Eight thousand years ago, high on the golden hills of the Tibetan plateau, a small but very important flower unfurled its petals. It really was just a little thing, some seven millimeters across at most. Yet, this little flower's little seeds would soon spread across the world. Ah, but what of its name? That would be: Buckwheat. A misleading name, taxonomically speaking, for it is not really a type of wheat at all. No, this little plant has closer ancestry to Rhubarb and Sorrel. Its name is a reference to its use. Buckwheat is a pseudocereal, see, much like quinoa and amaranth. And as a pseudocereal it is often used in a manner not at all unlike true wheat. I shall get to this a little later. First, I think, let me return to this marvelous little flower currently swaying in the cold prehistoric winds of the ancient Tibetan plateau.

A question one might ask (and one I intend to answer), is how the Buckwheat made its way from what is now China, all the way across the Old World, to eventually adorn the heraldic crests of Hilversum? Before buckwheat began its westward migration, it first travelled further east. About six thousand years ago, it was on the Japanese archipelago that buckwheat was first eaten by humans. It was not much just yet, simply boiled in water and eaten as a porridge. A nutritious and filling dish, nonetheless. The seeds are full of calories, carbohydrates, and antioxidants, all of them extremely valuable when trying to survive the harsh neolithic landscapes. Buckwheat remained in this state of culinary stasis for a very long time. Humans, as is their wont, were not at all in a state of stasis. In the West, great civilizations such as Carthage and Rome rose and fell, superseded by hundreds of squabbling kings, bishops, and princes. In the East, a seemingly endless series of dynasties, from Xia to Zhou, from Han to Qin, rolled over one another in waves of violence. And all the while, the humble buckwheat remained.

Everything changed when the Mongols began their expansion. Genghis Khan, perhaps the greatest conqueror of recorded history, saw the creation of a political, administrative, and mercantile empire that spanned from the eastern shores of China to the capital of the Roman Empire; Byzantium. This vast network, now referred to as the Silk Road, would be the path which Buckwheat was to travel. We are now seven thousand years removed from that plucky little flower on the Tibetan Plateau, and only about one thousand years removed from you and I. Buckwheat is about to go into overdrive. Already, in Japan and Korea, the plain but nutritious buckwheat porridge is being replaced by Soba noodles and gelatinous Memil-Muk. The first Europeans to taste Buckwheat were the eastern Slavs. They made Blini from it, thin pancakes eaten at the end of winter to celebrate the return of the sun. Buckwheat would become especially important in Poland and Russia. Still today, Russia produces and consumes more Buckwheat than any other nation on earth. The preferred dish of the Poles and the Russians is Kasha, a return to porridge form. Around the Alps, both Germans and Italians made pastas with Buckwheat flour. In France, Buckwheat became especially popular amongst the Celtic Bretons of Brittany, using it for sausage rolls, porridge, or pancakes. Buckwheat would even traverse the Atlantic Ocean, eaten by both the Ashkenazi Jew diaspora in the form of Kasha varnishkes and the Pennsylvania Dutch in scrapple.

Ah, but there is one little country I have skipped. The Netherlands. Buckwheat became a staple in that little corner of the world some seven hundred years ago, and is unlikely to go anywhere anytime soon. It is used in Balkenbrij, an old fashioned but hearty stew. Balkenbrij was a winter dish, made from animal organs and sweetened with a bit of Buckwheat. Then there is Broeder, or Jan in de Zak, or Pork, a delightfully named Frisian dish where Buckwheat batter is poured in a pillowcase and boiled. This crafty dish turns Buckwheat into a bread-like substance. Then there is the Gronings Poffert, or Trommelkoek, in which buckwheat, wheat, and raisins are whisked with milk and eggs and set to bake until a large circular cake is made. Stip is closer to form for the humble Buckwheat; porridge with a trench in the middle for a healthy serving of syrup. Ah, and speaking of syrup. Perhaps the most famous Dutch dish made possible by the flowering of a little seed in Tibet some eight thousand years ago is: poffertjes.

Poffertjes are a young dish, relatively speaking, only three hundred years old. They are a through and through Amsterdams dish (that is to say, they are likely inspired by a similar Indonesian dish); delicious fluffy little snacks served with syrup or butter or sugar. But where was the metropolitan Amsterdammer to get enough buckwheat to crave their desire for poffertjes? At last, dear reader, I am ready to answer the question of how the Buckwheat travelled from China to Hilversum. Old Hilversum was a simple patchwork of farms, and Old Hilversummers were simple farmers. The soil in Hilversum is poor in nutrients and sandy, so most folks there raised sheep. It just so happened that there was a plant, a simple little pseudocereal, that had been on a very long journey, that was hardy enough for poor soil and grew remarkably well in sheep manure fertilizer. And it was somewhere around this time that four kernels of Buckwheat at last found themselves upon the crest of Hilversum.

In truth, nobody knows exactly when, how, or why, Buckwheat specifically was chosen for Hilversum's crest, only that it has been this way for about three-hundred years. That is, I suppose, one of the marvels of history. Through archives, archaeology, and countless documents, we can piece together the rise and fall of vast empires. But something as simple as painting four golden seeds on a plain blue shield, well, this bit of knowledge has been lost to the mists of time. I think, however, that this is okay. Our imaginations can take us even further than the humble little Buckwheat has travelled.

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