, the guinguette was a place for passion, celebration and entertainment. In the broader picture, these guinguettes paved the way for the cabarets to flourish during the *Belle Epoque* – focused not on an exclusive clientele but on large-scale entertainment. The guinguette's audience consisted of a mixed populace, while the café décor tried to appeal to a more elite and exclusive clientele.[268] Not only in terms of audience, but also in its social function did the café play a different role from other public drinking places.

Despite the fact that some of the larger guinguettes were established in the outskirts of the city, taverns could be found all over Paris. During the nineteenth century, taverns largely outnumbered the elite cafés. Naturally, the population visiting taverns was much bigger at the time than the amount of people visiting cafés. While taverns might have been less visible on the greater boulevards and in literature, historical writings and documentation; one could find local taverns in nearly every working district.

Absinthe consumption in the tavern

If we return to the central beverage of this thesis, we see that absinthe had a special role for the working class. In section II of this chapter, we have seen that absinthe was drunk for different reasons than other alcohols; often consumed in between business meetings and appointments as a sort of 'waiting drink'.[269] The role of the local tavern as a centre for business and employment strengthened this habit even more, as cafés became business centres in disguise. For workers, it was important to visit the café in order to get jobs. They often borrowed money from shop owners, which was formed into a bi-monthly loan including drinks served in the café; often aperitifs (with absinthe being the most popular amongst them). Of course, the shop owner played an important role in providing work through his contacts. Besides, the loan gives the debtor a considerable influence if one considers that he has in addition the privilege of centralizing the job offers. This way, shop owners could favour those who were not only

[267] Brennan (2005) 31.
[268] Ibid., 32.
[269] See page 83 of this thesis.

suitable for the job, but moreover amongst the café's best customers.[270] Absinthe was thus sometimes used as a means of payment amongst the working class and was helpful in the process of finding employment. This broadens the scope of absinthe use even more, and illustrates the specific way wherein absinthe was used in working class taverns.

Within Paris, the area around *Les Halles* is interesting with regard to its public drinking audience. On the one hand, *Les Halles* is located at the very centre of Paris: in the first arrondissement, close to the Louvre and the Royal Palace. This makes the area prone to high rents and bourgeoise cafés with an exclusive clientele. However, with *Les Halles* being a gigantic food market; there are many workers and vendors around the area. Amongst these classes, absinthe was the go-to aperitif, which meant that *Les Halles* had many potential absinthe buyers. This meant that the public drinking audience in this area was twofold: rich, upper class people that lived in the first arrondissement in Paris; and the working class that was involved in the giant Les Halles food market.

While many of the lower working classes were consuming absinthe, there were also more expensive cafés in the area around Les Halles. An example of this can be found on the affiche below from 1856. Translated to today's value, one had to pay 35 euros (equal to 1,5 hours of labour) for either a complete lunch or a *bière de Strasbourg.*[271] Absinthe is not mentioned on the menu, but with these prices we can speculate that this affiche was not targeted to the larger working class population around Les Halles.

[270] Bonneff (1913) 15-16.

[271] Calculated via https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque natio

Image: Affiche from the 'Grand Café des Halles Centrales' *from 1856 with several prices and activities © gallica*

Nonetheless, with some exceptions aside, absinthe was cheap. It was the most popular amongst the distilled spirits and could be purchased for little more than 10 cents – with some cafés in the 'working men's quarters' (e.g. Les Halles) going as low as 3 cents per glass.[272] This shows that although absinthe is usually associated with artists and a specific bohemian lifestyle, it was equally popular amongst the working class, who made up the majority of the Parisian population. It is evident that the working classes were consuming the majority of absinthe. When looking at statistics, it is nearly impossible to explain the rise of absinthe consumption, distilled spirits and alcohol in general without taking into account the majority of French society.[273] The working class was drinking absinthe, and probably lots of it. Especially when

[272] Adams (2004) 124.
[273] Marrus (1974) 125.

absinthe became cheaper, during the 1870s, the consumption of absinthe skyrocketed. As mentioned earlier, however, there were some differences in the type of absinthe that was consumed.

Different types of absinthe: price and production

Throughout the nineteenth century, there were different types of absinthe on the market. The most prestigious, commonly associated with the great names like Pernod Fils, Leon Duval and Premier Fils, was labelled *absinthe Suisse.* This type of absinthe was most commonly served in the prestigious cafés or more expensive drinking places.[274] These spirits usually had an alcohol-by-volume percentage of 60%, 70% or 72%.[275] The label 'Suisse' did not mean that the drink had to come from Switzerland, but rather that it was produced via the traditional method – which originated in the city of Pontarlier, on the border with Switzerland. It was here were Henri-Louis Pernod had established the first absinthe distillery in 1805.[276] There was also the cheaper *absinthe fine* and *absinthe ordinaire* (with 55% and 45% alcohol, respectively) and *absinthe commune* – the cheapest of them all – containing 40% alcohol per volume.[277] However, the stronger *absinthe Suisse* remained the most popular style of them all. Absinthe's with a lower alcohol content were significantly less successful: in the 1860s, when absinthe was still fairly exclusive, for every litre of *absinthe commune*, people consumed around 20 litres of *absinthe Suisse.*[278] Later, cheaper producers started to imitate the strong character of *absinthe Suisse*, albeit with cheaper ingredients and production methods. To complicate matters even more, there were, besides differences in alcohol content, differences in the production process of absinthe.

Generally speaking, there were two methods of producing absinthe. The first is infusing the alcohol with plants and botanicals and boiling the mixture to give absinthe its distinctive taste. Later, after the maceration, the alcohol is distilled and therefore receives a higher alcohol percentage.[279] In principle, this process is the traditional way of making absinthe. The second method is slightly different, using no real plants but adding different botanical-essences to the

[274] *l'Hydropathe*, 15 (5 August 1879), 4.
[275] Moreau (1863) 16.
[276] Luauté (2007) 517.
[277] Moreau (1863) 16.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Luauté (2007) 517.

cold distilled alcohol. In this second method, there is no need for boiling and additional distilling, since the plant extracts can be mixed into the alcohol directly. This method is quicker, since there is no time needed for the infusion of botanicals into the alcohol. Interestingly, this second method is mentioned by Challand in the experiments he did together with Magnan around 1870.[280] The advantage of this method, at least from a scientific perspective, is that the amount of ingredients present in the mixture can be determined much more specifically. For taste, however, the traditional way of infusing alcohol with real botanicals is recommended, and was the dominant approach for the more prestigious absinthe producers. Next to this, there are other factors involved in the quality of absinthe, beside alcohol content and production methods. Since there are many different plants and botanicals used in the production of absinthe, nearly every absinthe producer had their own distinct recipe, making every absinthe brand different.

The price and availability of absinthe changed drastically in the 1870s. The aforementioned wine-disease phylloxera that devastated France's vineyards made many producers turn to cheaper grain and beet alcohols.[281] With wines becoming more and more expensive, the price of industrially produced alcohol – including absinthe, which was most popular amongst the distilled spirits – dropped significantly. This decrease in price meant an explosion of absinthe consumption amongst the poorer working classes, who could now better afford a glass of absinthe than their regular wine. In 1873, a glass of absinthe cost 15 cents, while a kilo of bread was 50 cents.[282] Not only was absinthe cheaper than food, it was also easier to obtain, being sold at nearly every café, wine merchant or small shop. But despite this great availability, there remained differences between the elite and 'poor man's absinthe' throughout the second half of the nineteenth century: "In 1894 in the 'great cafés', the price was only 10c, while in 'working men's quarters' absinthe could be had for 3c."[283] There are very few sources that explicitly say something about the *quality* of absinthe that is consumed in public drinking places. Given its extremely low price, however, it is natural to assume that the absinthe consumed in taverns was of inferior quality compared to the absinthe that was served in the cafés. Its price was probably

[280] Challand (1871) 56-57. "Toutes les essences sont préparées d'avance; on n'emploie plus l'infusion des différentes plantes citées plus haut. On fabrique simplement à froid la liqueur d'absinthe en ajoutant à de l'alcool à divers degrés."

[281] Accessed via https://www.absinthes.com/absinthe-encyclopedia/the-war-on-absinthe/absinthe-et-absintheurs-by-henri-balesta/

[282] Adams (2004) 124.

[283] Ibid.

the most likely explanation for absinthe's enormous popularity amongst the working classes, and the tavern was its most prevalent facilitator. Despite additional taxes and price regulations that were carried out in the later nineteenth century, absinthe was there to stay – and its low production costs and high value-for-money played an important role herein.

In conclusion, there are a few interesting observations to make in the working class tavern. First, they had an important role in the daily lives of most Parisians. Being a centre for business, providing financial loans and a central meeting place for the lower classes, the multifaceted role of the tavern made it into a cornerstone of Parisian social life. Second, the guinguettes in the outskirts of Paris paved the way for the later cabarets, which became popular for their focus on entertainment and festivity instead of 'modest' high-class public drinking. Third, absinthe was sometimes used as a means of payment and was the go-to beverage to order at the tavern. Absinthe was deeply ingrained into the functioning of the tavern amongst its working class population. Finally, the price, production and availability of absinthe were all factors that contributed to its popularity amongst the working class. It must be noted, however, that the lower classes in Paris were drinking other types of absinthe than the richer bourgeois clientele was in their cafés. In the final section of this chapter, the focus will be on the remaining category of public drinking places in this thesis: the artistic cabarets.

IIIc) Le Rat Mort and Le Chat Noir: artists, women and the cabarets of Montmartre

Monin, a Parisian doctor that was greatly influenced by the writings of Magnan, wrote in 1889 that there were three types of *consommateurs* in Paris. Following the theory of psychiatrist Henri Legrand du Saulle, he distinguishes "trois familles [des] buveurs parisiens: Consommateurs de vin blanc: femmes […] ; Consommateurs d'absinthe : artistes, déclassés, irréguliers de la Bourse, de la presse et des théâtres, poètes incompris, etc.; [et] Consommateurs de vin rouge : la masse des travailleurs. »[284] This illustrates the strong connection between class, gender and social status to the type of drink. Of course, the description by Monin is both oversimplified and wrong, as we have seen that the audience and category of drink were much

[284] Monin (1889) 88.

more flexible. When researching absinthe, however, it is inescapable to talk about some of these stereotypical classifications.

The most well-known social group that is connected to the consumption of absinthe in the Parisian cafés is that of the *bohemians.* Consisting mainly of artists, poets, writers, painters or other people strongly affiliated with the artistic lifestyle of nineteenth-century Paris. Secondary literature is saturated with the well-known stories of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Vincent van Gogh. For precisely this reason, I will not explicitly focus on them in this section. Rather, I analyse the different literary circles – rather than their individuals – and see which drinking establishments they frequently visited.

Cabarets formed the home base for many of the bohemian artists, and literary circles often held their gatherings in these public drinking places. This turns the Parisian cabarets into interesting places of knowledge, where the artistic inspiration and cognitive of absinthe was discussed and transferred. Some of the famous nineteenth-century cabarets were in close contact (and competition) with each other, as there were certain clusters of cabarets that were most frequently visited by bohemian artists and literary circles.

A striking example of such a cluster is the neighbourhood of Montmartre, whose cabarets became extremely popular in the 1880s and 1890s. Montmartre started off as a small village just outside of Paris, but experienced a major transformation during the Belle Epoque, when it became the centre for entertainment and bohemian gaiety in the French capital and beyond. Montmartre also became a hub for artistic encounters and literary discussions, shifting (a part of) Parisian culture from its heart to the outer parts of the city. This idea was enforced by the view that the centre of Paris was dominated by ‘old’ powers like the government and traditionalist bourgeoisie, while places like Montmartre gave room for the spirit to freely move.

The most distinct neighbourhood that was known for its artistic cabarets was located in the north of Paris, around the Place Pigalle and towards the former village of Montmartre.

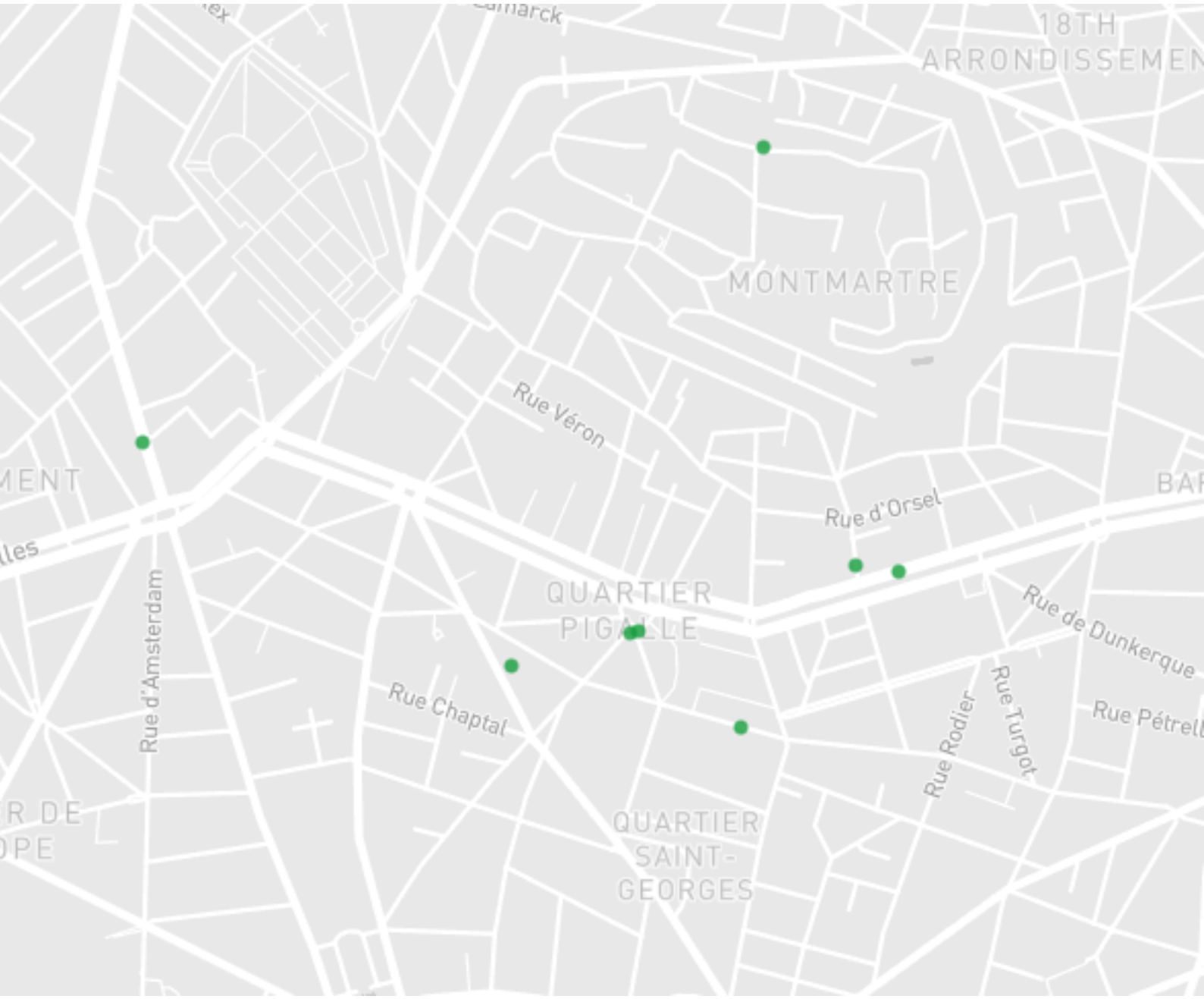


Image: all the public drinking places around the Place Pigalle that were visited by artists and bohemians (snapshot taken 20-07-2021)

On this map, we find cabarets such as *Le Chat Noir, Le Rat Mort, Au Lapin Agile* and other places like the *Café Gourbois*, the *Nouvelle Athènes* and *Café des Incohérents.* These cafés are often referred to in secondary literature, and some of them even remain visible in contemporary pop culture (such as the famous logo of the *Chat Noir*'s black cat). While many of these places have closed shop in the meanwhile, *Au Lapin Agile* still exists as an artistic cabaret, and the

Chat Noir's third and final location is now transformed into a hotel.[285] In general, this area of Paris is responsible for the imagination of the cabarets and bohemian lifestyle of the Belle Epoque. However, they were not the only public drinking establishments where artistic circles gathered around a glass of absinthe.

The image and influence of Montmartre is often exaggerated, as we will see later in this chapter.[286] The division between working class and bourgeois, establishment and bohemians, and city-centre and its outskirts is not black and white. When looking at the broader picture, we see that there were many more artistic cabarets than the famous one's in Montmartre in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the following map, all public drinking places whose audiences consisted of 'artistes', 'gens de lettres', 'bohemians' or literary audiences are plotted.

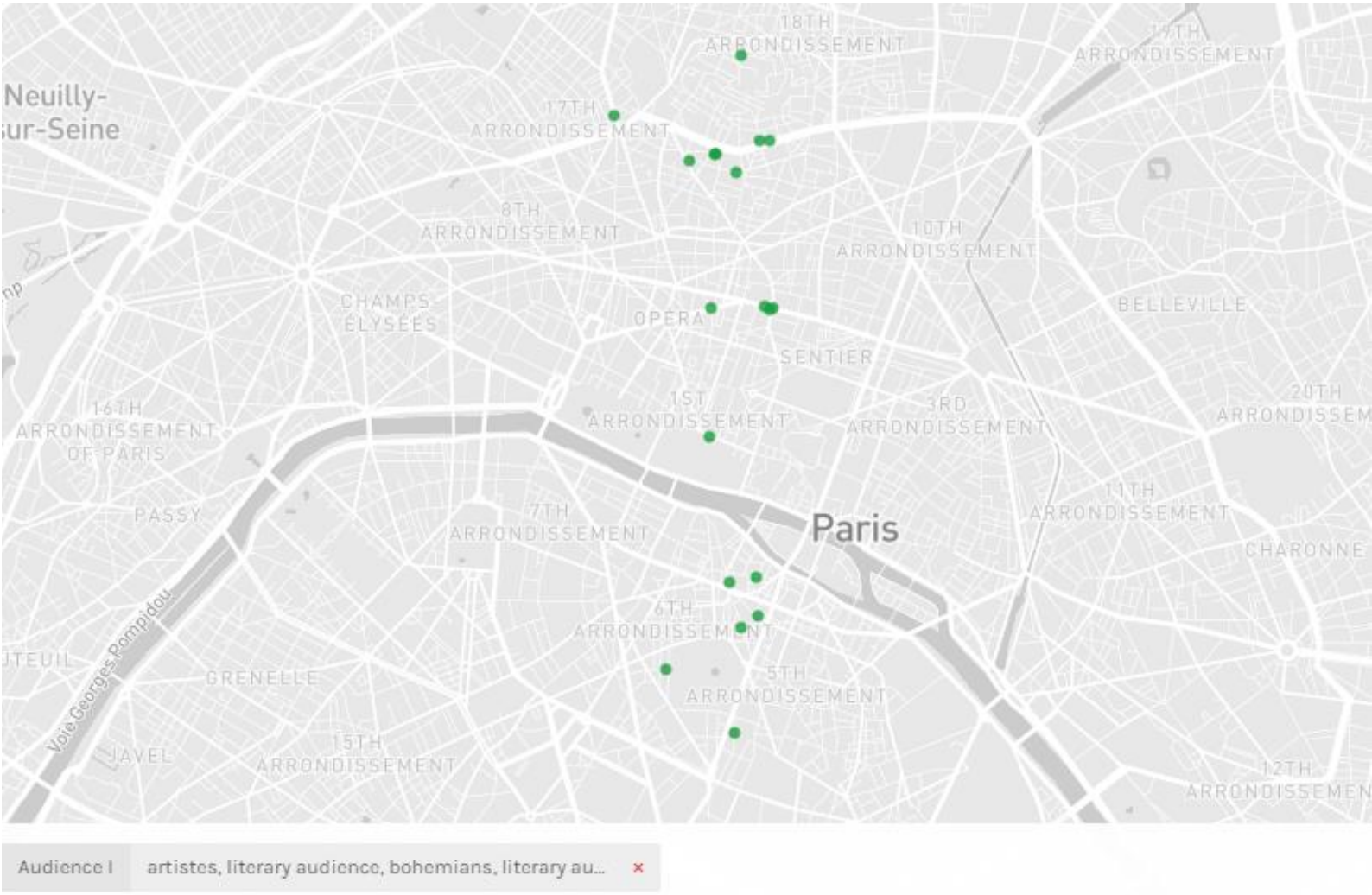


Image: all public drinking places that were frequently visited by the artistic population (Snapshot taken on 20-07-2021)

[285] For more information on the recent status of these places, please visit https://au-lapin-agile.com/ and https://www.hotelchatnoir.com/.
[286] See page 123 of this thesis.

It becomes clear that besides the area around Plage Pigalle, there were clusters of artistic drinking establishments around the Opéra and in the Quartier Latin.

Despite the fact that nineteenth-century bohemian culture is strongly associated with the Montmartre neighbourhood in secondary literature, this particular culture should be understood in the broader geographical context of Paris as a whole. According to Cate and Shaw, who studied the artistic soul of the cabaret in the later nineteenth century, the distinctive spirit of Montmartre cannot be contained geographically "the spirit of Momtmartre was not, and could not be, confined by geography. It was an avant-garde state of mind, which may best be explained by the new institutions of entertainment, by the community of artist, writers, and performers, and by the vehicles for promotion that emerged and thrived there during the last two decades of the nineteenth century."[287] In the context of this thesis, I agree with them that the distinct culture associated with bohemian artists and cabarets cannot be contained geographically, for it was not limited to the boundaries of Montmartre.

With this in mind, it becomes interesting to look at the possible differences between artistic cabarets in the Montmartre area and those in other parts of Paris – if such differences would occur. In the next section, I will analyse the absinthe use in artistic drinking environments in two different neighbourhoods: the Tortoni on the boulevard des Italiens and the Chat Noir around the Place Pigalle.

Absinthe consumption in the Tortoni and Chat Noir

We start in the *old* bohemian quarter of Paris: at the café Tortoni. Child describes this café as the most typical café on the popular *boulevard des Italiens* one can find: "The history of Tortoni is the history of the boulevard."[288] The boulevard des Italiens counts as one of the *grands boulevards* that carried the early years of Paris' collective absinthe binge. In the 1850s and 1860s, the boulevard des Italiens – conveniently located between the boulevard Montmartre and the Opéra – was a hotspot for absinthe consumers, bourgeois café culture and Parisian terraces in general. A certain '*Verre-vert'* – a pseudonym for one of Tortoni's regulars – was part of a group that frequented the café. One day, a stranger was laughing at one of the group's jokes. When the leader of the group raised an impudent look into his direction, the stranger

[287] Cate and Shaw (1996) 19.
[288] Child (1889) 3.

recognized his disadvantage and disappeared under the table. The most important reason for his departure, however, was that he did not know how to "faire son absinthe."[289] Another man, Alphose Daudet, went to Tortoni once or twice a month, but always received a lot of attention. Apparently, he drank his absinthe *white.* The writer remains unclear about what this means; it can either be diluted with too much water, turning it 'white', or mixed with something else. In any case, drinking *absinthe blanche* was a disgrace: all serious people would not dare to speak of 'white' absinthe.[290] Preparing one's own glass of absinthe in the right way was an essential skill that visitors of the café needed to possess.

Luckily, most of the people visiting the Tortoni were inveterate absinthe drinkers rather than ignorant newcomers. An example of a seasoned *absintheur* is commandant Schumann: a fifty-year old man, an '*ancien dragon'* and brave man before drinking.[291] When one enters the café at five 'o clock, Schumann is usually sitting – alone – before his first absinthe of the day. At this time, he is usually sharp and sometimes even gloomy. When starting the conversation, Schumann inevitably refers back to his own childhood, which usually means that it is time to order his second absinthe. His comrades arrive, and Schumann starts to speak of them with praise. This phase is happy and exciting, similarly to Lierre's experience we encountered in the previous chapter.[292] Not unexpectedly, thus, the third absinthe offers a different image. At the third glass, Schumann is still happy but has more and more difficulty coming up with the right words. Conversations are harder to follow, and he is having trouble expressing himself clearly. Interestingly, his interlocutors do not really seem to mind: they just nod and agree indifferently. The fourth glass of absinthe is ordered with some difficulty: Schumann has to ask his neighbour at the bar – of whom he has forgotten the name – for a few cents that he comes short. After this, the fifth glass of absinthe is enjoyed without moving from his place; afraid to lose *la parole*, Schumann is chained to his chair, telling stories and making new friends for life. At the sixth or seventh glass, he is more focused on the music that is played at the Tortoni and realizes, after jokingly insulting his friends at the café, that it is time for him to leave.[293] In this anecdote, there does not seem to be much of a knowledge transfer or intellectual challenge during a typical afternoon in the Tortoni, as substantive conversation seems to lack in the majority of the time. Nonetheless, the frequent visitor is convinced that the diversity of knowledge and intelligence

[289] *L'Heure Verte,* in Revue Illustrée 1886, 410.
[290] Ibid, 410.
[291] Ibid, 411.
[292] See page 26 of this thesis.
[293] *L'Heure Verte* (1886) 411-412.

one gains during a day at the Tortoni is bigger than the part of intelligence that is lost.[294] In other words, and despite scientific claims about the negative effects of absinthe on the brain, the café visitors are convinced that absinthe facilitates the improvement of one's intelligence, rather than diminishing it. This argument will reoccur in the popular stories about the artists that swear by the bohemian lifestyle.

From the old centre of absinthe consumption, we move northwards in the direction of the *butte Montmartre,* to the Place Pigalle. During the late 1870s and 1880s, this was the heart of Parisian bohemian nightlife, and Child even crowned Montmartre as "the modern capital of intellect" in 1889.[295] From George Moore, an Irish novelist who spent his 20s in Paris during the 1870s and 1880s, we get the following picture of one of the most famous cafés at the Place Pigalle:

> I did not go to either Oxford or Cambridge but I went to the Nouvelle Athènes…Ah! the morning idlenesses and the long evenings when life was but a summer illusion, the grey moonlight on the Place [Pigalle] where we used to stand on the pavements, the shutters clanging up behind us, loath to separate, thinking of what we had left said, and how much better we might have enforced our arguments…With what strange, almost unnatural clearness do I see and hear – see the white face of that café, the white nose of the block of houses, stretching up to the Place, between two streets, and I know what shops are there. I can hear the glass door of the café grate on the sand as I open it.
>
> I can recall the smell of every hour. In the morning that of the eggs frizzling in butter, the pungent cigarette, coffee and bad cognac; at five o'clock the fragrant odour of absinthe; and soon after the steaming soup ascends from the kitchen; and as the evening advances, the mingled smells of cigarettes, coffee and weak beer.[296]

From this description, we learn that although the café enjoyed a great reputation, it was not necessarily due to its high-end profile – bad cognac and weak beer do not really indicate the most luxurious café experience. However, *l'heure verte* was essential, and indispensably celebrated at the Place Pigalle. The new drinking establishments in the north of the city wanted to distinguish themselves from the posh elite cafés in the city centre by promoting, similar to the guinguettes we encountered in IIIb, celebration, entertainment and festivity. While the atmosphere in bourgeois cafés remained (to a certain extent) modest and polite, there was

[294] Ibid, 411. « Je crois avoir suffisamment prouvé que « l'heure verte » est une des heures curieuses de Paris, et que les diverses intelligences y gagnent certainement plutôt qu'elles n'y perdent. »
[295] Child (1889) 15.
[296] Adams (2004) 38; original source Moore, George, *Confessions of a Young Man*, Montreal, 1972, p.102–5.

nothing too crazy for the new bohemian drinking places. The Place Pigalle became the centre for this new type of public drinking, with popular establishments like *Nouvelle Athènes* and *Le Rat Mort.*

Another cabaret with a great reputation for its absinthe consumption – ""the most famous and curious café of Montmartre"[297] – was *Le Chat Noir.* Located at the boulevard around the Place Pigalle, it was the centre of artistic and bohemian lifestyle during the 1880s and 1890s. It started at an old post office at the boulevard de Rochechouart in 1881, established by the cabaret's owner Rodolphe Salis.[298] The first Chat Noir gained popularity through the *Hydropathes* – a literary circle which will be discussed in a bit – who gathered there since December 1881. The owner, Rodolphe Salis, had invited this artistic circle to his newly established cabaret, and the Hydropathes even named their journal after the café. During its popularity, the *Chat Noir* even explicitly promoted itself as an absinthe establishment to potential visitors.[299] Soon, the old post office at the boulevard de Rochechouart was outgrown by its audience and popularity, and Salis had to look for another location. In 1885, Le Chat Noir migrated to another location in the neighbourhood, to the quieter rue de Laval, the contemporary rue Victor Massé.[300] This new complex had three floors – with the upper floor holding hundred people already [301]– with coloured front-windows and an authentic swinging zinc-sign at the front.[302] However, the interior was what astonished most people. It combined styles from Louis XIII's reign with medieval and Renaissance components like dark wooden tables and chairs, antique swords and coats of arms. Salis, the owner, was an art student himself, and the cabaret, if not for entertainment or occasional drinking, could be visited as a museum of antiquities. The image on the next page illustrates the resemblance of the Chat Noir's interior as somewhat of a 'cabinet of curiosities'.

While a collection of old wooden furniture, classic firearms and other rare antiquities might partly resemble the interior of bourgeois cafés and elite cabarets, the *Chat Noir* explicitly did not want to attract this type of audience. Most of its antiquities and elite interior was treated with sarcasm and ironic jokes about the *ancien regime.* The waiters, for example, were serving

[297] Child (1889) 13.
[298] Adams (2004) 78.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Rearick (1985) 58.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Child (1889) 14.

their customers in the costume of the French Academy [303]– an elitist institution *par excellence*: "[Salis] dressed his waiters in the uniforms of members of the Académie Française, and he himself stood out with a prefect's uniform of the First Empire on his large frame."[304] Accordingly, the halls of the Chat Noir were named after typically bourgeoise terms, such as the *Salle des Etats, Salle des Seigneurs and Salle des Gardes*.[305] This way, via mockery and sarcasm and by ironically imitating them, the bohemians wanted to make fun of this elitist bourgeois culture.

Image: Interior of the Cabaret du Chat Noir. © Child, 14.

Besides, when unwanted visitors managed to get inside the cabaret, Salis had his own methods to treat his favourite audience: "Before being allowed to penetrate to the upper rooms you must

[303] Child (1889) 15.
[304] Rearick (1985) 59.
[305] Ibid.

show clean hands, *patte blanche*, or rather a hand stained with ink or with paint; for our host professes a violent hatred of bourgeois and philistines."[306] This shows that the social aspect of public drinking places goes further than its front door. With different floors, exclusive rooms and other measurements, shop owners could tailor audiences to their liking and treat their customers accordingly. In Montmartre especially, there was a relative distaste for the Parisian upper class. In another cabaret, the owner – Aristide Bruant, who himself grew up in poverty – was known to insult bourgeois customers in person, even when they came into his cabaret as paying customers. He often addressed them as *mon cochon* (my pig) or *tas de salauds* (group of bastards).[307] This illustrates that although many different social classes visited the popular cabarets, they were not all treated equally. While the cabaret seemed less exclusive than the elitist café, it had its own ways of tailoring its audience and treating its visitors differently.

The successful cabaret owner Rodolphe Salis had his own methods of managing the *Chat Noir*. He was a Parisian celebrity, and one of the most influential people in the Montmartre area. While Salis' passion was in the arts, he saw great potential in the opening of a bohemian cabaret: "Formerly a painter and somewhat of a poet, he concluded one day, after due reflection, that drink was a greater necessity than art, and that he could better tempt the public to give him money in exchange for beer than in exchange for his pictures."[308] Salis thus grew out to one of the big names in Montmartre, and artists loved coming over to his cabaret.

The regulars in the Chat Noir had a close connection to the shop owner. In cooperation with Salis, they released a weekly magazine called *Le Chat Noir*. In one of these editions – one from 25 July 1885, the magazine contains an article that describes the role of absinthe during a typical night at the Chat Noir. First, around half past five in the afternoon, someone orders an *absinthe au sucre*. The waiter laughs, and says that it stays funny to see a man drink his absinthe with a sugar cube. Meanwhile, it is around 6 'o clock and the women start to gather around the boulevards and the Place Pigalle. The man at the bar orders an *absinthe anisée*: absinthe mixed with a sweet anise-liquor (e.g. *anisette*). The waiter complains: absinthe with sugar is one thing, but ordering it mixed with other liquors… In the meantime, the man is becoming more and more preoccupied about the women that walk by: "Where do they go? Where do they come from? Will I ever see them again?"[309] He gets confused and wonders why there is no single

[306] Child (1889) 14.
[307] Rearick (1985) 46.
[308] Child (1889) 13.
[309] *Le Chat Noir* – 25-07-1885.

woman that wants to take a seat next to him. Does not one of them want to hug him, pet him or simply hold his hand? Defeated, he asks the waiter for another absinthe: "une *absinthe pure*… and don't be afraid to pour in some more."[310]

In this fragment, we see three different preparations of absinthe. The first, absinthe with a sugar cube, is frowned upon in first instance. Although the consumption of absinthe with sugar was quite similar during the late nineteenth century, it was still considered 'funny' when a grown-up man asked for a sugar cube to come with his absinthe. The second, is an absinthe mixed with a sweeter liquor. From the perspective of the waiter, we see that these specific mixing request sometimes lead to minor frustrations. When the consumer is at his lowest, however, he returns to the most basic form of the drink: *absinthe pure.* The melancholia surrounding the feelings of the consumer can only be reflected in the strong and bitter taste of absinthe in its purest form. At this stage – which could occur both in mental and physical form – the consumer cared less about the presentation and decoration of the *green fairy*. Once a glass or two are consumed, the subsequent glasses of absinthe are not really subject to high demands. Interestingly, Henri Balesta – whom we encountered earlier for its description of *absintheurs* around 1860 – recognizes this phase as one of the last stages of the chronic absintheur. At this final stage, the absintheur does not want to think about his drinking every time: the absinthe is no longer mixed or diluted with water as in the well-known preparation ritual. Rather, the absintheur gulps down some inferior brand of absinthe without thinking, either in pure form or reinforced with rum or cognac.[311] Ironically, these final stages of the absinthe addict are already visible during a typical night at the Chat Noir. The following expression might illustrate the common position towards absinthe in the world of the Chat Noir perfectly: "*C'est bon, l'absinthe.. Pas la première gorgée, mais après.* »[312]

These newspapers and magazine-like editions illustrate the cabaret as a distinctive place of knowledge. Within the world of the cabaret, absinthe had a well-known reputation, was ascribed specific properties, and people followed explicit rules for ordering and preparing one's absinthe. This applies to the cabarets in Montmartre (e.g. Le Chat Noir) as well as cabarets in the 'old' centre of absinthe consumption (e.g. the Tortoni). The knowledge about absinthe was transferred and produced in the cabaret both implicitly – through conversations, social gatherings and encounters – and explicitly, in the form of published journals and magazines. In

[310] Translated by author: « une absinthe pure… ayez donc pas peur d'en mettre » From *Le Chat Noir* 25-07-1885
[311] Adams (2004) 132, originally rom Balesta, Henri, *Absinthe et Absintheurs*, Paris, 1860, 22.
[312] *Le Chat Noir,* 25-07-1885. In English: "It is good, absinthe.. Not the first sip, but later"

the next subsection, the people behind these publications will be investigated further; not by listing the individual visitors of the cabaret, but by focussing on the circles that were gathering there.

Literary circles and artists in Montmartre

Although the artistic cabarets in Paris are sometimes considered a homogenous group, there were still differences in the respective audiences that visited these public drinking establishments. In the image below, it becomes clear that there were different categories in the 'artistic public' to consider. The most general term – *artistes* – applied to many of the so-called 'artistic cabarets' like the famous Chat Noir or the Rat Mort. But also places that called themselves *café* found their audience primarily amongst artists. The Café de la Nouvelle Athènes, for example, has been the setting for Degas' *L'Absinthe*[313] and was frequently visited by absintheurs. Other types of audiences, like the literary groups and writers, preferred to meet in the somewhat more upscale establishments in the city centre. The bohemian *gentlemen* that visited the Tortoni had a similar status: they were drinking absinthe by the litres, but preferred the slightly fancier drinking places around the Opéra over the artistic cabarets in Montmartre. Café Racine, finally, is the only drinking establishment in this dataset that was explicitly known for having both artists and students amongst their frequent visitors.

[313] See page 128 of this thesis for an image of this painting..

Image: all different categories in the 'artistic public' that visited public drinking places (snapshot taken 20-07-2021)

While some of the artistic drinking places were visited by individuals that came and went, others were frequented by a very specific social circle of regulars. There have been several well-known literary circles that dominated the artistic nightlife of Montmartre during the 1880s. One of them is the *Hydropathes*, founded by Emile Goudeau in October 1878.[314] The group consisted of a broad variety of people:from writers, poets, artists and art students to engineers, ministry employees and "a certain number of ordinary drunks."[315] Its social constitutions were thus very diverse. Initially, the group gathered in the historical Quartier Latin. Besides being a literary circle, they were heavily promoting other aspects of the bohemian lifestyle. The Hydropathes

[314] Rearick (1985) 55.
[315] Cate & Shaw (1996) 20.

met each Wednesday and Saturday at a café in the Quartier Latin. From these gatherings and discussions, the group distilled the most important, promising and (often) provocative aspects and processed it into their bimonthly journal. Given their diverse constitution, there were text writers as well as talented illustrators amongst the group. The first issue of their group published journal (called *l'Hydropathe*) appeared on 19 February 1879. Besides satirical texts and humorous anecdotes, there journals were occasionally filled up with advertisements.[316] In the fifteenth edition of the *Hydropathe* we find the following fragment:

> AMAZING! AMAZING! Do you know Réné? No?! Ah! Well! Go, all the *Hydropathes*, my friends, to 38 rue des Écoles, and there, you will see the most beautiful cafe in the Latin Quarter. We fish our own crayfish, we cook them in ad hoc ovens, and after we gulp them down *naturallement*! And the pints! and *les Turins*! and the absinthe with real Pernod; and beer from Prague, the house speciality, however, go to see, drink and you'll tell us all about it.[317]

Apparently, the *Hydropathes* did not save on produce quality, as the finest ingredients are presented here; beer from Prague and, more importantly, real Pernod absinthe. This learns us that, although the artistic circles are often said to distance themselves from the bourgeois upper class, they were in fact serving similar elite beverages. Artists were not drinking the same absinthe as the working class did. Absinthe, the most important liquor within the artistic lifestyle, was of superior quality from the most prestigious distiller at the time: Pernod.

The group moved to Montmartre in December 1881, and held their gatherings in the brand new cabaret *Le Chat Noir,* on the Boulevard Rochechouart.[318] The owner Rodolphe Salis had convinced Goudeau and the Hydropathes to move their circle from the left bank to the Chat Noir.[319] *L'Hydropathe* was quickly renamed into *Le Chat noir,* continuing to produce satirical and provocative pieces that were quickly picked up by a larger public.

Emile Goudeau, the founder and leader of the Hydropathes, published his memories about the artistic circle in *Dix Ans de Bohème* in 1887. In this manuscript, he states that in order to best enjoy a good reading – such as his own works – one should go to Quartier Latin and find a place

[316] Trott (2014) 185.
[317] *l'Hydropathe*, 15 (5 August 1879), 4.
[318] Rearick (1985) 58.
[319] Adams (2004) 79.

to install oneself there; "comme le voulait la tradition!"[320] It was thus not necessary to go to Paris' outskirts, which seems to contradict the popular narrative that the artistic lifestyle during the 1880s was essentially found in Montmartre. Interestingly, Goudeau is not necessarily tied to Montmartre in any way: the geographical differences between the time at the Quartier Latin and the time in Montmartre seem to be negligible. He even says that he often visited cafés around the Opéra – a neighbourhood that we have categorised as an elite café as opposed to the artistic drinking places.[321] What is more essential, at least to Goudeau, is the presence of drinks during the artistic experience.

Drinks were unmistakably connected to the artistic experience during the 1880s. Reading, thinking and discussing should all be done while enjoying a nice drink: *Tout en buvant.* [322] According to Goudeau, this is not only a matter of leisure and pleasure, but drinking enforces the creative process: "The old saying 'it is better to write a tragedy than to go to the café' turns out to be incorrect."[323] Goudeau states that in a city like Paris, one should go up into the crowd, mix oneself with passengers and live on the *agora* and *forum* of the city like the Greeks and Romans. For Paris, the *café* is the forum. The drinking place was not seen as a closed off area of French social, but rather a "prolongement de la rue parisienne qu'on appelle un café."[324] It is here where one finds politicians, wine sellers, bankers and artists. Cafés are the places of reunion, meaningful encounters and thought-provoking discussions.[325] Interestingly, Goudeau states that this description is applicable for both the Quartier Latin as well as Montmartre. This means that one does not necessarily has to be in Montmartre to witness the ideal circumstances for artistic inspiration. Before the artistic dominance in Montmartre in the 1880s, there was already a distinctive artistic culture on the other side of the Seine. This proves that secondary literature is wrong in claiming that the artistic culture of late nineteenth-century Paris was to be found in Montmartre exclusively.[326]

What explicit role did absinthe play in this artistic process? First, it was the drink that demarcated the starting moment of most of the gatherings. At the convenient time during the afternoon, between 4 and 5, "We install ourselves in a corner, from *l'heure de l'absinthe* until

[320] Goudeau (1888) 3. "As tradition would prescribe".
[321] Ibid., 7.
[322] Ibid., 8.
[323] Ibid., 9.
[324] Ibid., "An extension of the Parisian street, which we call a café."
[325] Ibid., 9-10.
[326] For example, see Rearick (1985) 55.

l'heure de la fermeture (closing time)," Goudeau explains.[327] In the following fragment of a poem, he illustrates the usual course of events during these typical *fêtes de la bohème*:

> *I sat in an isolated corner of a cafe:*
> *I was staring through the thick, overheated air*
> *Bended over their glass where the absinthe was turning white*
> *Thirty-year-old men who, with their eyes extinguished,*
> *Already bald, smoking while reading a newspaper.*[328]

The rest of the poem is not as gloomy, but it illustrates, again, that drinking absinthe is often associated with melancholia and transience. The green fairy was known to project a painfully clear mirror of one's own life and significance to its witnesses. A bit further in his book, Goudeau admits that there was a certain role ascribed to different types of drink. This indicates the strong connection between absinthe and the artistic lifestyle: amongst other drinks like champagne – which was seen as a 'comforter' drink; *"le champagne consolateur"* – absinthe was commonly known as a source of inspiration: *absinthe inspiratrice.*[329] This association has played an important role in the lives of many nineteenth-century artists and their inseparable glasses of absinthe.

Some artists devoted their whole artistic life to the green spirit. One example hereof is Alfred Jarry, who created the majority of his art around absinthe. Usually, Jarry began his days with three glasses of absinthe spaced between ten and twelve in the morning.[330] Throughout the day, he would then consume a few litres of wine, coffee that was fortified with brandy and many more glasses of absinthe. Jarry referred to absinthe as 'my sacred herb' or 'green goddess', and the story goes that one day he rode his bicycle through Paris with his face painted completely green, to honour the green fairy.[331] He really seemed to believe in the inspirational properties of absinthe and therefore sacrificed his health to improve his artistic expressions. Jarry had to

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[327] Goudeau, (1888) 29.

[328] Translated by author. Original from Goudeau (1888) 56:
Je m'assis dans le coin isolé d'un café :
Je regardais dans l'air épais et surchauffé
Se pencher sur leur verre où blanchissait l'absinthe
Des hommes de trente ans qui, la prunelle éteinte,
Déjà chauves, fumaient en lisant un journal.

[329] Ibid., 62.

[330] Adams (2004) 134.

[331] Lennon (1990) 34, 61.

pay the price for this lifestyle in 1907, when he died of a combination of tuberculosis, malnutrition and alcoholism, aged 33.[332]

Despite there being a strong connection – at least in the literature – between artists and absinthe consumption, it is important not to overestimate this relationship. Like Jarry, there were numerous nineteenth-century artists that are dedicating much of their work and inspiration to the green fairy. However, as Adams states, the artists that were writing most explicitly about absinthe were often comic versifiers, minor poets and writers of light verse.[333] The *real* artists – the great names that are often associated with absinthe, such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine – did not write much about the spirit. Similarly, the most famous painters from this period did not explicitly ascribe a special function or vital importance to absinthe. Although absinthe played a role in the painting process and paintings of Degas, van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec, their artistic value does not depend on absinthe: "Remove the absinthe from the pictures or the titles of the pictures, and [their] work is still supremely valid."[334] These insights are important to understand and critically interpret the relationship between absinthe and the bohemian artists; and to nuance much of what has been said in the secondary literature, as much of the narrative of absinthe and artists has been exaggerated.

Besides, it remains important to note that the *bohemian culture* that is often imposed on absinthe consumption, goes back much further. During the mid-nineteenth century – the starting point of this thesis – we cannot yet speak of a clear association of absinthe with the bohemian lifestyle. Rather, it is likely that the strong connection between artists and absinthe is formed precisely during the following decades: "In this earliest definition of the bohemian lifestyle, absinthe features not at all, making it possible to date absinthe's association with artists as taking place soon after the middle of the nineteenth century."[335] This makes the time scope of this thesis very interesting for the story of absinthe.

The role of women in the cabaret

There is an interesting story to tell about the role of women in relation to absinthe. As discussed before, social status and gender was often connected to a certain type of drink. In the first half

[332] Adams (2004) 134.
[333] Ibid., 137.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid., 4.

of the nineteenth century, the women's drink by default was white wine.[336] Later, however, women started to gain interest in other types of alcoholic drinks. The growing popularity of absinthe did not limit itself to the boundaries of the male sex, and was soon drunk by women all over Paris.

From the 1880s, when absinthe was widely available in most Parisian cabarets, absinthe drinking began to involve women with some claim to gentility.[337] In the decades before, public drinking establishments were an exclusively male domain. For that reason, alcoholism had never been associated with women. It was therefore a public scandal and shocking phenomenon to see drunk women walking along the streets.: "Whereas the picture of women waiting forlornly outside the cabarets for their men was a frequent image among anti-alcohol campaigners, women were possibly waiting less and drinking more themselves as time went on."[338] Although some cabarets were opened for a female audience only, women and men were drinking amongst each other in most places. When drinking, absinthe was a perfect drink of choice for women: "it was often drunk neat, it was suggested, because such a drink would not bloat their bodies uncomfortably inside their tight corsets."[339] Besides this advantage, a glass of absinthe was good value for money. Since women had only just started to become more independent and generate their own (relatively low) income, a glass of absinthe could be enjoyed slowly, one sip at a time, while still possessing a strong flavour for a little price.[340] Sometimes, it is even argued that the introduction of *aperitifs*, spirits and other alcoholic liquors have contributed to the occasional drinking by women.[341] More traditional alcohols like beer, wine and an occasional brandy were targeted primarily to their male audience. With the advent of aperitifs and other alcoholic drinks, the potential market for these alcohols was extended to the female sex. *Aperitifs* were more elegant than a pint of German beer or a glass of white wine, and women are said to have drunk about the same amount of aperitifs than men did at the time.[342] Especially from the 1880s onwards, the absinthe advertising was directed to men and women equally: "Absinthe, the bellwether alcoholic drink of the *Belle Epoque* comes down to

[336] Monin (1889) 88.
[337] Marrus (1974) 126.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Adams (2004) 189.
[340] Ibid., 189-190.
[341] Delahaye (1983) 81.
[342] Ibid.

us today in advertising posters showing women actually enjoying themselves with glass in hand. Times had changed."[343]

Despite the fact that women started to go to cabarets to drink their absinthes, males continued to make up the gross majority of people visiting public drinking establishments. The clientele of the cabaret was essentially masculine, so that it remained a place where men could be "*entre hommes."*[344] The same argument was used for both organized and informal meetings that took place at the café. As Child described, in 1889, there was a clear reason why women were less welcome in the public drinking environment:

> All men, it seems, feel the need of escaping occasionally from the gentle influence of their women-folk, and of enjoying masculine society and masculine talk; hence the café and hence the club, which is an outcome and modification of the café, and the most exclusively masculine of all the institutions of modern civilization.[345]

In other words, public drinking establishments were there for men to escape their 'women-folk' and to be amongst *gentlemen.* In reality, most drinking places had little to do with real gentlemen activities, but getting drunk in public was simply more enjoyed without the other sex. We must, thus, nuance the statement that women were equally participating in the public drinking in Paris during the nineteenth century. Yes, they were drinking (for the first time in public), but the cabaret remained a place primarily suited for a masculine audience.

Interestingly, however, many of the shop owners (the *débitants*) were women. Perhaps not always welcome *at* the bar, they were often making sure the supply *behind* the bar was plentiful. Since every husband had his own daily job at a certain occupation, the long and late hours in the cabaret were usually reserved for the wife. The family's husband could typically only work at a drinking establishment during Sundays and public holidays – the rest of the time, his wife was in charge. [346] And since we are already talking about family life, it was quite common for children to be involved in public drinking too, as young kids already visited the café and the phenomenon of children being sent to buy absinthe for their parents was quite common.[347] An example of a place that was run by a woman was the *Laiterie du Paradoxe*, located on the left

[343] Marrus (1974) 126.
[344] Lalouette (1982) 133.
[345] Child (1889) 2.
[346] Lalouette (1982) 132.
[347] Adams (2004) 192.

bank at the rue Saint-André des Arts, close to the boulevard de Montmartre. We already encountered this café in section IIIa, when it was identified with a bourgeois clientele that produced "conversations abracadabrante."[348] Meanwhile, the person behind the bar – serving the drinks and listening to the customer's stories – is a woman, despite public drinking places generally being masculine affairs.

Besides working as shop owners, women were also pictured frequently as a *muse* in the world of absinthe – both in terminology and imagination (absinthe was always described as a *she* (*la fée verte*). [349] Moreover, women were often pictured on the bottles of absinthe and advertisement posters. Numerous affiches included seductive women or female green fairies that presented the drink to its potential customer. Besides being used in advertising, women appeared in many paintings by Manet, Degas, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec.[350] Often, the painted ladies were drinking absinthe, proving again that the consumption of absinthe was not limited to men exclusively. In Degas' *L'Absinthe* – originally named *Dans un café* – a woman is pictured next to a man sitting in the Café de la Nouvelle Athénes at the Place Pigalle. This was one of the hotspots of absinthe from the 1870s onwards, and within a few minutes one could walk to the *Café des Incohérents, Le Chat Noir* or *Le Rat Mort,* which was located right next to Nouvelle Athénes. The artists and bohemians that reigned supreme in this neighbourhood found their muses in this very area. There are numerous stories of artists and absintheurs who have devoted their work and sacrificed their lives for a certain woman, romanticized in art and poetry and enforced by a regular absinthe intake – a 'visit from the green fairy'. In many cases, the muse of absinthe was a woman – often imaginary but sometimes present in the flesh – that was roaming the cabarets and enchanting her male customers.

Another way women were linked to the story of absinthe was in terms of erotic activities or prostitution. Especially in the 1860s and 1870s – before Montmartre's prime as a centre for entertainment – cabarets were a place for prostitutes to pick up men. As mentioned before, prostitution was considered a pressing problem in the second half of the nineteenth century, with theories like Morel's dégénérescence stressing the deterioration of the French race. Nonetheless, as one might expect, the demand was still there on the streets, and many cafés in the outer neighbourhoods of Paris could continue to host prostitutes. Sometimes, the women

[348] Delvau (1862) 87.
[349] E.g. in literature: Goudeau (1888) 12.
[350] Marrus (1974) 126.

working in these environments used absinthe ‘to forget’ about the nights and the things that happened, like described in Emile Zola’s *Nana*.[351]

[351] As found in Adams (2004) 191: “They were endlessly confidential, whilst Satin lay on her stomach in her nightgown, waving her legs above her head, and smoking cigarettes as she listened. Sometimes, on such afternoons as they had troubles to retail, they treated themselves to absinthe in order, as they termed it, ‘to forget.’ Satin did not go downstairs or put on a petticoat, but simply went and leant over the banisters, and shouted her order out to the concierge’s little girl, a chit of ten, who when she brought up the absinthe in a glass would look furtively at the lady’s bare legs.” From Zola, Emile, *Nana*, London, 1962, p.223.

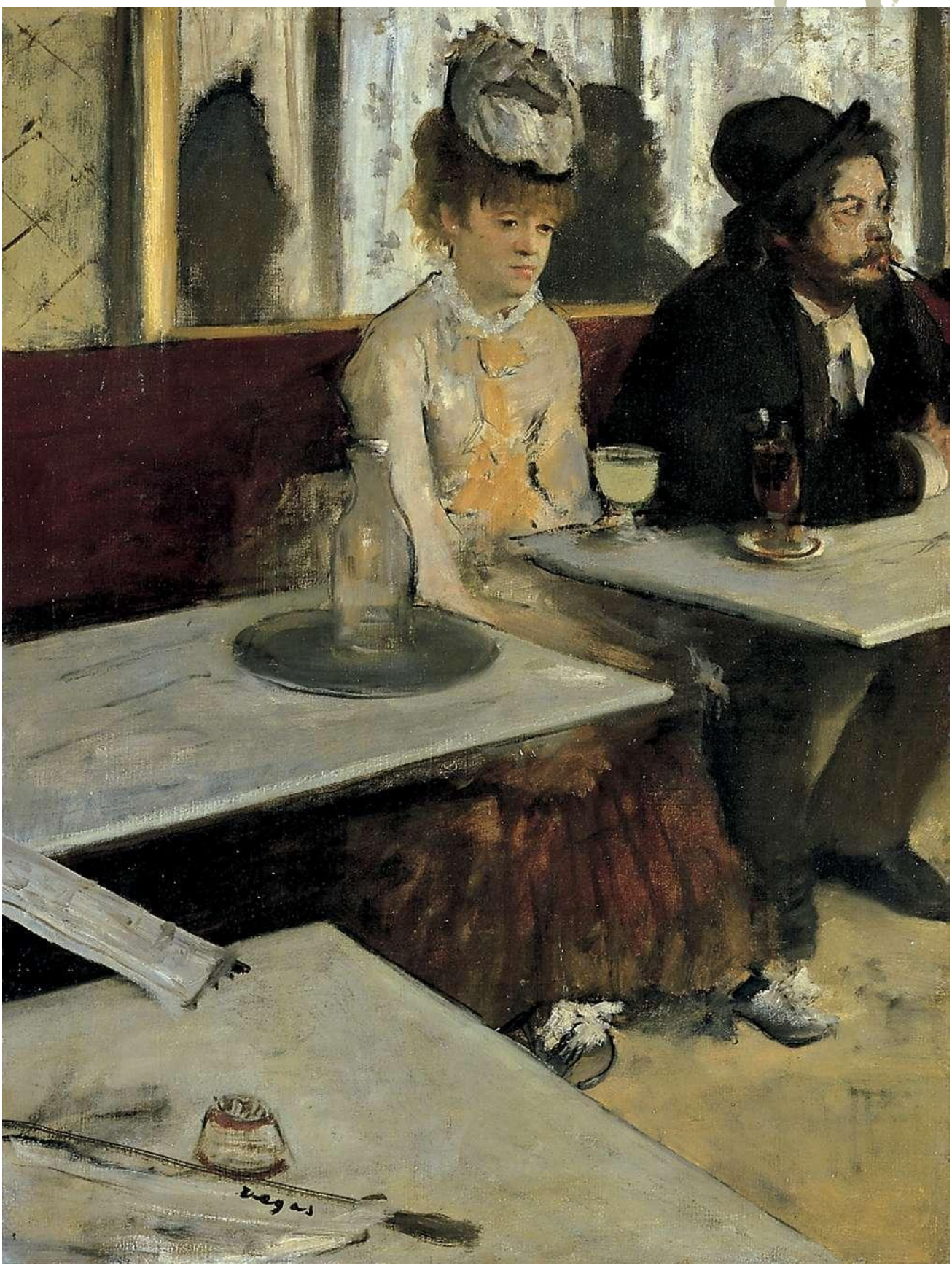


Image: Edgar Degas' famous painting from 1876 – *L'Absinthe* (originally '*Dans un café'*) – collection of Musée d'Orsay in Paris. The setting of this painting is inside the café de la Nouvelle Athènes café on the Place Pigalle.

The place with the biggest reputation for being a 'lesbian hangout' was *Le Rat Mort.* Located at the Place Pigalle, right next to Nouvelle Athénes, it was known to turn into a lesbian café during the evenings. In an article from 1886 in *Le Courrier Francais,* Emile Goudeau – whom we will encounter in the next session as well – describes his experiences during a night in *Le Rat Mort.* He mentions that while all the cafés and cabarets have a common audience and clientele, the *Rat Mort* has one *particularité*. During the early evening – from *l'heure verte* to around 10 'o clock – there are few particularities: people are discussing art and poetry, speculating about politics and current affairs and older grey men discuss the future of the French race. After everyone drank their coffee, beer or took one's absinthe, the café empties and Goudeau is the only one left in the restaurant hall. But his solitude does not last long: soon after the previous audience has left *Le Rat Mort,* four women walk into the café. "Ni jeunes, ni vieilles", slightly tired but with a certain determination, they are the lesbians – Goudeau calls them the "*bataillon de Lesbos, les héritières de Sapho"* – that meet in this special café.[352] They install themselves at a table not far from him, and start chatting and flirting with each other just like an ordinary man and woman would do. At a certain moment, a Montmartre prostitute enters the café and complains that she has not received any money today, while she had been out on the streets for over four hours. As a response, one of the lesbian ladies hands her a billet of one hundred francs (!) and tells her to go. After this bizarre moment, Goudeau concludes: "Eh bien, voilà le *Rat mort,* mélange incroyable de toutes les grandeurs et de tous les vices."

In this story of female sexual expression, we find traces that lead us back to the previous chapter. Magnan, who already identified absinthe consumption as a signifier of the degeneration of the French race, saw another danger in the sexuality of females. 'Sexual inversion', as the term was coined, was seen as a condition that was both congenital and hereditary.[353] Women that suffered from these sexual preferences were considered a product of degeneration, and the 'disease' of sexual inversion was put in the same category as physical malformations, cretinism and absinthism.

In conclusion, women play multiple roles in the history of absinthe. In the first place, they can be in charge of the whole spectacle; with women being the owner of multiple *debits de boissons* all over Paris. Secondly, absinthe can be seen as an emancipatory device through which women could gain more social status. Promoted to both male and female audiences, women were now

[352] *Le Courrier Français* (1886) 3.
[353] Charcot and Magnan (1882) 54-56.

considered part of the potential consumer market. It is questionable, however, to which extent absinthe can only be seen as an emancipatory device for women: the objectification of women – both in the imaginary muses and in actual eroticism and prostitution – also played an important role in the history of absinthe. Nonetheless, this section has shown that the history of absinthe can also be discussed from a female perspective, by focussing on social power-relations and sexual expression. Perhaps the consumption of absinthe was one of the steps for women to gain more independence and a better status in the long struggle for emancipation and equality.

The growing entertainment industry

The 1880s can be interpreted both as the heyday and downfall of the small-scale artistic cabaret. Equally, the character of absinthe changed from a quintessential element of artists and bohemians to a more commonly served alcohol amongst other beverages in the cabaret. When the early 1880s were the prime years for literary circles, drunken poets and bohemian cabarets, the late 1880s are characterized as a shift from artistic expression and unconventionalism towards a more general form of entertainment. Understandably, since many artistic cabarets exploded because of their popularity, they sought means to please an even bigger audience. The Chat Noir is a good example of this fashion. Starting as a typical intimate artistic cabaret – "the prototype and beau ideal of the fantastic neo medieval tavern"[354] – with a very involved group of frequent visitors; Salis soon transformed it into a large-scale entertainment cabaret with daily (popular) music and festive dancers. It is here, in Montmartre, where we can see most clearly that the late nineteenth century consumer society was taking off in Paris.

[354] Child (1889) 13.

In the bohemian world of cabarets and public drinking, it was most visible in the trend of less artistic substantiation and more large-scale entertainment.

Image: Painting of the Café des Incohérents, located at 16 bis, rue Fontaine by Santiago Rusiñol (1890) © *Museum Montserrat*

Another artistic circle that was based in the Montmartre area was *les Incohérents*. Contrary to the *Hydropathes*, who focussed mainly on comedy and poetry, the Incohérents were concerned more with the visual arts. In 1882, the young writer Jules Lévy (who can be considered the founding father of the Incohérents-movement) organised an exhibition in his small Left Bank apartment. Amongst the invitees were Edouard Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Richard Wagner and the king of Bavaria.[355] The exhibition was entitled "*Arts incohérents"* and presented an unconventional, humorous approach to art that was

[355] Cate & Shaw (1996) 1.

unprecedented.[356] The purpose of this new satirical approach to art was to reject the conventional definitions of art and its classic aesthetic by deliberately focussing on the randomness, humour and irrelevance between art objects. The Incohérents wanted to break with traditional definitions of art and created their own avant-garde artistic interpretation.

Interestingly, the Incohérents also started at the Left Bank before moving to Montmartre, similar to Goudeau's Hydropathes. Later, with the establishment of their own café – the *café des Incohérents* – at the rue Fontaine (one street behind the Place Pigalle) they became a great name in the Montmartre area. From 1885 to 1890, there was a popular annual event called *The Incohérents' Ball*, where students from the Parisian art academies gathered with the artistic circles in Montmartre. These events consisted of masked balls, heavy decoration and daring costumes (sometimes including nudity), often seen as provoking for the local authorities in Paris. On one occasion, in 1893, there was a scandal when artists and models from the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* had a nearly-naked sexy costume ball at the Moulin Rouge. Everyone who attended was charged and fined by the police. This in turn resulted in public demonstrations in the Quartier Latin, with one youth killed by the police.[357] This shows the strong connections between certain cafés in Montmartre and the student community in the Quartier Latin. Although there were virtually no student cafés outside of the Quartier Latin, the connection with the bohemians in the north of Paris was found in art, literature, festivity and a distaste for the Parisian authorities.

The way in which the café des Incohérents presented itself as a public drinking place is typical if we compare it to other drinking establishments. Compared to the bourgeois cafés, for example, the café des Incohérents is much more straightforward in the advertising of alcoholic beverages. On the following pages, there are two posters for the café, one from 1888 and the other from 1890. The first poster shows a topless female – a *muse*, if you want – sitting on a beer barrel, with two angels who lay on the ground to tap their beers. This shows that the connection between drinks (beer, in this case) and the public drinking place are explicit. This can be interpreted as a marketing strategy: by promoting alcoholic drinks, festivities and overall enjoyment – instead of artistic humour or satirical poems – a greater audience can be reached. The café des Incohérents was established *by* artists, but was not *limited to* artists in terms of

[356] Cate & Shaw (1996) 2.
[357] Rearick, (1985) 43-46.

their audience. With these advertisements directed to larger audiences, we detect the first signs of a change in the bohemian cabaret culture of Montmartre.

Image : poster for the Café des Incoherents (1888) located at 16bis rue Fontaine © gallica

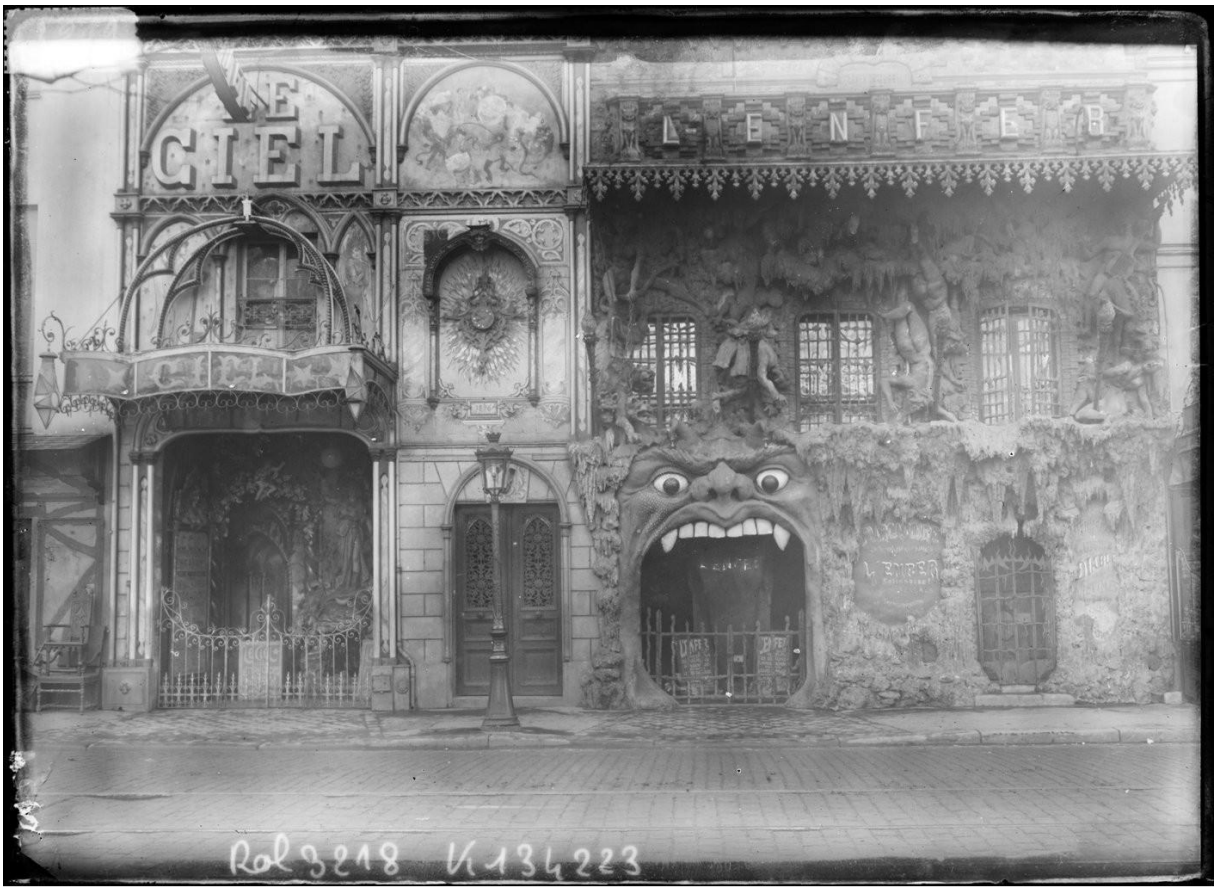
A poster from two years later, in 1890, shows an even more detailed way of advertising alcoholic beverages. Both beer (at the top) as *champagne des hautvillers* (on the bottom) were promoted on this poster. This illustrates an entertainment business that is even more focussed on consumers and advertisement. From the 1890s onwards, the bohemian spirit slowly made way for a more homogenic audience that wanted to be entertained. The growing 'entertainment industry' no longer focused on artists and creative or intellectual stimulation, but rather on large-scale entertainment value and more generic amusement. The cabaret was no longer the place *par excellence* for controversy and experimentation.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Image: poster for the Café-concert des Incoherents from 1890 © gallica/BnF[358]

[358] Accessed via https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9012791f.r=caf%C3%A9%20paris?rk=1673828;0#

Absinthe, however, remained important for the cabaret business. It was still one of the cheapest alcoholic beverages and the preparation ritual added value to the enchanting cabaret experiences. For visitors from outside of Paris – both from the rest of France and form abroad – drinking absinthe in a cabaret in Montmartre was an essential part of their visit.[359] For this reason, many new cabarets sprouted in the north of Paris, with few resembling the intimate artistic cabarets of the early 1880s.



Image; (1909) the entrances of the cabarets Le Ciel and L'Enfer, located next to each other on the Boulevard de Clichy. © gallica [360]

The old windmills that originally provided the village Montmartre with flour were rebuilt and converted into places of large-scale entertainment. First de Moulin de la Galette, and later, in October 1889, the Moulin Rouge, which was "destined to become the most famous nightclub

[359] Maizeroy, *Guide des Plaisirs à Paris* (1899) 159.
[360] Accessed via https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53109476p.r=cabaret%20l%27enfer%20le%20ciel?rk=21459;2#

in the world."[361] The 1890s marked the explosion of new cabarets in the Montmartre area. Extravagant festivities and thematic cabarets illustrate that the scope of the cabaret as a public drinking place had changed: from a small-scale and intimate venue for artists, writers and those who surrendered themselves to the bohemian lifestyle, it became a place for large-scale entertainment, recreation and more popular forms of amusement. On the boulevard the Clichy, there was a thematic cabaret called *l'Enfer* ("Hell") where one could walk through the gates of hell to indulge oneself in the earthly pleasures and sinful amusement. Customers were greatest with "*chers damnés*" (dear damned) and were served by devils. Ironically, a few years later *Le Ciel* ("Heaven") opened its doors right next to the neighbouring cabaret. In this place, customers could be served by waiters that were dressed up as angels, drinking "the ambrosia of the gods" (a one-franc bock beer) and watching burlesque religious rites.[362]

The typical night out at the cabaret no longer consisted of philosophical discussions or comic poetry, but found in singing and dancing, often including performing musicians and other paid performers. The drinking remained the same, but the face of the cabaret had changed drastically. In 1899, the British H.P. Hugh gave the following impression of the nightlife of Montmartre:

> As the night closes in, you watch with fascination the gradual streaks of light that crawl out, as avenue after avenue is lighted up, and the whole city is lined out in fire at your feet. The red sails of the Moulin Rouge swing round, the flash light from the Tour Eiffel touches the Sacré-Coeur and whitens the thousand-year-old church of Saint-Pierre. The other Montmartre awakens while the quiet inhabitants of the hill go to sleep.
>
> The sickly odour of absinthe lies heavily on the air. The 'absinthe hour' of the Boulevards begins vaguely at half-past-five and ends just as vaguely at half-past-seven; but on the hill it never ends. Not that it is the home of the drunkard in any way; but the deadly opium drink lasts longer than anything else, and it is the aim of Montmartre to stop as long as possible on the terrasse of a café and watch the world go by. To spend an hour in a really typical haunt of the Bohemians is a liberal education.[363]

Again, similar to the visitors of the Tortoni in the 1880s, the consumption of absinthe is seen as a form of education. The 'liberal education' one enjoys when sitting in a public drinking place, sipping one's absinthe, is incomparable with other forms of education. Being present in the city during its most lively hours – from *l'heure de l'absinthe* to *l'heure du fermeture* – gives

[361] Adams (2004) 130.
[362] Rearick (1985) 64.
[363] Hugh (1899) as quoted in Adams (2004) 131.

the spectator a unique insight into the raw and ugly, but at the same time festive and enchanting bohemian life in Paris. This knowledge about absinthe can only be obtained by participating in the world of nineteenth-century public drinking establishments themselves.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Montmartre continued to grow as the Parisian centre of entertainment and amusement. The *Belle Epoque* was now in its prime, and more and more Parisians were enjoying the city's nightlife. Also internationally, the status of Paris became more and more linked to its entertainment business. In a tour guide from 1889, Paris was described as "the very capital of the kingdom of pleasures"[364] From all over the world, people came to visit the French capital to witness its richness and fantastic character. The international spectacles of the *Exposition Universelle* from 1889 and the 1900 Paris Exposition increased the influx of international tourists even more. Paris had become one of the earliest city trip destinations for large-scale tourism; and while absinthe continued to play a (small) part in its identity, much of the grandeur and essence of the green fairy had dried up in the world of concert halls, spectacles, and festivals. No longer consumed for its inspiratory value or as a *mode de vie*, absinthe degraded to an ordinary alcoholic spirit, albeit with a great historical reputation. Artists were less interested in the inspirational qualities of an absinthe that was equally drunk by the majority of common people. Moreover, the intimate artistic cabarets that sparked so much of their inspiration were transformed into bigger establishments for the masses, losing their distinct atmosphere of the 1880s that had produced many poets, literary circles and journals as the place where bohemian artists drank their absinthe.

In conclusion, the cabaret as a place of knowledge provides some further interesting observations with regards to knowledge and consumption of absinthe. First, most of the cabarets had their own journal which they published weekly or bimonthly. Via these publications, the customers as well as outsiders could obtain knowledge about absinthe rituals and the current state of affairs. Second, the artistic cabaret remained quite exclusive in terms of its audience: many cabaret owners had their own methods of treating their clientele according to their preference. In line with this, the frequent visitors of the cabaret usually had close connections to the shop owners. Third, it is important to note that the artistic-bohemian lifestyle that is often associated with the cabarets from Montmartre is not necessarily limited to this geographical cluster. Artistic experiences with regard to public drinking places and absinthe consumption originated in the Quartier Latin, before becoming associated with the cabarets in Montmartre

[364] Rearick (1985) 40, from Camille Debans (1889) *Les Plaisirs et les curiosités de Paris* (E. Kolb) p. 11.

from the 1880s onwards. Fourth, women play an interesting role in the story of absinthe. Working as shop owners, being the muse of artists and a prostitute to others, and increasingly drinking absinthe and finding their place within Parisian nightlife – the presence of women in the cabaret should not be overlooked. Fifth, the connection between the artists in Montmartre and students in the Quartier Latin is noteworthy. This illustrates that although the clusters of public drinking places can be considered as separate entities, there were certainly interrelationships between them. Finally, in the 1880s, a shift can be observed from the intimate artistic cabaret to a more large-scale approach to entertainment. During this period, the role of absinthe changed: from an artistic beverage that was part of the cabaret's identity, to a spirit that was primarily drunk for its fascinating history by tourists and superficial visitors of the cabaret. Paris had turned into the capital of large-scale entertainment and spectacle, and Montmartre was its hotspot.

Conclusion

The work behind this thesis is an answer to Brennan's ask for a cultural history of alcohol in France.[365] By writing this thesis, I hope to have contributed to this endeavour and to have shown that there is a new promising way of doing historical research into social drinking, by adding to qualitative research the method of socio-geographical mapping. The approaches used in this thesis are open to revision and response, but are meant to spark excitement and ingenuity about the research topic and methods in the first place.

In this thesis, I have made a distinction between two domains of knowledge. In these domains, there were certain places of knowledge – environments that facilitate, transfer or generate knowledge – that showed us that absinthe was conceived differently in specific contexts. The main question of this thesis was as follows: *How was absinthe embedded in Paris between 1850-1890?* With the previously stated insights and observations, it is possible to answer this question on the basis of the contemporary model of substance abuse in drugs, set and setting, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis.[366]

Set

With regard to the (mind)set of absinthe consumption, there are some interesting observations. First, drinkers of absinthe consumed it for different reasons than the doctors and scientists assumed. They did not only drink absinthe to get drunk or experience its potentially psychoactive effects, but had other reasons for drinking it. Absinthe was one of the first alcoholic beverages that was widely available to a great part of French society. Both its availability and low price made it a favourite drink amongst the working classes. Especially during the 1870s, when the price of absinthe dropped significantly, so that a glass of absinthe was cheaper than a few slices of bread.[367] Thus, absinthe was in many cases drunk as a 'go-to' beverage instead of a special experience or encounter with the green fairy. Besides, absinthe was sometimes used as a means of payment in the working class taverns. The local tavern was the place where business was done, employment was sought, and loans could be attracted. Since

[365] Brennan, T. (1989). Towards the cultural history of alcohol in France. Journal of Social History, 23(1), 71-92.
[366] See page 12 of this thesis.
[367] Adams, 124.

the working classes were the majority of the consumers of absinthe during the 1870s and 1880s,[368] taverns played an important role in the story of absinthe in nineteenth century Paris.

Second, the people that were found in the Parisian hospitals and asylums were more than occasional absinthe drinkers. In many cases, patients did not only consume absinthe, but also wine, beer and other alcohols. Besides, many people living in hospital complexes – such as the Salpêtrière – were not necessarily sick but extremely poor. This adds a social component to the hospital as a place of knowledge: not only taking care of sick people, but providing shelter to the impoverished. Statements about drunkards and alcoholics being taken into hospitals and asylums should thus be considered carefully, since they could have been admitted for different reasons. Their overall health and lifestyle was often questionable, making their unfortunate conditions only partly due to their absinthe intake.

Third, information about absinthe – particularly its (un)healthy properties – was communicated differently with regard to its context. In the hospital environment, the effects of absinthe were described differently than in public drinking places. While scientists and doctors warned for the dangerous consequences of absinthe consumption, advertisers were promoting absinthe with terms like 'boisson hygiènique' and claimed that it had serious health benefits. Public drinking places created their own discourses about absinthe, as some cabarets had their own journal which they published weekly or bimonthly. Via these publications, the costumers as well as outsiders could obtain knowledge about café rituals and the current state of affairs.

Between these two domains of knowledge, there did not seem to be much communication, as both terminology and practices differed among them. Lierre is an exception to this, combining the study of medical publications with observations from the context of public drinking. Lierre indulged himself in exploratory research via participatory observation, thereby combining theoretical insights with his personal experience. In doing so, Lierre has been the most successful example of combining the two different domains of knowledge that are prevalent in this thesis. More generally, however, knowledge about absinthe was different in both areas, so that the consumer of absinthe could have completely different ideas about their intake and experience depending on the context wherein one would learn about the alcoholic spirit.

[368] Marrus (1974) 127.

Setting

Then to the setting of absinthe consumption. First, it is clear that absinthe should be enjoyed in the company of others. The *Turbabsine* is an early example of this phenomenon, but the social dimension of absinthe consumption is something we have encountered many times during these thesis: from military veterans to the literary circles of Montmartre. Even the most serious absintheurs, such as Du Châtelet, whom we encountered in the first chapter, preferred drinking together over drinking alone.

Second, public drinking establishments were socially segregated. Every establishment had their own, distinct audience. The type of audience depended on location, price and character; varying from elitist cafés to working class taverns. However: absinthe was sold nearly everywhere – the only difference amongst drinking places being its quality and price. Some artistic cafés advertised with the *real* Pernod, while working class taverns were probably serving absinthe of lower quality.[369] Women started to drink absinthe from the 1880s and played a role in several aspects of this thesis, but the world of public drinking places remained predominantly masculine.

Third, there is a relation between the location of public drinking places and their audience. In the analysis of the generated map and its data, it has become clear that there are strong relations between the geographical location of a drinking place and its respective audience. There were several clusters of public drinking establishments all over Paris. Generally speaking, students gathered in the Quartier Latin, the upper class bourgeois visited the cafés around the Opéra and bohemians and artists gathered in the Montmartre area around the Place Pigalle. Before 1880, however, this last group was found at the left bank in the Quartier Latin, interestingly.

Fourth, the medical-scientific domain of knowledge differed greatly from the context of public drinking places. In this thesis, we learned that Paris, at the time, could be considered as the centre of nineteenth century medicine. We can thus assume that the quality of scientific development and progress in Paris was relatively high. However, while analysing the places of knowledge within this domain - i.e. La Salpêtrière and the laboratory at Sainte-Anne - we find evidence that this image must be adapted. In the context of absinthe, it is important that not all

[369] See page 120 of this thesis. Unfortunately, there are not too many accounts on the quality of absinthe that is served in public drinking establishments. For this thesis, I have made the assumption that extremely low pricings – some as low as 3 cents per glass – indicate absinthe of inferior quality.

absintheurs that were hospitalized were actually sick, and that the results of Magnan's experiments on lab dogs are not necessarily translatable to human absinthe consumption.

Fifth, the hospital environment and drinking places did not have close contacts. In primary literature, there are very few references from one domain of knowledge to the other. Besides, as we have seen in the case of incoming patients, there was often a mediating party involved. The police had an important role in the admission and distribution of patients all over Paris. This made the two domains even more disconnected; with doctors only seeing patients being brought in by the police and shop owners only having to deal with occasional police control.

Drug

Finally, some conclusions on the drug itself. A first thing to notice is that the absinthe tested in Magnan and Challand's experiments is different from the absinthe that is consumed by humans. As shown in the section on production, there were many different types of absinthe on the market: from superior *absinthe Suisse* that could reach up to 72% alcohol per volume to cheaper *absinthe commune*, with an alcohol content of 40%.[370] Moreover, there were different methods used in the production process of absinthe. The most common method for the popular absinthe brands was brewing the alcohol with herbs and botanicals before distilling it. Another method was to create the essences of the additional ingredients, and to add them to the cold (already) distilled alcohol. Magnan and Challand prepared their absinthe through this second way, because it was easier and more (scientifically) accurate. Meanwhile, the most popular absinthe brands were using the first method of infusion to produce their absinthe. These differences in production translated to a different effect on the mind and body of the consumer. Besides, it is important to note that the quality of absinthe is highly dependent on the doses and ingredients used.[371] What is striking about absinthe is the fact that the composition of ingredients and their relative quantities varied from producer to producer. The production process was an integral part of the branding of an absinthe. With a huge variety of (competing) producers and brands, it is nearly impossible to compare the laboratory-made absinthe with the absinthe that was served in cafés, taverns and cabarets. Thus, even with the mistakes made by Magnan in dosing

[370] For reference, see page 105 of this thesis.
[371] Luauté (2007) 517.

and representation for human consumption omitted, it is very likely that absinthe in these experiments was different from the absinthe that was consumed in public drinking places.

Second, different places of knowledge served different types of absinthe. The absinthe that was consumed in the working class tavern differed from the absinthe that was served in the bourgeois café. In some cases, usually the more high-end drinking establishments, there is evidence (e.g. via advertisements) that popular absinthe's of good quality were served. In taverns, on the other hand, the extremely low price for a glass of absinthe indicates the serving of absinthe of lesser quality. If we connect this insight to the previous observation that different types of public drinking places had distinct audiences, we can conclude that different social groups during the nineteenth century were each drinking different types of absinthe in their own distinct public drinking places. This problematizes the situatedness of knowledge in the case of absinthe even more: not only is the knowledge between hospital environments and public drinking places untransferable; even *within* these domains of knowledge there is evidence for social knowledge segregation. This shows, once again, that the locality of knowledge is crucial to understand a complex historical phenomenon. Absinthe has its own geography of knowledge with different components, actors and places. The laboratory dog that is injected by Magnan, the bohemian that sips his absinthe while discussing poetry or the drunkard that is brought into the hospital by the police: it is a question to what extent we can talk about the same context of absinthe in these different circumstances.

Third, although absinthe was eventually framed as a dangerous drug in the early twentieth century, there had been very little evidence for this outcome during the nineteenth century. From the research done in this thesis, it does not necessarily follow that absinthe would be banned within the next two decades. The period between 1850 and 1890 does not presage the demonisation of absinthe in the period thereafter. Taking into account the locality and embeddedness of knowledge about absinthe, the period of research shows (at least) two different domains wherein knowledge was facilitated, created or transferred. While one of them was critical at times (i.e. hospital environment), the general support for theses about absinthisme and the demonisation of absinthe was lacking in the public environment. Interestingly, the classical explanation of absinthe's demonisation and its eventual banning does not necessarily follow from this thesis.

Contributions, implementation and future research

Besides the study of absinthe and the social history of public drinking, this thesis has contributed to other aspects of scientific inquiry. An important topic in todays' replication studies is the situatedness of knowledge.[372] The case study of Magnan is a good example of this concept – showing that many of his experiment results are based on implicit considerations of the context wherein an experiment takes place. Moreover, this thesis has shown that the situatedness of knowledge does not only apply to the scientific environment, but also to other domains of society. 'Public drinking knowledge' was widely supported and admittedly as important as the scientific theories of Magnan and his companions. To understand a historical phenomenon, historians should consider every aspect and type of knowledge that was circulating amongst different social groups and the general public. Only via this holistic approach can we try to grasp parts of the complex historical developments that we love to research.

This thesis has aimed to develop a new method for doing cultural historical research. With the help of online tools made possible by Palladio, maps, graphs and other visualisations have been created. The analysis of these models has brought promising insights: from conclusions about the locality of a certain 'absinthe-hub', to the observation of patterns between social groups and types of drinking establishments. In the future, I hope to develop this method even more, as I think it will continue to prove itself valuable in the context of researching multifaceted sociocultural phenomena in a holistic way.

Considering future research, there is a collection of material that can still be reviewed. The journals published by the visitors of the artistic cabarets, for example *Le Chat Noir* or *l'Hydropathe*, can be subject to intensive historical studies, as it forms a rich collection of potentially valuable source material. Other documents, like the reports about alcohol taxes and selling, could also be further investigated. Most obvious, it would be interesting to investigate the other part of the story of absinthe, namely the period from 1890 to 1916 (when it was banned). In this type of research, the focus could shift towards centres of entertainment and 'pleasure' as an addition to the domain of public drinking places, or it could be interpreted as a separate domain of knowledge. Key players in the banning of absinthe – like temperance movements and politicians – could also be added to the spectrum. Without knowing how

[372] Already addressed by, for example, Livingstone (1995) 28, the situatedness of knowledge remains an important concept within replication studies.

research results will accord or conflict with the conclusions of this thesis, I am confident that the period 1890-1916 provides another very interesting timeframe for investigating the wonderful story of absinthe. Especially in combination with the research method of socio-geographical mapping as explored within this thesis, I am very excited about everything that future research may bring.

Fin.

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