

“One can’t have everything”

**Consumption in Louise Clappe’s ‘The Shirley Letters’ from Gold Rush
California 1851-1852**

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Introduction

Really everybody should go to the mines, just to see how little it takes to make people comfortable in the world.¹

The mining community around Louise Clappe was collapsing. Her favorite cook had left, stores were running low on supplies, bar-rooms once filled with merry drinkers had become somber sanctuaries for the few miners remaining. She herself was waiting to leave Indian Bar² ahead of winter.³ To survive, she had depended on acts of consumption. Like others around her, she needed stores, hotels, washers, and cooks for survival and comfort. This thesis examines how consumption, its places and objects are described in Louise Clappe's *The Shirley Letters*, written in gold rush California during years 1851-1852.

Middle 19th century United States were a fast-growing nation. Both economic and population growth were unprecedented. Population pressure, land-scarcity and adventurism created a bursting nation 'destined' for westward growth.⁴ Gold discovery at Sutter's Mill in 1848 drew hundreds of thousands of migrants into California during the coming years. Previously isolated, California grew rapidly, integrating to global transportation and commercial networks, and in 1850 to the United States.⁵ Amid hopeful miners came very few women. One of them was Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe, who arrived at San Francisco in January of 1850 with her physician husband. They ended up on Rich Bar, northern part of the Sierra Nevada by September 1851, where her husband set up medical practice.⁶

When Clappe and her husband came to California, the most frenzied rush had started to cool off, but there was still growth in sight.⁷ They came at a time when modes of

¹ Shirley, Letter 23rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4, 1855, 348.

² Bar in place name means a ridge of sand or other material at rivers mouth. Swan's Anglo-American dictionary, 1950, 149. The gold-camps seem to mostly have been settlements build on these Bars. In this text, Bar capitalized means the community, while bar-room means the drinking area or establishment.

³ Shirley, Letter 23rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4, 1855, 347-349.

⁴ For U.S. history, see for example: Johnson 1997 or Jenkins 2007, passim. For economic history, see Gallman & Wallis 1992, passim.. In Finnish, see Henriksson 2021, passim.

⁵ Eifler 2017, 1.

⁶ Baranzini 1999, 239.

⁷ 'Easiest' gold fields depleted, there were fears of decline already in 1850. See Holliday 2002, 401-402. However, peak gold production was coming 1852. See Holliday 2002, 303 & Eifler 2017, 81

prospecting and digging were changing, and society changing along them. For this research it is relevant to note that society and especially commercial networks had already been developing for a few years, and their experience might differ from those who came during the first seasons. It should also be noted how the rush was devastating for Indians and environment of California.⁸ Clappe was part of a wide movement which permanently altered California, its pre-existing population and the whole United States. Concentrating on vital part of this movement, consumption, I aim at deeper understanding of the rush and its participant's lives, motives and actions.

At Rich Bar and neighboring Indian Bar, Clappe produced twenty-three letters. These appeared in *The Pioneer*-magazine's monthly issues during its short existence 1854-1855. Consisting mostly of historical articles and travel accounts, it was edited by founder Ferdinand C. Ewer.⁹ Whether Clappe wrote private letters or literature has been discussed.¹⁰ As they have been published, probably edited and never sent, I treat them as literary description of the gold rush. While private letters might have contained more candid information about things like money, I see little reason for her to restrain from publicly talking about consumption chances and goods. Publishing the letters under pseudonym, Dame Shirley, provided Clappe additional leeway.

Thus, we can presume her description of consumption trustworthy. Some parts, like drinking, gambling or material scarcity might have been exaggerated. Overall, consumption seems to have been matter of insignificance to Clappe, which generally makes historical material trustworthy on the insignificant subject.¹¹ Contextualized with earlier research, Clappe's writing provides ample evidence on the subject matter. When left in doubt or contradicted by the source, I have applied more careful criticism.

The source however presents some limitations. Clappe writes from the position of upper middle-class woman, who doesn't work for her sustenance. This makes her position different to the miners and others who work for a living. The letters are single narrative from certain viewpoint, limiting generalization possibilities. I have tried to differentiate

⁸ For the effect on Indians, see for example Eifler 2017, 69. For environmental effects, which often intertwined with effects on Indians, see Eifler 2017, 127, 144.

⁹ Lawrence 2006, 140.

¹⁰ Smith-Baranzini calls them 'believed by some historians to be private communique', 1999, 240, while Halverson calls them 'clearly intended to reach a broader audience' 2013, 27. Lawrence treats them as literature in epistolary form, 2006, 63-65. I view hints of private language in the letters as writing device.

¹¹ Sage handbook of documentary research 2006, 75.

between consumption of Clappe herself and the community she describes around her. Her descriptions of consumption habits and chances around her still offer some chances to create a broader picture of gold rush consumer environment.

I have selected *The Shirley Letters* because they contain abundant mentions of consumption, they have been often utilized in research¹² but not from this perspective and because they were accessible in digitized form through The Pioneers archived volumes at Internet Archive.¹³ During preliminary filtering of possible sources, Clappe's letters proved to be the most compact package of consumption description, whereas many other sources only contained scattered mentions. The source restricts my timeframe between September 1851 and November 1852, while my geographical frame is mostly Rich & Indian Bars with some excursions to surrounding communities in the northern Sierra Nevada.

I selected consumption as my focus because researching it not only paints a fuller picture of the past, but of our contemporary society too. The California gold rush provides an excellent basis for consumption research. It formed many new societies rapidly, and these societies needed to establish commercial links and habits to survive and thrive. As Mark Eifler has noted, researching the gold rush today brings us back to the roots of our attitudes towards work and material acquisition.¹⁴ Materiality and acquisitive nature of the rush are reasons more why this research is important. Understanding spending may lead us to understand mining and the attraction to gold better.

Consumption during the gold rush hasn't been researched specifically, at least not in a notable way. Multiple general histories on the rush have been produced through the years: John Caughey's *The California gold rush* (1975 [1948]), J.S. Holliday's *The world rushed in* (2002 [1981]), Malcolm Rohrbough's *Days of Gold* (1997) and Mark Eifler's *The California Gold Rush* (2017) have all been useful. They all acknowledge the commercial side of the rush, and none of them reinforce any self-sufficient pioneer images. However, none of them have commerce as their direct focus. I was unable to find research on general North-American consumption during the 19th century. Frank Trentmann's *Empire of things* (2016) covers the whole globe, but largely excludes this

¹² Caughey called them 'often-cited' already in 1948. Caughey, 1974, 284.

¹³ Internet Archive has many versions of *The Pioneer*-volumes. I used these: [volumes 1-2](#) and [3-4](#).

¹⁴ Eifler 2017, 5.

area and time. Terrence Witkowski's *A History of American Consumption* (2017) provided theoretical stimulus, but limited info on my subject matter.

Indeed, 19th century United States seems to still be under researched area on consumption. Historians trying to find consumer revolutions have concentrated on the 18th century and earlier.¹⁵ Instead of debating over what is consumer culture, I will mainly participate in the discussion about historical development of consumption and commercialization.¹⁶ My aim is to show evidence of consumption and development towards consumer culture present in the source. I will show that even though crude in some sense, gold rush Californians did indeed consume and rely on extensive commercial networks – even if they didn't have full consumer culture as such. In this way I hope to contribute to this discussion and fill gaps in consumption history.

Despite the thin research, we can say U.S. was highly commercialized during the 19th century. Ann Martin has shown growing possibilities of consumption reaching and permeating western frontier communities already in the preceding century.¹⁷ The strong growth of economy improved living standards for the middle- and higher classes during 1800-1860.¹⁸ From 1830s onwards America had a fully commercialized culture, even if still regional and largely centered in urban areas.¹⁹ This was the culture most migrants to California came from and which they brought with them. I aim to show the parts of commercialized culture visible in Clappe's writing.

How consumption is described in The Shirley Letters and why was consumption like described are my main research questions. Each chapter has supplementary questions. The first sub-chapter concentrates on flow-of-goods, how goods reached the camps and from where. The second sub-chapter aims to describe the places of consumption like stores and hotels. Then I move to the objects and acts of consumption in the second main chapter, describing them, their acquisition and maintenance. In the third main chapter I

¹⁵ See e.g., Trentmann 2016, 10–11, Mullins 2011, 42. Sassatelli 2007, 14–20.

¹⁶ Consumer culture theory (CCT) can't be unconditionally applied to California, as all requirements posed by Witkowski aren't fulfilled. As some are, it could be argued that California did indeed have its own consumer culture. However, the source and limits of this thesis do not enable further theoretical debate. More on CCT, see Witkowski 2017, 2-3. For historical perspective, see Trentmann 2016, 10-11 or Agnew 1993, 19-40.

¹⁷ Martin 2008, 108, 159.

¹⁸ Walsh 1992, 252.

¹⁹ Agnew 1993, 27.

delve deeper into the meanings of consumption and how circumstances affected the chances to consume – ambitiously proposing a special gold rush consumer environment.

My research is situated on the fields of social- and economic history. Analyzing the source through close reading makes this thesis qualitative in terms of methods.²⁰ Qualitative analysis fits the source's descriptive nature best. Due to small diversity of items mentioned in the text, I decided not to catalog them. I have tried to mention most objects in analysis, still avoiding exhaustive lists. Despite close reading, I have mostly refrained from deep textual analysis. It wouldn't fit my aim of showing consumer environment around Clappe. Instead of Clappe's reasons for certain portrayals, I concentrate on the portrayals themselves, how they fit larger context, why were things like portrayed and what it means for consumption history. However, the relationship between Clappe's status and her descriptions of consumption is addressed.

Following Carlo Ginzburg and others, I use Clappe's mentions of insignificant or marginal actions as clues towards something larger.²¹ Mundane things for her act as important evidence for me towards the commerciality of her surroundings. Thus, my research is also situated on the field of microhistory. Flow between micro- and macro history has been found useful in earlier consumption history research.²² In this thesis the flow is visible in how world-trade, immigration and wider social realities affect life at the camps – and how Clappe and the camps tell a wider story of the western expansion and commercialization of societies.

Mining camps differed in many ways from the commercial urban centers of east coast United States and Europe, traditional locations of consumption history. Thus, I deviate from earlier consumption history, concentrating on the environment of consumption over things like identity. In this way, I touch on the field of business history as well from the viewpoint of a customer. I would also place my research as following the material turn in historical research.²³ Consumption is largely based on material goods. Materiality can't be ignored in this research either, even if not my main focus. Still, consumption is more than shopping goods – it includes the flow, acquisition, and use of things as well as

²⁰ On close reading, see e.g., Patricia Kain, *How to do close reading*, 1998.

²¹ About Ginzburg and microhistory, see e.g., Peltonen, 2014, or Ginzburg himself, same publication.

²² Trentmann 2016, 17.

²³ For material turn in history, see e.g., Green, 2012

services.²⁴ I also include entertainment and gambling in the definition as both feature in earlier consumption history research.²⁵

Rather than the debated and possibly unapplicable *consumer culture*, I use *consumer environment* to describe the chances of consumption around Clappe. Consumer culture implies that majority act in certain way, while environment only implies the described possibilities for consumption. Concepts like *style*,²⁶ and *fashion*,²⁷ still appear in the text. *Commercial* and its derivatives are also important.²⁸ Mark Eifler has noted how the rush needed support to work.²⁹ This support, largely commercial, is what I want to focus on through the eyes of Louise Clappe, also known as Dame Shirley.

²⁴ Trentmann 2016, 1–3.

²⁵ Entertainment has been included in Anna Sundelin's research on colonial Jamaica, see Sundelin 2018, chapter 3 '*Places of consumption and costly entertainment*'. Gambling has been designated consumption practice in CCT, see Witkowski 2017, 54.

²⁶ Meaning way of doing something. Cambridge Dictionary, 2023. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>.

²⁷ Meaning style popular in particular time. Cambridge Dictionary, 2023.

²⁸ I define *commercialize* as the process of society becoming centered on profit and buying/selling while *commerciality* is the phenomenon of profit/consumption present in society. Both are derived from word *commercial*, which means something aimed to make profit. Cambridge Dictionary, 2023.

²⁹ Eifler 2017, 7.

1. Diverse places and volatile flows of consumption

1.1. Formal, informal, and disturbed flows of goods

Remote state from the east-coast business and transportation hubs, goods traveled a long way to reach harbors of California. The mining camps were further away, with some commercial links still at their infant stages. In this chapter, I look at the way flow-of-goods is described in Clappe's letters. Consumption starts with obtaining the product or service, one way or another.

Having troubles finding food to buy on her first trip to the mining camps, Clappe mentions miners' 'hand-to-mouth style of living'. Houses they passed had no provisions, and the hotel's food service had already ended for the night in Marysville.³⁰ To me, this demonstrates her expectations of consumption chances. She was used to finding food both from private houses and commercial establishments like hotels. During early rush there were wider problems with supporting the masses of people.³¹ Some remained in 1851, but it was not that there was no food available. Her husband resorted to nearby restaurant for oysters, tomatoes, toast and coffee, food that Clappe calls 'only available at the time', yet still better than eating unacceptable pie & cheese or worse yet, 'saw-dusty' crackers.³² This sets the tone for Clappe's attitude towards consumption.

Marysville was one of the booming cities that supplied merchants and teamsters with goods to take for sale on the camps. The booming cities got their goods from San Francisco, the main hub and harbor of the coast.³³ This formed commercial linkages enabling flow of goods, but as we can see from above, even in Marysville the options were limited from the perception of some. Furthermore, this flow was often disturbed. Soon after arriving at Rich Bar, their first residence, Clappe describes the hardships of miners settled there before them. Some people stranded for winter 1850-51 at the Bar had gone through snow to 'Frenchman's Ranch', packed flour on their backs and walked back the 40 miles.³⁴

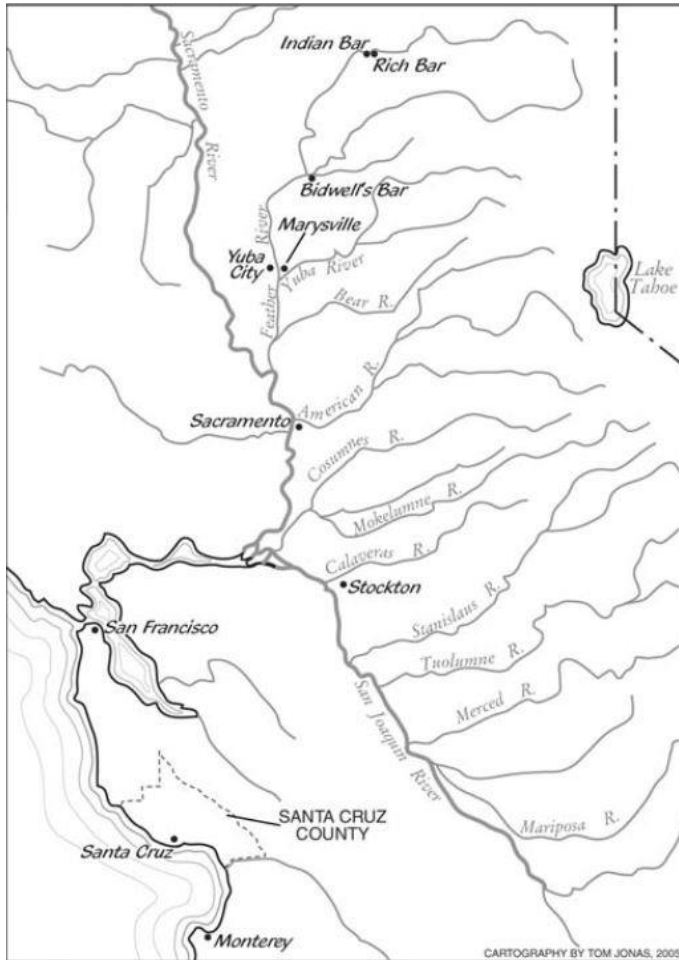
³⁰ Shirley, Letter 1st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1, 1854, 42-43.

³¹ Eifler 2017, 78.

³² Shirley, Letter 1st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 43.

³³ Eifler 2017, 82.

³⁴ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1, 1854, 224.



Map showing the gold fields and Clappe's residences Rich & Indian Bar. From Deborah Lawrence's *Writing the trail* (2006), p. 63. Map by Tom Jonas.

I see this demonstrating the importance of informal networks of consumption and commerce. When more formal commerce as described above failed, ranches and other mining camps not extensively used for goods became the only place to find food. And these links were not for personal sustenance only. Clappe tells how these packers sold their flour in the camp for 3 dollars a pound, apparently considerable

profit. Further she affirms to her readers that there was no danger of famine anymore, as people had prepared with supplies to last many years, and there were at least two or three well-filled groceries in town.³⁵

This fits the evolution of mining camp to mining town proposed by Eifler.³⁶ This evolution clearly included commerce and consumption. As Rich Bar grew and became more stable, it became at least seemingly more trustworthy in its commercial links. At formation there might have been more need for informal networks, which then diminished as more formal networks were formed. However, later these links seemed to somewhat persist, and were used especially for certain delicacies and perishable goods. Milk was one of these, which Clappe procured from 'Spanish Rancho'.³⁷

³⁵ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 224. This in itself shows that there were specified 'groceries' at the Bar, and thus multiple traders with different specialties.

³⁶ Eifler 2017, 82. Some mining camps attracted permanent merchants, with more people and business following, and in this way camps gradually became towns.

³⁷ Shirley, Letter 4th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 273.

In addition to stores supplied by the formal commercial flow and ranchos selling their own supplies, distributing goods onwards from person to person was one important form of consumption. Clappe describes distributing all her pins to interested Indians,³⁸ and her little scent bottles to children for play.³⁹ This part of consumption has sometimes been ignored in earlier definitions and research. Agreeing with Trentmann, I think it's important to describe the flow-of-goods in its entirety.⁴⁰ It also highlights the partly recycling nature of consumption in the mining camps. In addition to recycling goods as toys, for example certain types of wine bottles were used to make lanterns.⁴¹

According to Witkowski, during the westward sweep of American expansion most consumer goods were produced locally.⁴² California might not fit this, as most were occupied in mining and relied on imported goods. Clappe explicitly groans on how hard it was to get stools made at the camps. She had to take chairs from the hotel, with only a bench produced locally for her new cabin. For this same cabin, her husband tried to get glass from the hotel's windows but had to order glass from Marysville. This was on October 7th. and they did not expect to get them before snow.⁴³

This hints at how long it took to get some items delivered. It also supports the notion of largely imported goods available at the mining camps. Reliance on imports has been noticed by earlier research,⁴⁴ and is further implied by San Francisco's position as one of the busiest foreign-trade ports of 1851 in the whole United States.⁴⁵ Many material things Clappe had brought from Marysville. She relates a long list of articles: carpet, pillows, quilts, blankets, linen, and towels.⁴⁶ Whether these were bought from Marysville we can't say for certain. Most likely they were produced in eastern United States or possibly in foreign countries. Despite Clappe's troubles and examples of imported items, it is still probable larger things like furniture were self-made and primitive.

There seems to have been special emphasis on products from the States. One storekeeper Clappe called 'The Yank' told her he had brought all his 'peculiar' items from the States

³⁸ Shirley, Letter 1st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 92. Both the source and newest research (Eifler) use *Indians*, so I have used it as well.

³⁹ Shirley, Letter 5th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 349.

⁴⁰ Trentmann 2016, 3–4.

⁴¹ Shirley, Letter 13th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 147.

⁴² Witkowski 2017, 93.

⁴³ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 93-94.

⁴⁴ Holliday 2002, 354.

⁴⁵ Eifler 2017, 93.

⁴⁶ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer* vol. 2. 1854, 94.

with him. He had been selling his stock for 3 years.⁴⁷ Through the descriptions of material things and their acquisition, material scarcity and desire for more is clearly shown. From the chairs to oilcloth for table, Clappe's family had to adapt and find different options.

Later in winter 1852 the flow of goods experienced problems. While by February proprietor of the Empire-hotel had bought a cow for local milk, the *rancheros* in turn had stopped driving cattle for slaughter.⁴⁸ Riverboats and easier passages kept settlements downstream supplied, but it was usual for the furthest, most northern mines to be sometimes impossible to reach.⁴⁹ This is heavily emphasized when Clappe tells of being without potatoes and onions from mid-February until late May. Then she illuminates the ecstatic state caused by the arrival of new foods via Spanish packers' mule-caravan.⁵⁰ These packers were an important part of the supply chain, and often were disappointed miners who had turned to more lucrative work.⁵¹

When these mule-caravans started to arrive, we can see similar behavior as described above during the previous winter-blockade. People brought on their back's supplies from Rich Bar to Indian Bar and sold them. Increasing numbers of supplies reaching the mines, potatoes went from forty cents per pound to shilling a pound in two days.⁵² This fits patterns of glutted markets of earlier years. Often when goods started to arrive, scarcity turned to abundance, waste, and plummeting prices.⁵³

Clappe often emphasizes how goods didn't arrive or were hard to get. Long distances and hard paths made transportation difficult. When formal links failed, informal network of commerce provided goods, if possible. Hardship and uncertainty created scarcity. Sharing, recycling and adapting were ways of coping with this. At least for Clappe, purchasing was the first impulse when in need. Often this was not possible, at least not for all wants. Scarcity, fluctuating prices and wanting consumers either rich in gold or soon to be rich created unique consumer environment. This was exhibited in various places of consumption.

⁴⁷ Shirley, Letter 9th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 218.

⁴⁸ Shirley, Letter 13th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 148.

⁴⁹ Holliday 2002, 303.

⁵⁰ Shirley, Letter 17th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 355-356.

⁵¹ Eifler 2017, 82.

⁵² Shirley, Letter 17th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 356.

⁵³ See Holliday 2002, p. 321 & Caughey 1975, p. 91.

1.2. Multipurpose rag-hotels and other places of consumption

*Indeed, for that matter, California herself might be called the Hotel State, so completely is she inundated with taverns, boarding-houses, &c.*⁵⁴

Often acts of consumption happen in a designated place, like a store, hotel, or restaurant. As can be seen from Clappe's quote above, California had these as well. This chapter examines what these places of consumption were like in gold rush California. How the economy or style of settlements affected them is discussed, and whether they were in line with rest of the country or differed from national developments.

For starters it is important to note that places of consumption were often merged businesses with broad services. 'Stores' could provide meals, provisions, drinking and accommodation.⁵⁵ This is apparent in the case of Rich Bar. Its hotel, The Empire, was half-shop downstairs, with an array of goods on display. It had areas for playing cards, drinking, socializing, and dining.⁵⁶ The smaller hotel at Indian Bar was attached to bowling-alley, provided meals and accommodation, had a dancefloor and a violin-skilled cook, a popular attraction.⁵⁷ Those establishments Clappe calls 'hotels' were centers of consumption with wider functions, while other businesses offered more limited services.

There is a reason why 'hotel' is in hyphenations. The hotels of mining camps and towns embodied the nature of the settlements. They were often makeshift in nature, with canvases as roofs or walls. They were constantly developing, but still far from what you could call a permanent hotel-building.⁵⁸ The Empire hotel fits this description well. It had a canvas roof and front, with rough planks for frame and other three walls. It's decoration of crimson calico, apparent signature color of the 'Golden State', combined with 'uncomfortable looking' benches and sofa elicit clear condescension from Clappe. Still, it was the only two-story building in town and only place with glass windows (only in the parlor, not individual rooms).⁵⁹ So, the hotel seems to have been an easily identifiable

⁵⁴ Shirley Letter 2nd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 174.

⁵⁵ Rohrbough 1998, 132-133.

⁵⁶ Shirley, Letter 2nd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 174.

⁵⁷ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 92.

⁵⁸ Rohrbough 1998, 132-133.

⁵⁹ Shirley, Letter 2nd. *The Pioneer*. vol. 1. 1854, 174.

landmark and thus attractive center for all kinds of activities. This was usual for the hotels of the far-west.⁶⁰

Similarly, the ‘Humboldt’ hotel at Indian Bar, the only hotel in vicinity, was a ‘rag-house’ with shingled roof.⁶¹ By my interpretation it had a wooden frame and roof but canvas for all walls. The wooden floor mentioned earlier made it popular among miners living in tents and earth floor cabins. According to Sandoval-Strausz, settlement hotels, made from planks fast and cheaply, were popular in the far-west of the 1850s.⁶² Clappe however notes how building the Empire, in all its crudeness, cost over 8000 dollars, because everything had to be transported from Marysville. The gamblers who originally built it had to later sell it for a few hundred dollars.⁶³ Thus California’s mining camp hotels might deviate slightly from rest of the far west, but they seem to have been important centers of sociability and commerce where Clappe lived too.

There was a clear need for accommodation services. Inexperience in preparing meals provided demand for places to eat at.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the impermanent nature of the settlements meant that only a few built cabins, and those who had no tents needed beds. Deborah Lawrence has marked the rooming houses and hotels as a sign of impermanence.⁶⁵ I would conclude that they were not only that, but also consequences of it. The makeshift hotel fits perfectly in a consumer environment where towns sprang up rapidly and could be gone tomorrow.

Traveling reveals other ways of accommodation. In her first letter, Clappe complains how there is nowhere to sleep, and they must continue riding through fatigue to reach a ranch.⁶⁶ Later she is on a trip to American Valley, where she boards on ‘Greenwoods Rancho’. ‘Miserable conditions’, that make her own cabin feel ‘luxurious’ cost 14 dollars a week.⁶⁷ For reference, the average weekly cost of board two years earlier had been 11 dollars in California and 12 in Sacramento.⁶⁸ There seems to have been a more informal accommodation system provided by the ranches. At the Greenwoods Rancho they were

⁶⁰ Sandoval-Strausz 2008, 96.

⁶¹ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 93.

⁶² Sandoval-Strausz 2008, 95–96.

⁶³ Shirley, Letter 2nd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 175.

⁶⁴ Rohrbough 1998, 144.

⁶⁵ Lawrence 2006, 66.

⁶⁶ Shirley, Letter 1st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 45.

⁶⁷ Shirley, Letter 22nd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 281.

⁶⁸ Clay & Jones 2008, 1014.

building a larger log house, expecting more travelers from the growing settlements around them.⁶⁹ It seems that this informal system was already turning into hotel- or resort-style service in 1852.

Growing camps and towns very rapidly attracted all kinds of business, not only hotels. Stores, drug stores, bakeries, even circuses were among them. Growing town meant fierce competition.⁷⁰ Clappe mentions no circus, but a lot of gambling and bowling. Competition meant to consumers growing possibilities of consumption. One can't draw generalized conclusions from Clappe's writing, since she clearly doesn't mention all possible traders and businesses available. It is still probable that business grew same way the number of physicians jumped from three to twenty-nine in three weeks from Clappe's arrival.⁷¹

When she does describe merchanting, she does it with detail. The above-mentioned Empire hotel's shop had velveteen, leather & calico, hams, preserved meats, oysters and other groceries. The calico was starched to an 'appalling state of stiffness' and all the merchandise was 'in hopeless confusion'.⁷² Designating the calico as too stiff, she shows a sense of style. She still has standards, possibly stemming from her life in the east. Deeming the display of goods as 'hopeless', she shows experience of better merchanting. She designates the frontier shop as lower. This might be in relation to the East coast, or only to what she has seen in California so far, in San Francisco and other bigger centers.

The general store, offering merchandise from foodstuffs and materials to hardware was the main retail form of the 1850s United States countryside. There were specialty shops only in the biggest cities.⁷³ Showing familiarity with general stores, 'The Yanks' store receives favorable description from Clappe. Despite describing his log cabin store across the river as having 'the most heterogeneous merchandise', she is clearly pleased with the trader and his selection. Crowbars, needles, velveteen trousers and 'jaunty' broadcloth coats are among articles mentioned. Even though sometimes faced with questionable quality of the goods, she calls the Yank her dear friend and visits him often. She found sealing wax only from there, while other traders had laughed at her.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Shirley, Letter 22nd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 281.

⁷⁰ Rohrbough 1998, 163, 166.

⁷¹ Shirley, Letter 1st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 42.

⁷² Shirley, Letter 2nd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 174.

⁷³ Eleanor 1989, 359-361.

⁷⁴ Shirley, Letter 9th. *The Pioneer*. vol. 2. 1854, 217-218.

The general stores of the time had to be in a good location, reachable by wagon that is, and selection by customers was guided by location, trust, and prices. Service was in large role, as all business was done personally between merchant and a customer.⁷⁵ In the mining camps the situation was a little different. The stores frequented by Clappe were clearly within walking distance. As prices were high and fluctuating, it is reasonable to expect that they drove selection in California. Obviously, the limited availability of stock was another guiding factor – you bought where you could find what you needed, as illustrated by Clappe’s sealing wax above. Trust and quality of service being important is visible in her descriptions of ‘The Yank’ and how she kept returning to him after successful first impression.

At least by August 1852 there was bakery next door to Clappe’s residence at Indian Bar.⁷⁶ Otherwise, her descriptions of consumption center on the two hotels and store of ‘The Yank’. There were probably many more businesses, but it is only natural that she describes those she frequented. Growing cities and miners making money expanded demand from bare sustenance to new services, food, and entertainment. There was a lot of hard cash, gold, in circulation.⁷⁷ It is no wonder that in research early on it has been noted how real fortunes were made by the traders.⁷⁸ For example, keeping a hotel or restaurant could provide living back in New York, but in California could make you enormous fortunes.⁷⁹

Places of consumption were diverse in the mining country. Hotels were fused businesses with multiple purposes, often quickly built. Other businesses, like general stores or bakeries could be located in log cabins. Nationwide development of retailing and hotels laid framework for these places, but the temporary nature of settlements and state of economy made these establishments special. Clappe describes some places of business minutely, while certainly leaving others unmentioned. With high dependency on imported goods, the mining communities could not have survived without commerce. Many noticed this and made good money by trade. In the gold fields there were places to spend your money at, and some of these became centers of social life.

⁷⁵ Eleanor 1989, 363-364.

⁷⁶ Shirley, Letter 19th. *The Pioneer*. vol. 4. 1855, 104.

⁷⁷ Rohrbough 1998, 67, 128.

⁷⁸ Jenkins 1957, 300.

⁷⁹ Holliday 2002, 10.

2. Cooks, gamblers and other ways to spend your gold

2.1. Limited cooking & unlimited sanctifying spirits

Diet of early-rush miners consisted mostly of preserved or fresh meat, bread or biscuits and coffee, but every successive season brought more options regarding meals.⁸⁰ When Clappe arrived, food situation had already been improving for few years. In this chapter, I analyze food and drink described in her letters. Especially I examine what did they eat and where the food came from. Drinking receives its own treatment as well.

Life in the mines induced a new appreciation for food. Ordinary foods back home had relatively heightened value at the area. Stopping to eat on her way to new residence, Clappe joyously describes ‘delicacies’ like fresh butter and milk eaten at breakfast.⁸¹ This reveals how she had already lifted these elsewhere ordinary items to delicacies. Indeed, milk and dairy were rare in California, as traditionally ranchers there kept cattle for meat instead.⁸² As noted earlier, Clappe later got milk sporadically from ‘Spanish Rancho’.⁸³ There is a notable absence of milk and dairy in Clappe’s letters, and when they are mentioned, their rarity is underlined.

Fresh milk and dairy were not the only products to climb the ladder of delicacy. There are mentions of early miners eating old animal carcasses they found.⁸⁴ Clappe didn’t resort to this, even though fresh meat at times did get scarce. At winter they had no fresh meat for a month, instead relying on their plenty stock of cured pork like dark ham and seafood like mackerels, oysters, and sardines.⁸⁵ Not accounting for the two ringdoves she received as a present for cooking, Clappe doesn’t mention any hunted meat.⁸⁶ Thus, Clappe relied heavily on bought food, in her case almost always made ready by cook.

Moving from Rich Bar to Indian Bar, Clappe describes her ‘coronation dinner’. The cook there called her Queen and hoped she appreciates his cooking more than the miners did. This multicourse dinner included oyster soup, fried salmon from the local river, roast beef and boiled ham, fried oysters with sides of potatoes and onions, pastry of mince pie and

⁸⁰ Rohrbough 1998, 143.

⁸¹ Shirley, Letter 1st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 92.

⁸² Horsman 2008, 200.

⁸³ Shirley, Letter 4th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 273.

⁸⁴ Horsman 2008, 200.

⁸⁵ Shirley, Letter 12th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 83.R

⁸⁶ Shirley, Letter 13th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 148.

pudding made without eggs or milk, with still more dessert: madeira nuts and raisins. Claret, champagne, and coffee were had as drinks.⁸⁷ This shows they tried to emulate fancy dinners and retain certain parts of lifestyle, even through limited possibilities.

The cook had a sense of pride and skill, feeling his skills wasted on miners who ate anything. He expected Clappe, as refined woman from the east, to appreciate his effort. In this setting, extensive dinners with a variety of courses and ingredients were for special occasions. This was acknowledged by Clappe: they normally ate breakfast at nine, dinner at six with soup-lunch in the middle. The special dinner helped them forget their living conditions. She also feared that they might not have as varied food during the winter.⁸⁸

Others had finer dinners and parties for celebration too. Celebrating the opening of a new hotel could warrant a lavish feast.⁸⁹ Clappe also provides further examples. The Christmastime festival Saturnalia, discussed at length later, was one of the occasions to bring out oysters and champagne.⁹⁰ Visiting a 'Spaniard' at a place called 'Junction', she received breakfast with oysters, salmon, venison, beef, preserved chicken, every possible vegetable and drinks like tea, coffee, chocolate, champagne, claret, porter, and stronger spirits. All they missed was ice, a luxury they always had at home near permafrost. Some of these were imported and bought, others from own garden of the 'Spaniard'.⁹¹

This hints at some local production of food near the Bars. During earlier rush food was imported even from distant places like Chile and Hawaii Islands as well as closer from Oregon and New Mexico. By Clappe's time there was local production in bigger cities like Sacramento, but imported food still remained important.⁹²

Even with provisions and other options available, there was a ready market for prepared meals. Just by buying provisions and cooking them on an open fire you could make good money, feeding dozens of miners at a time.⁹³ Through Clappe's writing you get the sense that there was always a larger group at the table, not just her and her husband. To me, the meals at the mines seem often very communal. Clappe was not unique in the case of food.

⁸⁷ Shirley, Letter 8th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 151.

⁸⁸ Shirley, Letter 8th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 152-153. As we saw earlier, her fears turned to reality. See notes 47-49, p. 11.

⁸⁹ Horsman 2008, 202.

⁹⁰ Shirley, Letter 12th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 81.

⁹¹ Shirley, Letter 20th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 173.

⁹² Horsman 2008, 199-200, 205-207.

⁹³ Horsman 2008, 200.

The cook of her 'coronation' became her favorite, and she was sad when Ned left in February 1852.⁹⁴ Furthermore, while describing recent crimes, she fleetingly hints at having a personal cook, a black male, during at least April & May 1852.⁹⁵ This combined with how she at the very end complains about having to cook herself,⁹⁶ tells us that Clappe was depended on and heavy consumer of ready-made food. Since 'Ned' was not her personal cook, there were other cooks and meals were communal, it is reasonable to presume there was active consumption of prepared meals. Still, we can't generalize that all or even most bought their food ready made by cook. Many could have eaten provisions, these bought from traders.

Overall, the situation regarding food seems to have been continuously improving. Luckier than many later goldrush sites, California had a tradition of ranching and coastline for importation.⁹⁷ During Clappe's time food security improved, with only regional variables and seasonal catastrophes risking poor times. Famines becoming rare, Clappe's complaints of food seem to be more on the side of quality and variety rather than scarcity and hunger. Dried and canned foods or dry foods such as biscuits⁹⁸ prevailed, while fresh products were harder to get. Obviously situation at the mines was different from the cities of California and from the U.S. east coast. Already in 1850 there was plenty to eat for those with money in San Francisco, restaurants ranging from French to Chinese.⁹⁹

There was no shortage of drinks in the gold rush settlements. One trader quipped how in Sacramento everybody drinks, more or less.¹⁰⁰ The Shirley Letters are filled with drinking too. Above we have seen how Clappe drank champagne and wines, while leaving the stronger spirits for 'the stronger spirits'.¹⁰¹ This echoes the view of alcohol I interpret from her writings. Drinking in moderation is fine and classy, while excess and drunkenness is commented on condescendingly or at best neutral, as if it was the natural state of things in the camps.

⁹⁴ Shirley, Letter 13th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 143.

⁹⁵ The former cook was hanged on suspicion of murdering his new employer. According to Clappe, 'he was the last one anybody though capable of such act.' Shirley, Letter 19th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 107.

⁹⁶ Shirley, Letter 23rd. *The Pioneer*. vol. 4. 1855, 345.

⁹⁷ Horsman 2008, 207.

⁹⁸ Clappe especially disliked saleratus biscuits, which taste of bitter alkali she had to kill with onions. Shirley, Letter 21st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 232.

⁹⁹ Horsman 2008, 197.

¹⁰⁰ Horsman 2008, 204.

¹⁰¹ Shirley, Letter 20th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 173.

Nationwide alcohol consumption peaked in 1830, and the 1850s was a time of temperance movements and liquor bills.¹⁰² Sure enough, Clappe mentions this. They drank champagne, for they had 'no fear of temperance society or Maine laws'.¹⁰³ According to Malcolm Rohrbough, miners rarely drank during the week, at least during early rush.¹⁰⁴ Other research has offered differing views, telling of excess drinking.¹⁰⁵ Clappe portrays drinking abundantly, rather supporting presence of excess drinking.

Gamblers and drinkers made noise at all hours, disturbing Clappe.¹⁰⁶ Even the canvas-house of the washerwoman had a bar-room.¹⁰⁷ Brandied fruits were imported in enormous quantities. Clappe quips how those who saved by making their own bread might spend 15-20 dollars a night drinking at the bar-rooms.¹⁰⁸ Following migrations, drinking saloons were springing up in every direction.¹⁰⁹ Chilean Independence Day was celebrated with twenty-gallon keg of brandy, and not only Chileans enjoyed it.¹¹⁰ Finally, she quips how 'nothing can be done in California without the sanctifying influence of the spirit'. Often the spirit was more 'questionable form than sparkling wine'.¹¹¹

This list illustrates the presence of drinking and alcohol on Rich Bar and Indian Bar. Many places sold alcohol, and it could be obtained in bulk too. Alcohol accelerated miners' spending, even if miners skimmed on other things. Sale of alcohol was clearly profitable. Many chose to put up a drinking establishment, often as one of first businesses in camp. Clappe might have very well agreed with Hinton Helper, who Mark Eifler has quoted: '...California can and does furnish the best bad things that are obtainable in America'.¹¹²

In The Shirley Letters, there are both descriptions of scarcity and abundance. Variety of foods and drinks are discussed. At times disturbed by seasons, the world of food and drink was at other times relatively rich for Clappe and others around her capable of paying. Professional cooks and emulated lavish dinners through limited possibilities brought

¹⁰² Witkowski 2017, 99.

¹⁰³ Shirley, Letter 13th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 145.

¹⁰⁴ Rohrbough 1998, 147.

¹⁰⁵ See for example Holliday 2002, p. 291, 336, 454, and Eifler 2017, p. 84-86, 188, 196.

¹⁰⁶ Shirley, Letter 6th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Shirley, Letter 5th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 348.

¹⁰⁸ Shirley, Letter 13th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 147. Indirectly this illustrates that some bought their bread from bakers, while some saved by making their own.

¹⁰⁹ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 222. & Shirley, Letter 17th., *The Pioneer*. Vol. 3. 1855, 360.

¹¹⁰ Shirley, Letter 4th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 275.

¹¹¹ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 222.

¹¹² Hinton Helper quoted in Eifler, 2017, 83.

variety to dry provisions and preserved food. Drinking was prevalent, and alcohol was consumed with food by Clappe and others by its own as well. Most important of all, the world of food and drink was highly commercialized. Provisions and alcohol were bought from traders and to some food was made ready by professional cooks.

2.2. Old clothes, well paid washers and other essentials

Food and drink weren't enough, the miners needed clothes and other essentials. In above chapters I have shown how some general stores carried ready-made clothes, cloths, and materials for making and repairing clothing. In this chapter I dig deeper into the clothes of The Shirley Letters. Where did they come from, what they were like and how they were cared for will get examined among other things. Other essentials, like tools, drugs and tobacco are also included in this chapter.

Clappe describes miners costume as consisting of flannel shirt (almost always dark blue), pantaloons with boots over them and a low-crowned black field hat. She remarked how the hat's 'fashion is not invariable'.¹¹³ This description shows that miners costume was simple and often down to color similar. Little variations could be created by small garments such as hats. The variations could be due to necessity more than personal preference. Stores probably carried only one or few variations of clothing items, making possible that changing and limited inflow of goods produced variations to costumes depending on time of purchase. Thus, 'fashion' should be taken here figuratively, not literally, as there doubtfully was any adherence to fashion on the miners' part.

Clothing selection at the western frontier during the 1850s was limited to utilitarian garments, with especially little for women.¹¹⁴ Situation seems to have been similar in California's mining camps. When Indian Bar's people gathered for 4th of July celebrations, everybody wore their colored shirts, some added calico or muslin white for the occasion. Clappe compared her own clothes 'from four years ago' to those of new ladies 'fresh from the States'.¹¹⁵ She clearly had different clothing standards for 'ladies'

¹¹³ Shirley, Letter 4th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 273.

¹¹⁴ Campbell & Brandt 1994, 18.

¹¹⁵ Shirley, Letter 18th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 22.

and others. Even if she wanted, Clappe could not procure new clothes for celebration, but had to use her old ones, feeling inferior compared to ladies who had fresher attires.

This is not the first or last time where Clappe exhibits a sense of style or certain set of standards. Later, before ‘riding out with the ladies’ to American Valley, their departure was postponed so that washer ‘china-man’ had time to clean their flannels. Clappe remarks how flannels at least need to be clean if they accept to wear them.¹¹⁶ She at the same time denotes flannels as something lesser but admits that they can be worn. Wearing flannels is an exception for the ladies, one they are forced to do. This again illustrates Clappe’s standards on what is normally acceptable for her to wear.

This opens an interesting viewpoint to both her background and clothing in the West. Generally, during the 1850s clothing had a growing importance for social purposes in the United States. Women expressed their self and values excepted from them through it.¹¹⁷ Clappe came from this refined society of the East. She thought about clothing, what she and others wore and in what state. Despite limited possibilities she still tried to convey messages through clothing, and others possibly did too. However, for all clothing might not have mattered that much. Social standings mixed in California. Lawyer in the east might be a waiter in the west.¹¹⁸ Clappe was curiously in the middle of these worlds, consumption chances limiting her actions.

There is little information on buying clothes in The Shirley Letters. Describing clothing relatively often, Clappe does not mention her or anybody else buying them. Indeed, it was common to bring clothes to the western frontier in bulk and then care for them meticulously.¹¹⁹ Because California was remote and the rush so sudden, the journey limited what people could bring with them. Goods were often abandoned along the way.¹²⁰ We must consider this and can’t ascertain that California fits the mold of general western frontier perfectly. During the first seasons, miners often had no clothes for changing.¹²¹ It is possible many still had only single or two sets of clothes, using and caring for them as long as they lasted.

¹¹⁶ Shirley, Letter 21st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 230.

¹¹⁷ Gordon 1992, 51.

¹¹⁸ Eifler 2017, 87.

¹¹⁹ Campbell & Brandt 1994, 16-17.

¹²⁰ See Eifler 2017, 62,71 and Caughey 1975, 119.

¹²¹ Rohrbough 1998, 191.

There had to be ways to replace clothing. As we have seen earlier, the trader 'Yank' sold ready-made clothing among other things.¹²² Also, by 1851-1852 there was at least to some Sacramento observers 'rigid adherence' to fashion in the city.¹²³ As the larger centers developed and clothing started to develop in terms of availability and importance, some of this influence might have reached the camps as well as affected Clappe's views on clothing standards.

Caring for clothes created market for washers. Clappe tells how the washer woman, whose services she used, made one hundred dollars weekly. Clappe pondered how she herself wasn't producing anything of value like almost everyone else in the community was, instead spending much money for the washing service alone. She says in San Francisco washing clothes cost 8 dollars per dozen.¹²⁴ Her tone implies that the rate at the Bar is same or even higher.

Pondering income and expenses shows that she was somewhat conspicuous of her own money use and knew her place in the economical hierarchy of the settlement. Possibly unique in this sense, in wider context she was not. Wives of army officers moving to western frontier, which to Clappe could reasonably be compared, avoided washing their clothes themselves if possible.¹²⁵ Furthermore, I think the mere amount of the washer woman's earnings suggests others used her services too. Washers were employed in other mining camps as well, with washing often reserved for the women and the Chinese.¹²⁶

In addition to food, drink and clothes, the miners needed other items. Miner's pack described by Clappe had blankets, frying pan, pickaxe, shovel, and food items.¹²⁷ Early concentration on tools by traders and mining turning more industrial probably affects how much they are mentioned.¹²⁸ By Clappe's time California probably had all the basic equipment needed. However, what they didn't seem to have were screws. Clappe drearily comments how funeral coffin had to be nailed shut.¹²⁹ It is left open whether this was in anyway unusual, but Clappe seems to view it as one more proof of poor circumstances.

¹²² Shirley, Letter 9th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 217-218.

¹²³ Eifler 2017, 199.

¹²⁴ Shirley, Letter 5th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 348.

¹²⁵ Campbell & Brandt 1994, 20.

¹²⁶ Eifler 2017, 140.

¹²⁷ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 223.

¹²⁸ See Eifler 2017, 19 for trade of tools, and Eifler 2017, 80, Rohrbough 1998, 191-192 or Lawrence 2006, 72, for changes in mining techniques.

¹²⁹ Shirley, Letter 5th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 348.

Other items include drugs, which are mentioned fleetingly in form of husband's 'respectable array of medicines'.¹³⁰ His husband provides us also with the only glimpse to tobacco on the Bars, as he had clay pipes, cigars, cigaritos, 'every procurable variety of tobacco'.¹³¹ Other than these, both are noticeably absent from the letters. We know that both were present during the rush.¹³² Her physician husband might make drugs too ordinary for her to comment, while his continued employment proves demand for medical care. Both drugs and tobacco probably had demand and use, but the sources don't concentrate on it. Many marginal items of consumption suffer the same fate, like those mentioned in store descriptions I have no space to analyze here. We can only assume by scattered mentions that they were sold and used like the context and evidence hints.

Clothes are often described in Clappe's letters, though she didn't buy them locally. The stores only carried limited selection and existing clothes were meticulously cared for by professional washers. There were similarities with other western frontier, but differences too. Other items like tools and drugs could be bought at the camps as well. Both in clothes and other essentials the main impression is the same as with food, scarcity. This scarcity commercial outlets tried their best to amend.

2.3. Gambling for gold, bowling for fun – entertainment of gold fields

*They [gamblers] have not troubled the Bar much during the winter, but as the spring opens, they flock in like ominous birds of prey. Last week one left here, after a stay of four days, with over a thousand dollars of the hard-earned gold of the miners.*¹³³

Here Clappe provides us with examples of her attitude towards gambling, the prevalence of gambling and estimation of gambling proprietors income. One of the most popular entertainment forms in California, gambling connected to miners' experience of 'gambling' for gold in the fields.¹³⁴ It was a major way of spending money, and possibly

¹³⁰ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 221.

¹³¹ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 95.

¹³² For medical care, see Holliday 2002, 372 or Eifler 2017, 116. Tobacco was one of the vices mentioned by Hinton Helper, and boxes of it arrived at San Francisco, see Eifler 2017, 83, 92. Tobacco use in general was growing practice in the U.S., most chewing it, see Axton 2009, 49, 55.

¹³³ Shirley, Letter 15th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 310. Clappe calls both proprietors of games and the customers of them as *gamblers*.

¹³⁴ Eifler 2017, 84.

was driven as much by hopes of winning money as entertainment value. In this chapter, I analyze gambling in Clappe's letters along with other, competing forms of entertainment.

The actual scope of gambling can only be vaguely interpreted through qualitative sources and no numerical data available. Clappe saw gambling as widespread, mentioning it often. From early on, the drinkers and gamblers haunting the bar-room at all hours disturbed her sleep.¹³⁵ Possibly exaggeration, this still act as evidence of late-night gambling. Her later statements strengthen this view. Gambling historian David Schwartz has gone as far as saying that miners spent most of their earnings on gambling.¹³⁶ As noted above, this cannot be quantitatively confirmed.

Nonetheless, it is more likely that gambling really was as big as Clappe paints it. Founders of Rich Bar act as further examples. They became rich, but 'monte fiend' ruined them and turned them into drunken gamblers. This was according to her 'too common' scene at the mines.¹³⁷ Thus, Clappe's view of the gamblers was not always only condescending or moral outrage, but also at times had a sense of pity.

Rainy season increased demand for entertainment. According to Clappe, when mining and prospecting stalled, the most common games *monte* and *faro* with *poker*, *euchre* and *whist* were in constant demand. Even the Bar's silversmith raffled off gold rings he produced, which to Clappe were nothing special. Everybody still wanted them, and the winner often chose to raffle them again for profit.¹³⁸ In my opinion, this reveals the mindset of the miners. Rather than saving or acquiring jewelry in the cities, they chose to participate in raffles. It is possible the ring was simply symbol of winning or a tool to make more profit, and nobody wanted it for what it was as ornament. I think this mentality of gamble was further highlighted by the selection of games. The most common games, monte and faro, required little skill and were based on guessing.¹³⁹

Thus, mentality and circumstances can explain the flourishment of gambling. To Clappe, 'those who rule society', were gamblers.¹⁴⁰ This corroborates with Schwartz's view of how gambling dominated not only mining camps but other frontier hubs as well, like cow towns. Clappe's and other commentator's bewilderment seeing all the gambling could be

¹³⁵ Shirley, Letter 6th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 23.

¹³⁶ Schwartz 2007, 259.

¹³⁷ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 223.

¹³⁸ Shirley, Letter 14th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 219.

¹³⁹ Schwartz 2007, p. 262.

¹⁴⁰ Shirley, Letter 18th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 25. She obviously means the gambling proprietors.

partly explained by prohibition of gambling in most other U.S. states. Previously hidden, in California and in the West generally it was wide open action. Indeed, Schwartz further claims San Francisco in 1850 was the busiest gambling city in America.¹⁴¹

Not only the miners or whites gambled. Clappe notes how Indians gambled too, with stakes like handful of beans.¹⁴² Gambling brings minorities to the light. The Indians had their own long gambling tradition, Mexicans and Chinese brought their own games, and women could find work in gambling saloons.¹⁴³ Visiting political convention at American Valley, Clappe noted how entire day was reserved for horse-racing and gambling in 'all their detestable varieties'. Here too different nationalities had their own games.¹⁴⁴ Thus, gambling was not only reserved for miners but permeated the whole society. Moving West was a great gamble, and those who made it continued to gamble there.

Despite gambling's prevalent position, other entertainment was available. Clappe mentions bowling as favorite amusement at the mines. Noise from bowling never stopped for long, during Sundays not at all.¹⁴⁵ There is limited research available on bowling, but in 1840 the first indoor bowling alley was opened in New York with lanes made from baked clay, and bowling had been well-established as a sport by that time.¹⁴⁶ Clappe gives no precise information on construction of the bowling alley at Indian Bar. All we know is that for celebration, it was improved with coarse cotton lining.¹⁴⁷ I think considering the impermanence of settlements they were probably not very elaborate, maybe just some suitable piece of earth. Bowling was generally not unusual for the mining camps, as billiards and ten-pin bowling was present from the start.¹⁴⁸

However, entertainment for Clappe likely meant other things. She mentions having chess- and cribbage boards, but there is no mention of playing.¹⁴⁹ It is likely only a few played chess, and it was more common in cities. With no mentions, there probably weren't billiards table either at the Bar's, possibly due to distance. Clappe had books by

¹⁴¹ Schwartz 2007, 259-261.

¹⁴² Shirley, Letter 17th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 360.

¹⁴³ Schwartz 2007, 263-266. Monte was Mexican game. Women worked as dealers, waiters & prostitutes.

¹⁴⁴ Shirley, Letter 21st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 234.

¹⁴⁵ Shirley, Letter 6th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 24.

¹⁴⁶ Grasso & Hartman 2014, xix.

¹⁴⁷ Shirley, Letter 12th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1854, 80.

¹⁴⁸ Rohrbough 1998, 128.

¹⁴⁹ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 94.

Shakespeare, Shelley, and Keats among others.¹⁵⁰ There is no mention of obtaining these or any books for that matter. Her taste in books likely differed from others at the camps. The book selection offered by the 'Yank' she describes as the 'greasiest' and largest on the river, describing them as 'yellow' literature.¹⁵¹ Thus, there were books for sale, even if the selection did not please Clappe. Indeed, reading was one popular form of passing time at the mines, whether old newspapers, letters from home or these 'greasy' books.¹⁵²

Clappe mentions no professional entertainers visiting the camps. There were theatres and bands touring other camps.¹⁵³ In my view it was possibly Clappe's location at the far-north part of gold fields that deterred these entertainers from foraying there. What you could count as entertainment were the public trials. Clappe tells of how there could be lots of money made by keeper of trial, in this case Empire Hotel, from selling dinners and drinks. She found that everybody abandoned Indian Bar to witness the trial at Rich Bar.¹⁵⁴

There were big celebrations for holidays. Saturnalia entailed grand dinner and even the most respectable men going around intoxicated for days in row.¹⁵⁵ Clappe participated in dances at American Valley with new immigrants. One tall man could not stand up inside the building, yet they danced merrily.¹⁵⁶ During winter there might not have been much else to do but drink and party. Even in the most dire and primitive conditions they continued to entertain themselves, as exemplified by the dances at American Valley.

We can confidently say that main entertainment forms were gambling, bowling and plain drinking and partying. Clappe describes gambling often, and it was prevalent in the camps. Bowling was also popular, and alleys were constructed even with little resources. Books were available, and reading was a past-time. But no matter the form, it is certain that the miners continued to entertain themselves. Even through limited chances and dire conditions they took advantage of commercial options, creating themselves entertainment.

¹⁵⁰ Others mentioned incl. Spencer, Coleridge, Lowell's Fable for Critics, Walton's Complete Angler, some Spanish books, and 'of course' a prayer book. Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 95.

¹⁵¹ Shirley, Letter 9th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 217.

¹⁵² Eifler 2017, 84.

¹⁵³ See for example Rohrbough 1998, 160-161.

¹⁵⁴ Shirley, Letter 9th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 215.

¹⁵⁵ Shirley, Letter 12th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 81.

¹⁵⁶ Shirley, Letter 22nd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 285.

3. Emulating home, charming with champagne – in special consumer environment?

Consumption is thoroughly cultural. It creates culture, and consequently allows us to examine culture through it. It contains meanings, builds identities – it can be much more than simply buying a product.¹⁵⁷ This chapter examines what consumption tells about gold rush California. I analyze things such as using consumption chances as separating East and West and using consumption for social purpose or conveying messages. Ultimately I aim to assess whether gold rush California had a special consumer environment.

Clappe came from eastern society commercialized for decades. Consumption had become structural feature of these societies. Goods were carriers of meanings, like social status. There was plethora of products, services, advertising prints, even specialized shopping districts forming.¹⁵⁸ Clappe herself talks about ‘luxuries’ and ‘refinements’ of the East.¹⁵⁹ Thus, Clappe was aware of these cultural meanings associated with consumption and certain behavior. She had grown up in genteel if not always cash rich Massachusetts family.¹⁶⁰ While we can’t generalize her experience straight to represent all others around her, it is probable there were many like her, as most miners came from middle class backgrounds.¹⁶¹ Despite her unique stance as non-working lady at the Bars, it is probable many residents with similar upbringing shared her values and standards regarding consumption. Furthermore, her descriptions of surrounding consumption carry undeniable evidence value.

Clappe drew lines both between East-West and her and others. Earlier research has noted her ‘high-brow’ attitude towards the miners.¹⁶² I see this further shown by her tendency to designate others as lower due to their consumption habits, like drinking or gambling.

¹⁵⁷ There are many works on consumption and culture. For meanings associated with consumption see Trentmann 2016, esp. 13-15, 23. *Consumption and World of Goods*, ed. by Brewer & Porter 1993, provides multiple useful articles. For sociological viewpoint see Sassatelli 2007, 1-6 and McCracken 1990, introduction.

¹⁵⁸ For development of U.S. consumer culture, see for example: Witkowski 2017, 83-85, 102-103, Sassatelli 2007, 25-30, McCracken 1990, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 95.

¹⁶⁰ Halverson 2013, 26.

¹⁶¹ Eifler 2017, 84

¹⁶² Halverson 2013, 29. Halverson points out how Clappe herself thought the miners did not ‘know any better’ and had low standards when it comes to housekeeping or architecture. This observation based on one remark by Clappe doesn’t mean miners had no standards or habits regarding other consumption.

As we have seen, she criticized shops and other places of consumption. She drew a clear line between her old eastern home and California, listing how they had no longer among many other things 'concerts or theaters', 'shopping' or 'latest fashions'.¹⁶³ Listing consumption chances she misses reveals her view of how different eastern and western societies were. Furthermore, she reveals that San Francisco had started to resemble East, as she also draws a line between 'showy houses and flashy shops' of San Francisco and crudeness of Rich Bar.¹⁶⁴ We can conclude that California and especially the mining camps were markedly different from the eastern societies.

Migrants from commercialized eastern societies brought with them consumption habits and expectations to this new environment. For example, champagne had a social use when founder of Rich Bar 'invested capital' in 'great champagne' to drink with Clappe.¹⁶⁵ Whether the drink was a gift for rare visitor, indicator of status or tool to charm Clappe, it is clear it carried a social meaning. Designating the champagne as 'great' and drink for special occasions, Clappe both reveals what she values regarding consumption as well as constructs champagne's image as rare, elegant drink, which it still carries and which possibly guides my interpretation of this situation.¹⁶⁶

The consumption habits traveling with Clappe and other migrants are also visible in her standards regarding clothes and emulated fancy dinners both discussed earlier. She brought some ornaments with her, like Chinese ivory and 'bohemian' cologne stands, which according to her 'would not disgrace lady's chamber at home'.¹⁶⁷ Earlier research has seen remarks like this as shedding earlier identity and building a new one.¹⁶⁸ These can simultaneously signify changing identity and troubles of retaining old one or consumption habits connected to it. Detailing products reminding of home and listing consumption chances not available both signify these chances limiting expression of self. Clappe and others tried to retain old consumption patterns, but it was not possible.

¹⁶³ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 95.

¹⁶⁴ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 221.

¹⁶⁵ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 222.

¹⁶⁶ Champagne got its regional product status at the turn of the 20th. century, meaning champagne Clappe drank could have been different to what it is for us today. Still, she seems to view it in high regard. For champagne's regional product status, see Trentmann 2016, 169.

¹⁶⁷ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 94.

¹⁶⁸ Deborah Lawrence has identified 'breaks' with old self in Clappe's writing, while Suzanne Bordelon saw Clappe as constructing new identity through California context. See Lawrence 2006, 78-79 and Bordelon 2018, 83-85.

The environment made retaining old habits challenging, if not impossible. Societies, prices and luck changed fast. Clappe underlined the ‘alacrity’ of founding settlements like Rich Bar, which grew to five hundred residents in just a week.¹⁶⁹ As we have seen, a year later it was well established settlement with many businesses and services. Life was impermanent and fast in gold rush California, with competition and uncertainty leading to fluctuating prices. Many miners driven by the infant California-dream came to exploit, not to build, with plans of returning east after making a fortune.¹⁷⁰ Clappe herself called the whole mining system of California ‘great gamble’, alluding to her husband’s experience with losing money on claims.¹⁷¹ Uncertain economic environment and fast paced society filled with miners trying to get rich and leave affected product selection, prices and forming of consumer society.

Settlements and enterprise mushroomed. Rich Bar too, which spawned around it many settlements, one of them Indian Bar.¹⁷² By Clappe’s time, Indian Bar had its own hotels, shops and services. Together the Bars formed a gold rush consumer environment. I propose here that this consumer environment could have been special, as in vastly different from other consumer environments before, then or after. Ann Martin searched for a special *way* of consumption from colonial Virginia.¹⁷³ As mentioned in introduction, detecting unified way of consumption from rush California or my source is impossible.

Detecting features of special consumer environment instead is possible. From above chapters and paragraphs certain material scarcity arises. This is embodied in Clappe’s remark - ‘even in the land of gold itself, one cannot have everything that she desires.’¹⁷⁴ She acknowledges her desires and limited chances. But it was not that there was nothing available or that everything was always short. Rather there was concentration on certain things, as exemplified by Clappe’s trip to American Valley, where wide array of provisions filled up rooms of ‘primitive’ lodgings.¹⁷⁵ There was concentration on different things over household items or furniture or porcelain, for example.

¹⁶⁹ Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 223.

¹⁷⁰ For the rush-spirit and California dream, see e.g., Eifler 2017, 2, 34, 82. For prices and what led to them, see e.g., Holliday 2002, 315, 328, Caughey 1975, 35, Kemmerer & Jones, 1959, 112.

¹⁷¹ Claim was a share in mining operation. Shirley, Letter 6th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 24.

¹⁷² Shirley, Letter 3rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 1. 1854, 223.

¹⁷³ Martin 2008, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Shirley, Letter 7th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 94-95. Later Clappe’s neighbor is worried about seeming too ‘aristocratic’ by having more than one spoon. This shows more material scarcity in addition to showing that material goods played role in social status. Clappe letter 20th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 174.

¹⁷⁵ Shirley, Letter 21st. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 231.

There was uncertainty to life at the mines. There are no mentions of banks in Clappe's letters. Often express companies acted like banks, hauling gold coast-to-coast.¹⁷⁶ Problems in safely storing gold locally could have affected consumption, for example make miners gamble or keep them paying soaring prices hoping for more gold. Belief in rich gold finds and fears of losing gold already found both probably increased spending. The prices weren't always high though, and I think the word *duality* describes the markets of gold rush California. Sometimes markets glutted, prices sank with too many products available, and ships were abandoned at San Francisco.¹⁷⁷ Clappe's experience highlights that most often there was scarcity and high prices.

Despite all the obstacles people like Clappe continued to consume. Impermanent and careless attitude quite probably affected consumption – one did not care if he lost all he had, as he believed in making it back soon.¹⁷⁸ It is entirely possible that California attracted to begin with people who were risk-averse and careless with money. Everybody was in motion. Clappe denoted this as quality of Americans, continuing searching even after finding steady income.¹⁷⁹ In this sense California fits the mold of general American westward expansion, which has been described as speculative in nature.¹⁸⁰

But in many ways Clappe's consumer environment tells of different society to that typical of other westward expansion. Miners were no settlers. The environment differed both from east coast and from mining towns of later years, famously controlled by one company with bad services.¹⁸¹ Even at the risk of reproducing old stereotypes, I would call gold rush consumer environment wild in some sense, uncontrollable, with plenty of services provided by commercial establishments and individual persons. Certain kinds of people drawn in masses to new circumstances created a temporary consumer environment that was for a while something they had never experienced. Large part of their experience of certain novelty and adventure might be due to the drastically changed consumption chances – suddenly everything was not as familiar, easy and settled as earlier.

Impermanence, speed and changing nature of gold rush California are exemplified by Clappe's second place of residence, Indian Bar. Fast built, it perished fast too. Clappe had

¹⁷⁶ Eifler 2017, 94.

¹⁷⁷ See e.g., Caughey 1975, 91 & Eifler 2017, 92.

¹⁷⁸ Eifler 2017, 94.

¹⁷⁹ Shirley, Letter 15th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 306.

¹⁸⁰ Bartlett 1974, 149.

¹⁸¹ Trentmann 2016, 524.

noticed the rush cooling off already in 1851.¹⁸² At Indian Bar they still believed in growth, as its hotel was expanded in April 1852.¹⁸³ It all collapsed at the end of 1852. New mining operations had failed. Shopkeepers, restaurants, and gamblers dependent on gold went moneyless. Clappe's husband was owed a lot of money too, while traders had delayed getting winter stock due to the high price of flour, making settlements unprepared for winter. The population had dropped from 'hundreds to twenty'.¹⁸⁴

Collapsing business left those dependent on consumption and the Bar itself in dire place. Clappe noted how 'the whole Bar' was littered with empty bottles, cans, boxes, and jars. Since Ned the cook had left, Clappe herself had to cook with utensils consisting of brass kettle, iron dipper and gridiron made of old shovel. She still tried to keep up some standards by having others for dinner at a table covered with 'quarter of a sheet' playing the part of tablecloth. She was content, acknowledged how she had changed and praised life at the mining camps. She was sad to leave when the time finally came.¹⁸⁵ Despite all her complaints, Clappe seemed to enjoy life at the Bar's. Unfortunately for her, in the end even such well-established settlements like Rich and Indian Bar were only temporary.

The emptied goods around the Bar work as a stunning picture of extensive commercial circulation ending. Clappe complaining about Ned leaving and stores emptying highlights her dependency on consumption. Despite her assurances and pride in her new lifestyle's difference from the old, she very much brought old habits to the camps and lived by them as much as possible. Possibly the whole positive hue in her attitude was made possible by the commercial options available to ease her life.

The collapse furthermore highlights how interdependent the whole community was. Miners on traders, gamblers on miners and everybody on gold. These were not individual pioneers doing it all themselves, but people largely dependent on commercial outlets. They were consumers, often only hindered by the environment they were in. Clappe's life in the gold fields and their special consumer environment was now over. Exhausted and abandoned settlements were left behind. For us, the final question is left for conclusion to answer. How was Clappe's consumer environment special – and why?

¹⁸² Good strikes had become rare, most pulled days wages, 6-8 dollars. Shirley, Letter 10th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 2. 1854, 275.

¹⁸³ Shirley, Letter 15th. *The Pioneer*, vol. 3. 1855, 305.

¹⁸⁴ Shirley, Letter 23rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 345.

¹⁸⁵ Shirley, Letter 23rd. *The Pioneer*, vol. 4. 1855, 348-349.

Conclusion

The consumer environment of Rich and Indian Bars differed vastly from Clappe's old east coast home of refinement and curated luxury. It was wild and crude assembly of different businesses and consumers hanging on to varying flows of goods from international, national and local networks of commerce. In this unlikely environment people consumed too. This special consumer environment tells us more about gold rush California – and possibly about us as humans.

Getting goods at the mining camps was hard and unreliable. Varying prices and flows of goods made life unpredictable. There were commercial links towards the coast and informal network of ranchos, but often both of these failed to fulfill needs. Clappe and others had to do without certain products. They had been used to buying what they needed, but now they were ushered into environment where this was no longer possible. Clappe complained of ordinary items like milk, potatoes and onions being unobtainable.

Naturally, in this new environment the consumers of East Coast, like Clappe, concentrated on other things. Dinners, gambling and other experiences were favored over material items like clothes, ornaments or furniture. The material scarcity and temporary settlements simply didn't allow for the miners to continue old habits like collecting things or shopping new clothes regularly. Clappe doesn't so much tell us how clothes created identity or what porcelain was fashionable. She tells us about commerciality permeating these frontier societies, people trying to mitigate primitive circumstances through spending and the lust for gold and harsh environment clouding financial decisions.

Clappe and others around her did spend. They consumed. The aforementioned dinners sometimes contained multiple courses and drinks like champagne. Clappe relied entirely on food bought ready-made from cook. At times she had her own cook, but often she relied on services of one cooking for multiple persons. Thus, others bought ready-made food too, served in hotels or restaurants. Probably most ate provisions, but importantly these were also bought, from traders, as an act of consumption.

There were clearly active markets for food and other things. Drinking got miners to spend more freely, alcohol sale was profitable and there were many bar-rooms. The center-pieces of the Bars, the hotels, combined under one canvas roof accommodation, restaurant, drinking, gambling and store services. There were other places of consumption

too, like groceries, general stores, a bakery and service providers like physicians and washers. Thriving businesses located in tents and quickly built log cabins is part of the uniqueness of the environment. Possibly nowhere at history has such commercial activity taken place in such remote and temporary circumstances. After all, this was not a market or bazaar, but a place of residence and work for hundreds of miners.

This diverse and thriving environment was not enough. Clappe complains of her chances to buy new clothes, book selection of stores and troubles of finding sealing wax, for example. She further shows her standards when she criticizes store spaces, foods or accommodation offered to her on trips. This is the final touch which rounds out the uniqueness of the consumer environment. It is not like there hasn't been societies where items are scarce and needs can't be met – what made Rich and Indian Bars unique was that they had people used to high commerciality, who had standards and habits. The Bars also had extensive commercial activity, just not enough for all.

What then do Clappe's descriptions of consumption tell about gold rush California? It definitely reaffirms that the miners were dependent on commercial networks and others. Consumption fits the overall spirit and nature of gold rush with temporary goods and experiences favored. Gold was heavily mined – and spent. But can Clappe tell us something about us as humans? Definitely that we have been spending for a long time. Even in a society where some miners concentrated on work and saving, some chose to eat relatively lavishly, gamble and drink. Pondering whether to have one more at the bar-room, we might not be that far separated from our 'pioneer' forefathers.

Additional research is required before more far-reaching conclusions. Wider material can determine what proportion of Californians Clappe can represent. Both consumption's environmental effects and it driving other changes or actions can be explored. That may be the true materialization of this thesis. Did dreams of consumption motivate miners? Commerciality may have affected our decisions for a long time before the age of mass consumption. Miners who came hoping to bring gold back home for more free consumption, were made to consume prematurely by circumstances, traders and gamblers. Some never intended to save. Clappe and others around her did consume, in their own special consumer environment. It remains to be researched whether they were an exception. Was the whole gold rush California like them? Or the whole West?

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