

# The German Tobacco “Drinker” (1630)

## Abstract

The text and imagery on this 1630 broadsheet are aimed at the literate German public. The broadsheet explains and warns against tobacco consumption. Smoking, which was called “tobacco drinking” back then, was still a novelty in Germany at the time. Smoking went on to become increasingly widespread in connection with the Thirty Years War. A translation of the poem follows underneath the image.

## Source



## The German Tobacco “Drinker”

My dear German, come here.

Look, read, and behold the new

“À la modish” monkey business

Which is going on now without measure or aim,

So that many of you even want to carry

Tobacco with you in your pants pocket

To make haze and smoke

In wine-taverns and ale-houses, too,

And think highly of yourselves when you do,

As if it were a great art,

So that many an upright man

Is greatly displeased by it.

But he who foolishly “drinks” tobacco

Gives no thought to their views,

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But goes on spreading his new splendor,  
And shows no regard for other people.  
Yet he cannot cure his hare-brain  
Cleanly with tobacco,  
But needs his tobacco haze  
To burden others and himself in vain.  
Although I, from my youth on,  
Never did approve of  
Tobacco's effects, power, and virtues.  
But I allow it to pass for good  
For those in particular  
Who use it at the proper time.  
I do not wish in my poem  
To mean everyone  
Who in the lands  
Where tobacco is generally "drunk"  
Let themselves be seen completely without hesitation,  
And are used to that, because it is the way of the land.  
Those gallant cavaliers  
I myself defend for that,  
And my scorn is all the greater  
Because many of those from the rabbit warren  
Dare to "drink" tobacco.  
They, who have not seen a foreign dog,  
Just as is the nature of monkeys,  
Always make problems for themselves.  
What they have seen today  
They will devote themselves to tomorrow.  
In their arrogant hearts  
And hare-brains, without jest,  
In dress, manners, and gestures,  
I say this without any difficulty,  
Is an outright boisterous arrogance  
And downright "à la modishness."  
Many now "drink" tobacco  
Out of blustering pomp and cockiness.  
He has scarcely any money on him,  
With which he honestly could  
Pay the innkeeper for his bill.  
Oh, that is for me a real gem.  
You poor dolt, stop your bragging!  
The innkeeper himself is truly displeased  
By this worthless stuff; believe me,  
He likes it much better when you often  
Have a fresh beer poured for yourself

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Than when you “drink” tobacco.  
You only empty the house for him that way,  
Drive still many more out  
Who otherwise might have spent a short hour  
To be happy on their part.  
That is a shame for the innkeeper;  
Hear and take note, you uncouth cow pie!  
Many a man is fresh and healthy.  
He “drinks” tobacco, and it gets in his throat;  
It makes him listless and dull.  
I say that nothing else brought him  
To that but cockiness.  
Then the following morning  
His head is awfully heavy,  
Perhaps his purse is light and empty,  
So that he can take hold of nothing more  
Than only his poor tobacco pipe  
In his pitch-smeared pants pocket.  
Yes, now tobacco is sucking  
The apprentices, so common,  
Into the ale houses,  
And I would guess that the fewest  
Know to what use or good.  
Indeed, it is nothing but mad cockiness.  
Many a boor and uncouth clod  
Sucks tobacco that nauseates him.  
It goes badly with him  
Because he must trot from the table while being taunted,  
He shakes his head back and forth,  
Soon afterwards starts to stretch out his neck,  
Awakening the vomit with reverence,  
And that tobacco he guzzled in,  
Now comes running out of him at a gallop.  
All of them are young nags, gnats, crickets,  
Ass’s heads, hare-brains, and bellowing cattle!  
Oh, how sick the dolt is then;  
That is all happening to him from tobacco’s stench.  
How the fool’s stomach contents rise;  
Run soon and fetch him rabbit food.  
Bring along the rabbit’s heart.  
Oh my, oh my, his tobacco pipe keeps  
Him from going mad. Will he be able  
To come back to his senses?  
Or give it to him quickly in his mouth,  
For tobacco is hugely healthy.

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Oh, how the thing pains him,  
Because he has never been to Holland  
So that he is due tobacco  
Like other gallant cavaliers  
Who traveled through foreign lands;  
For that they should be highly praised.  
Not learning to “drink” is right for him;  
He should suck on a cow teat.

**Author.**

You tobacco “drinkers” in general,  
Who when drinking beer or wine,  
Teach each other to “drink” tobacco,  
Burdening the innkeeper and other guests,  
If there were one among all of you  
Who does not like my poem,  
And lets himself perhaps dream that  
He is also something for others,  
He would also think that he is modest,  
That others were also people.  
And if he imposed the penance on  
Himself, that he must always “drink”  
Tobacco, he would leave.  
But there is seldom an inn,  
That does not have more than one room,  
Where he could nicely act out  
His gravitas, alone with just himself.  
But where would his strutting go?  
How could he, before everyone with praise,  
Like a bungling schoolboy?  
He thinks that from his manner,  
Everyone considers him a gentleman,  
Thinks that he is prudent.  
How the dolt deceives himself.  
Quite a few want to beautify the matter:  
“Drinking” tobacco is healthy for all those  
Who always find themselves  
With serious fog in their heads.  
My dear tobacco “drinkers,”  
The matter seems strange to me,  
That when drinking beer or wine  
A person finds nothing jolly,  
Sometimes even guzzles beyond his ability.  
He should just care for his body’s health.  
And as soon as you “drink” too much tobacco,

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So that the same effect and taste  
Begins to work on you,  
You immediately start to make music,  
No differently than especially  
Occurs with patients in the hospital.  
When this is praiseworthy and beautiful,  
You can pass for a courtier.  
Indeed, where? I think at places,  
As now has been reported,  
Where such music continues  
Day and night without constraint.  
What did the German have before  
Tobacco came on the scene?  
For catarrh, flux, and fog  
In the head the German long ago used  
Warmed mixtures, together with cold ice,  
And learned people still praise the art.  
My dear tobacco “drinker,”  
I still advise you now truly about this:  
The Dutchman is better than you.  
Accustomed to tobacco, late and early.  
He uses it on journeys by ship  
From youth on, by nature and custom.  
But you use it without aim,  
As a wondrous marvel now,  
And even at times and places  
Where you don’t gain a whit.  
That is not praiseworthy, understand,  
Nor is it useful, so give it up.  
Especially the common handworker,  
Should abstain from tobacco,  
Because he cannot “drink” it  
Until something new comes along.

Augsburg, Mattheo Rhembold, 1630  
Translation: Kathleen Dell’Orto

Source: *Der teutsche Tabacktrincker*, broadsheet (copperplate engraving), Augsburg: Mattheo Rhembold, 1630.  
HAB Wolfenbüttel, Signature: 38.2 Aug. 2°, vor fol 134; reprinted in Wolfgang Harms, ed., *Deutsche illustrierte Flugblätter des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*. Band I (Wolfenbüttel Teil 1). Tübingen, 1985, pp. 184–85.

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