



## SENSING THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

The exhibition springs from the project *Historiske toll- og skipsanløpslister*. This has made a selection of trade statistics for all the Norwegian customs ports accessible to the public. The records show what goods and ships entered and left Norwegian harbours. As such they provide insight into peoples activities, what they could buy in the shops, as well as what places they had contact with. Looked at in a different way, the records can give an impression of how the 18<sup>th</sup> century may have been experienced through the senses.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century trade statistics are available in searchable databases on the website toll.lokalhistorie.no. Illegal trade and smuggling was commonplace, so the records can only be used to estimate minimum amounts and values of what was traded.

The exhibition has been made possible with support from  
 Sparebankstiftelsen  
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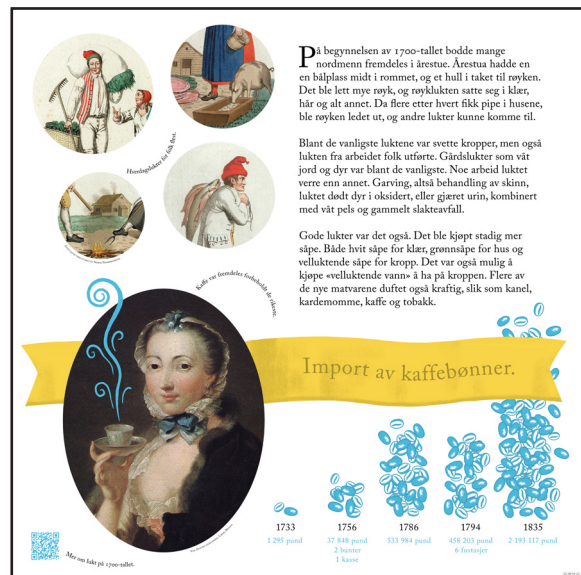


## TRADE IN THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

The 18<sup>th</sup> century marks the onset of global trade, and Norway became a part of this. More goods were traded, often from distant places, and in larger quantities than in previous times. Norwegian ports traded with neighbouring ports and with ports in Denmark, as well as European ports, and indirectly also other continents

Grain was brought from Denmark and the Baltics. From Southern-and Western Europe wines, oil and fruits, as well as textiles and manufactured goods were imported. From more distant places came Asian tea, silk and porcelain, American tobacco and sugar , though mostly via larger ports in Europe.

Exports of Norwegian goods to Europe also rose though the 18<sup>th</sup> century, The main exports from Eastern Norway were timber and iron, much of the former going to England, From Bergen and Western-Norway fish from the coast as well as Northern Norway was exported to France, The Netherlands, Spain and Portugal. Trondheim's exports were fish, timber, but mainly copper, of which the Netherlands was the main first destination. In Europe the Norwegian exports went to feed the growing urban populations, build infrastructure, but also as raw materials in the growing early industrial production of consumer goods.

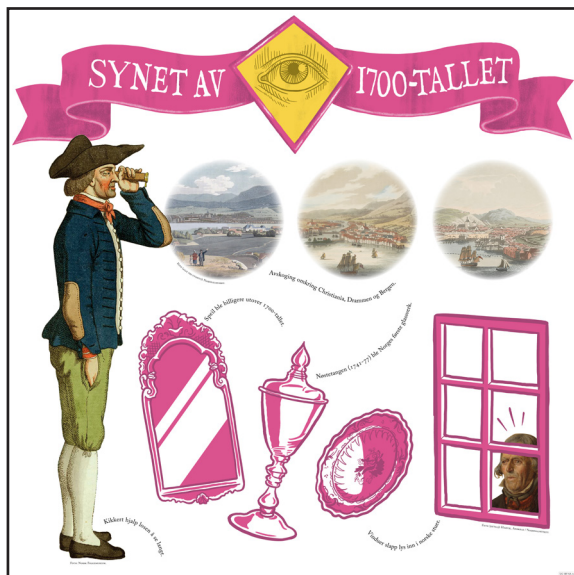


## THE SCENT

The hearth was the centre of many Norwegian houses in the early 18th century. The smoke from its fire was long also the dominant smell getting into clothes, hair and everything else. As chimneys became more common, the smoke was lead out, and other scents could be noticed.

The most common smells were sweaty bodies, but also the smell of the work. Farm smells like damp earth and wet animals were amongst the most common, as well as those of drying fish and fresh saw dust. Some work smelled worse than other. Curing leather smelled of decaying dead animals, fermented urine and wet fur.

There were also good smells. Soap played an important role in enabling these to spread. Not only did soap wash away the stale and strong smells, but they also had new, often flowery scents. It was also possible to buy “scented water” to dab to cover up your own smell, or hide that of others. As global trade increased more people experienced the exotic smells of spices like cinnamon, coffee etc., not to mention tobacco which in the 1700s was popular in all levels of society.

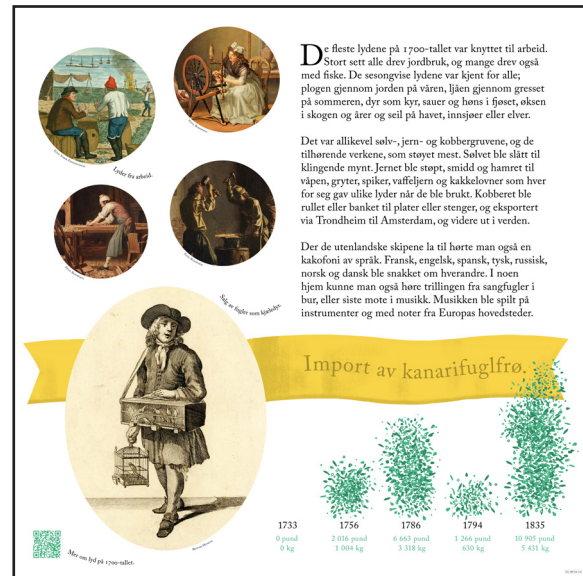


## THE LOOK

Large parts of Norway were deforested through the 1700s. The barren landscape began in coastal areas, but gradually moved inland. The trees were felled and exported, often yielding large profits to those involved.

Though much of the earnings provided by the exports were used for basic necessities, many also had a surplus which they used to decorate their surroundings. It became fashionable to have more colourful and often multi-coloured or patterned clothes. Many also chose to install windows, letting daylight into the house. With better lighting it was possible to better see and appreciate decorative pictures, books, furniture, the patterned bedspreads.

Material objects became a way for people to show what they thought were pleasing, or in other ways was important. The objects also became visualisations of social hierarchies. Those with many and beautiful things were clearly wealthy. Those with few and worn things, were poor.



## THE SOUND

Except for the sounds of nature, most sounds in the 1700s were work-related. Most people were farmers, and many also fished. Seasonal sounds were familiar to all; the plough through wet soil in spring, the scythe through grass in summer. Also; the sound of cows, sheep and chickens in the barn, the axe in the forest and oars and sails on the sea, lakes or rivers.

The silver, iron and copper mines, as well as the related works probably made the loudest noises. The silver was turned into hard cash. The iron was cast, forged and hammered into weapons, pots, nails, waffle irons and stoves which each gave different sounds when they were used. The copper was processed in furnaces before it was exported via Trondheim to Amsterdam, and further out into the world.

When foreign ships arrived to Norwegian ports they brought a cacophony of languages. French, English, Spanish, German, Russian, Dutch, Norwegian and Danish spoken, often at the same time. In some homes you also heard songbirds singing from their cages, or the latest fashions in music being played on instruments like the violin. In many more the sound of children playing would ring though the house or across fields, sometimes accompanied by toy trumpets or drums.

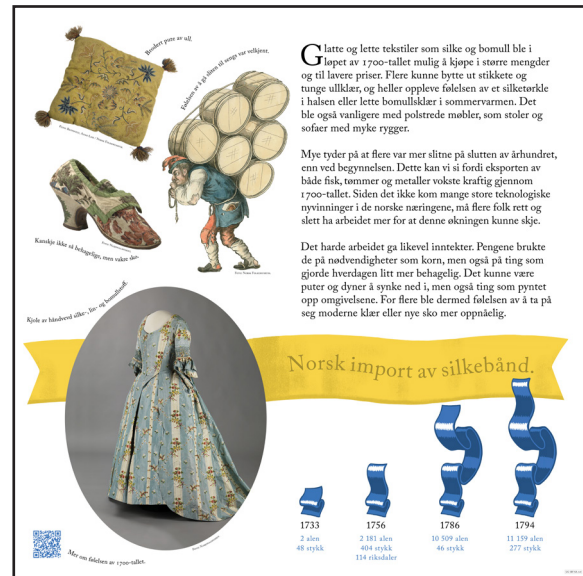


## THE TASTE

The day-to-day food for most people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was porridge or bread, often with butter and some cheese, and perhaps some salt fish or meat on the side. Increased international trade nevertheless meant that new flavours gradually entered Norwegian plates for a larger share of the population. From Southern Europe lemons and oranges, raisins, almonds, wine and olive oil arrived. From more distant continents came tobacco, coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate and spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper, cardamom and other spices.

The foreign foods made it possible to create dishes that tasted more and different than everyday diet. Many of these are today thought of as “typical Norwegian traditional food”.

The Norwegian exports also gave Europeans a taste Norwegian foods. In southern Europe stock fish and clip fish were made into savoury dishes like bacalao, and Norwegian caraway seeds gave taste to Danish spirits.



## THE FEEL

Increased comfort was one of the characteristics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. International trade brought an increasing array of soft and light fabrics in larger quantities and at lower prices. Gradually itchy and heavy woollen garments were replaced by soft silk scarves or lighter cotton clothes. Even furniture became more comfortable; upholstered chairs and sofas became fashionable in wealthier homes. In poorer houses cushions became increasingly common on the hard benches

Work was nevertheless hard. Increased exports of both fish and timber, as well as the lack of significant labour saving innovations in these sectors indicate that more people likely had to work harder at the end of the century, than those living at the start. Falling exhausted into bed must therefore have been an increasingly common experience as the century progressed.

The hard work nevertheless gave profits. These could be spent on necessities such as grain, but also on the things that made life a little more comfortable. Cushions and duvets to sink into at the end of the day are some examples, clothes like silk stockings, brocade bodices or fancy high heeled shoes. Though all may not all have been comfortable, the feeling of looking beautiful and fashionable gradually became attainable for more.