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Peoples and Cultures of Europe Week 6

## ♥ Happy Valentine's Day



Postcard, [National Library of Norway](#) -- [Wikimedia Commons](#)

## We're scheduled for a little Romantic Love in class this week . . . it's Valentine's Day Week!

### Romantic Love is a European invention.

“The day first became associated with romantic love in the circle of Geoffrey Chaucer [1343-1400] in the High Middle Ages, when the tradition of **courtly love** flourished” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentine%27s\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentine%27s_Day)). We'll be seeing that courtly love flourish in the video "**Strange Relations**".

Garrison Keillor points out that “The ancient Romans had a fertility festival celebrated at mid-February of every year. The festival was called Lupercalia in honor of Lupa, the wolf who was said to have suckled Romulus and Remus, who went on to found the city of Rome. Lupercalia was a pagan fertility festival celebrated with sacrifices of goats and dogs, with milk and wool and blood. Young men would cut strips from the skins of the goats then strip naked and run through the

city in groups, where young women would line up to be spanked with the switches, believing it would improve their fertility. Lupercalia was still wildly popular long after the Roman Empire was officially Christian, and it's not difficult to see why the Church would have wished to have a different sort of holiday take its place.” (The Writer's Almanac 14 February 2015) <<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/14b86d560933de1a>>

This week think Chocolate . . . it's a Valentine's Day tradition . . .

## Why chocolate?

No.

It's not **an aphrodisiac**—or at least if it is, there is no scientific proof of that. Phenylethylamine in chocolate *is* an aphrodisiac, but it's not likely that enough of it makes it to your brain while eating chocolate “to make a difference”, so to speak. But there's always **the power of suggestion . . .** and chocolate sugar pills (placebos) are powerful **psychosomatics**

<<http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/anth4616/cpplacebo.html>>.

Giving chocolate goes back to the days of the Ancient Mesoamericans who “invented” chocolate, as a byproduct of beer making. So gifting chocolate has been around for a long time—probably for 3000 years. And people have probably been thinking that it is an aphrodisiac all of that time.

In Europe , "The tradition of giving chocolates on Valentine's Day can be traced to Richard Cadbury, of the English chocolate-making family, who ‘invented’ the first Valentine's Day candy box during the Victorian era. The Victorians, who fancied decorating cards with plump cupids shooting arrows of love, later transferred the image to the lids of heart-shaped boxes filled with dreamy combinations of silken chocolates." ("For Lovers, Chocolate," Niki Dwyer, *The Buffalo News*, February 11, 1998, Lifestyles, p. 2D, quoted in Food Timeline <<http://www.foodtimeline.org/valentines.html>>.) Late Victorian children could cut out the pictures on the decorated Cadbury “fancy chocolates” boxes and stick them into scrapbooks, if the Victorian ladies didn't save the fancy chocolate boxes for use as trinket or button boxes. Victorian and Edwardian chocolate boxes are now treasured collectors' items (Food Timeline).

Chef Oscar Ortega of Jackson, Wyoming, won first place last year in the world competition in Europe for his praline creation. He is now recognized as one of the world's greatest chocolatiers. And, at least equally important, he's a very nice person. <<http://atelierortega.squarespace.com/#oscar-ortega>>



Locally, Russell Stover, nephew to his namesake who created the candy company, served on the City Council of Duluth, MN from 2000-2008 [facebook](#).



This week, should you wish to sweeten things and people up a little with chocolate, be sure it is at least “70%” [cocoa solids and cocoa butter]. And *recipients of chocolate* take note: if your admirer gives you chocolate that's any less than “70%” it might be time to think about looking for a different admirer.

The single exception to the “at least ‘70%’” rule lies in baking. The *Cooks Illustrated* folks, the American (U.S.A.) gurus of practical scientific food preparation, say baking [adjective, not verb] chocolate for the various holidays should be *no more than* “60%”. (So if your admirer shows up with Valentine *baked goods* with chocolate of “60%” quality, that’s actually a plus; keep him/her.)

More information on chocolate is available from the class Chocolate page at

<http://www.d.umn.edu/cia/faculty/troufs/anthfood/afchocolate.html>.

**As for St. Valentine**, as in “St. Valentine’s Day,” there are more than a dozen St. Valentines in the Roman Catholic Church, and neither of the two Valentines thought to be responsible for “Valentine’s Day” ate chocolate (Valentine of Rome, and Valentine of Terni in Central Italy). And, as mentioned above, Valentine’s Day itself became associated with romance only in the Middle Ages.

More information on Valentine’s Day is available from the class WebPage at

[http://www.d.umn.edu/cia/faculty/troufs/anthfood/afvalentines\\_day.html#title](http://www.d.umn.edu/cia/faculty/troufs/anthfood/afvalentines_day.html#title).

## Enjoy your chocolate . . . and Valentine’s Day,

**Tim Roufs**

<http://www.d.umn.edu/~troufs/>