

Towards a Structured Approach to Reading Historic Cookbooks.

[Download Here](#)



m/c journal
A JOURNAL OF MEDIA AND CULTURE

[Home](#) > [Vol 16, No 3 \(2013\)](#) > [Mac Con Iomaire](#)

Towards a Structured Approach to Reading Historic Cookbooks

[Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire](#)

Introduction

Cookbooks are an exceptional written record of what is largely an oral tradition. They have been as “magician’s hats” due to their ability to reveal much more than they seem to contain (“Finding”). The first book printed in Germany was the Guttenberg Bible in 1456 but, by 1490, it was introduced into almost every European country (Tierney). The spread of literacy between 1500 and the rise in silent reading, helped to create a new private sphere into which the individual could seek refuge from the community (Chartier). This new technology had its effects in the world as in so many spheres of culture (Mennell, *All Manners*). Trubek notes that cookbooks are thus often used by culinary historians, since they usually contain all the requisite materials for a cuisine: ingredients, method, technique, and presentation. Printed cookbooks, beginning in the modern period, provide culinary historians with sources of evidence of the culinary past.

Historians have argued that social differences can be expressed by the way and type of food written. Cookbooks are now widely accepted as valid socio-cultural and historic documents (Folch, Shalaby). Indeed the link between literacy levels and the protestant tradition has been expressed through Danish cookbooks (Gold). From Apicius, Taillevent, La Varenne, and Menon to Bradley, Smollett, Acton, and Beeton, how can both manuscript and printed cookbooks be analysed as historic documents? What is the difference between a manuscript and a printed cookbook? Barbara Ketchum Wheaton has been studying cookbooks for over half a century and is honorary curator of the culinary collection at Harvard’s Schlesinger Library, has developed a methodology to read historic cookbooks using a structured approach. For a number of years she has been giving seminars to scholars from multidisciplinary fields on how to read historic cookbooks. This paper draws on the author’s experiences attending Wheaton’s seminars in Harvard, and on supervising the use of this methodology at both Masters and Doctoral levels (Mac Con Iomaire, and Cashman).

Manuscripts versus Printed Cookbooks

A fundamental difference exists between manuscript and printed cookbooks in their relationship to the public and private domain. Manuscript cookbooks are by their very essence intimate, relative to the household and written with an eye to private circulation. Culinary manuscripts follow the diurnal and are written for the household. They contain recipes for cures and restoratives, recipes for cleansing products for the household and the body, as well as the expected recipes for cooking and preserving all manners of food. In a manuscript or printed cookbook, the recipes contained within often act as a reminder of how life and the production of food could be in the pre-industrialised world (White). Printed cookbooks draw on the very fact of being public. They assume a “literate population with sufficient discretionary income to invest in texts that commodify knowledge” (Folch). This process of commoditisation brings recipes from the private to the public sphere. There exists a subset of cookbooks that straddle this boundary. For example, Mrs. Rundell’s *A New System of Domestic Cookery* (1806), which brought to the public a distillation of a lifetime of domestic experience. Originally intended for her daughters alone, Rundell’s was reprinted regularly during the nineteenth century with the last edition printed in 1893. Beeton had been enormously popular for over thirty years (Mac Con Iomaire, and Cashman).

Barbara Ketchum Wheaton’s Structured Approach

Cookbooks can be rewarding, surprising and illuminating when read carefully with due attention to understanding them as cultural artefacts. However, Wheaton notes that: “One may read a single cookbook and find it immensely entertaining. One may read two and begin to find intriguing similarities and differences. When the third cookbook is read, one’s mind begins to blur, and one begins to feel the need for some sort of method in approaching these documents” (“Finding”).

Following decades of studying cookbooks from both sides of the Atlantic and writing a semina

M/C JOURNAL

- HOME
- CURRENT ISSUE
- UPCOMING ISSUES
- ARCHIVES
- CONTRIBUTORS
- ABOUT M/C JOURNAL
- USER HOME

JOURNAL CONTENT

SEARCH

SEARCH SCOPE

All

- BROWSE
- BY ISSUE
 - BY AUTHOR
 - BY TITLE

CURRENT ISSUE

ATOM 1.0

RSS 2.0

RSS 1.0

USER

USERNAME

PASSWORD

REMEMBER ME

INFORMATION

- FOR READERS
- FOR AUTHORS
- FOR LIBRARIANS

FONT SIZE

JOURNAL HELP

French at table from 1300-1789 (Wheaton, *Savouring the Past*), this combined experience cookbooks as historical documents was codified, and a structured approach gradually articulated within a week long seminar format. In studying any cookbook, regardless of era or country, the text is broken down into five different groupings, to wit: ingredients; equipment or facilities; the book as a whole; and, finally, the worldview. A particular strength of Wheaton's seminar is the multidisciplinary nature of the approaches of students who attend, which throws the study open to wide ranging techniques. Students with a purely scientific training unearth interesting developing databases of the frequency of ingredients or techniques, and cross referencing their books from similar or different timelines or geographical regions. Patterns are displayed in graphs. Linguists offer their own unique lens to study cookbooks, whereas anthropologists and historians: these objects can tell us about how our ancestors lived and drew meaning from life. This approach is continuously refined, and each grouping is discussed below.

Ingredients

The geographic origins of the ingredients are of interest, as is the seasonality and the cost of them within the scope of each cookbook, as well as the sensory quality both separately and combined in different recipes. In the medieval period, the use of spices and large joints of butchers meat are symbols of wealth and status. However, when the discovery of sea routes to the New World in the East made spices more available and affordable to the middle classes, the upper classes spent more. Evidence from culinary manuscripts in Georgian Ireland, for example, suggests that galangal was easily available in Dublin during the eighteenth century than in the mid-twentieth century. A note articulated by La Varenne in his *Le Cuisinier Francois* (1651), heralded that food should taste of ingredients, and exotic ingredients such as cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger were replaced by the local *bouquet*. Stocks and sauces became the foundations of French haute cuisine (Mac Con Iomaire).

Some combinations of flavours and ingredients were based on humoral physiology, a long standing system based on the writings of Hippocrates and Galen, now discredited by modern understanding. The four humors are blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. It was believed that these humors would wax and wane in the body, depending on diet and activity. Galen (c.129-200) believed that warm food produced yellow bile and that cold food produced phlegm. It is difficult to understand some combinations of ingredients or the manner of service without comprehending the context within they were consumed.

Some ingredients found in Roman cookbooks, such as "garum" or "silphium" are no longer available. It is suggested that the nearest substitute for garum also known as "liquamen"—a fermented fish sauce—be *Naam Plaa*, or Thai fish sauce (Grainger). Ingredients such as tea and white bread, once the prerogative of the wealthy over time to become the staple of the urban poor. These ingredients symbolise radically differing contexts during the seventeenth century than in the early twentieth century. Indeed, there are other ingredients such as hominy (dried maize kernel treated with alkali) (crackers made from graham flour) found in American cookbooks that require translation for an unacquainted non-American reader. There has been a growing number of food encyclopaedias in recent years that assist scholars in identifying such commodities (Smith, Katz, Davidson).

The Cook's Workplace, Techniques, and Equipment

It is important to be aware of the type of kitchen equipment used, the management of heat and the kitchen, and also the gradual spread of the industrial revolution into the domestic sphere. Historic castles such as Hampton Court Palace where nowadays archaeologists re-enact life before the Tudor times give a glimpse as to how difficult and labour intensive food production was. Meat was roasted in front of huge fires by spit boys. Force-meats and purees were manually pulped using pestles. Various technological developments including spit-dogs, and mechanised pulleys, replaced spit boys, the most up to date being the mechanised rotisserie. The technological advancements of the last few years can be seen in the Royal Pavilion in Brighton where Marie-Antoinin Carême worked for the Regent in 1816 (Brighton Pavilion), but despite the gleaming copper pans and high ceilings for the work was still back breaking. Carême died aged forty-nine, "burnt out by the flame of his great fumes of his ovens" (Ackerman 90). Mennell points out that his fame outlived him, resting on his *Pâtissier Royal Parisien* (1815); *Le Pâtissier Pittoresque* (1815); *Le Maître d'Hôtel Français*; *Cuisinier Parisien* (1828); and, finally, *L'Art de la Cuisine Française au Dix-Neuvième Siècle*, which was finished posthumously by his student Pluméry (*All Manners*). Mennell suggests that Carême embody the first paradigm of professional French cuisine (in Kuhn's terminology), pointing out that his previous work had so comprehensively codified the field nor established its dominance as a reference for the whole profession in the way that Carême did" (*All Manners* 149).

The most dramatic technological changes came after the industrial revolution. Although there were ovens available in bakeries and in large Norman households, the period of general acceptance of modern cooking equipment that enclosed fire (such as the Aga stove) is from c.1860 to 1910, with gas ovens appearing in c.1910 to the 1920s) and Electricity from c.1930. New food processing techniques dates from the 1860s) canning (1860s), cooling and freezing (1880s), freeze drying (1950s), and motorised delivery (1920s–1950s) (den Hartog). It must also be noted that the supply of fresh food improved particularly, radically improved following the birth, and expansion of, the railways. To understand the context of the cookbook, one needs to be aware of the limits of the technology available to the user.

cookbooks. For many lower to middle class families during the twentieth century, the first cookbook would possess came with their gas or electrical oven.

Meals

One can follow cooked dishes from the kitchen to the eating place, observing food presentation sequencing, and serving of the meal and table etiquette. Meal times and structure changed. During the Middle Ages, people usually ate two meals a day: a substantial dinner around noon and supper in the evening (Adamson). Some of the most important factors to consider are the manner in which meals were served: either *à la française* or *à la russe*. One of the main changes that occurred in the nineteenth century was the slow but gradual transfer from service *à la française* to service *à la russe*. In medieval times to the middle of the nineteenth century the structure of a formal meal was “courses”—as the term is now understood—but by “services”. Each service could comprise one or more dishes—both sweet and savoury—from which each guest could select what appealed to him or her (Davidson). The philosophy behind this form of service was the forementioned humoral philosophy where each diner chose food based on the four humours of blood, yellow bile, black bile, or phlegm, known as *le grand couvert*, the *à la française* method made it impossible for the diners to eat a course that was beyond arm’s length (Blake, and Crewe). Smooth service, however, was the key to an effective dinner since servants controlled the flow of food (Eatwell). The taste and temperature of food changed at each stage with the *à la russe* dinner as each course came in sequence.

Many historic cookbooks offer table plans illustrating the suggested arrangement of dishes on a table in the *à la française* style of service. Many of these dishes might be re-used in later meals, and some dishes like hashes and rissoles often utilised left over components of previous meals. There is a whole genre of cookbooks informing the middle class cooks how to be frugal and also how to emulate *haute cuisine* with cheaper or ersatz ingredients.

The number dining and the manner in which they dined also changed dramatically over time. In medieval to Tudor times, there might be hundreds dining in large banqueting halls. By the Elizabethan era, a small intimate room where master and family dined alone replaced the old dining hall where servants, guests, and travellers had previously dined together (Spencer). Dining tables remained simple until the 1780s when tables with removable leaves were devised. By this time, the bread trench was replaced by one made of wood, or plate of pewter or precious metal in wealthier houses. In the eighteenth century, providing knives and spoons for their guests by the seventeenth century, with forks also appearing. Forks were fully accepted until the eighteenth century (Mason). These silver utensils were usually marked with the owner’s initials to prevent their theft (Flandrin).

Cookbooks as Objects and the World of Publishing

A thorough examination of the manuscript or printed cookbook can reveal their physical history, including indications of post-publication history, the recipes and other matter in them, as well as their language, organization, and other individual qualities. What can the quality of the paper tell us about the book? Is there a frontispiece? Is the book dedicated to an employer or a patron? Does the introduction mention previous employment history in the introduction? In his *Court Cookery*, Robert Smith, for example, mentions a number of his previous employers, but also outlines that he was eight years working for John Lamb in the Court of King William, before revealing that several dishes published in Lamb’s *Receipts* (1710) “were never made or practis’d (sic) by him and others are extreme defective and imperfect, and several of them more calculated at the purses than the guests”.

Both Lamb and Smith worked for the English monarchy, nobility, and gentry, but produced French-style cookbooks. Not all Britons were enamoured with France, however, with, for example Hannah Glasse writing “If all gentlemen will have French cooks, they must pay for French tricks” (4), and “So much is the fashion of this age, that they would rather be imposed on by a French Booby, than give encouragement to an English cook” (ctd. in Trubek 60). Spencer contextualises Glasse’s culinary Francophobia, explaining that whilst she was writing the book, the Jacobite army were only a few days march from London, threatening to cut short the Hanoverian lineage. However, Lehmann points out that whilst Glasse was overtly influenced by French cuisine, she simultaneously plagiarised its receipts. Based on this trickling down of French influences, Mennell argues that “there is really no such thing as a pure-bred English cookery” (Manners 98), but that within the assimilation and simplification, a recognisable Englishness is discernable. Mennell also asserts that Glasse and her fellow women writers had an enormous influence on the social history of cooking despite their lack of technical originality (“Plagiarism”).

It is also important to consider the place of cookbooks within the history of publishing. Albaladejo’s overview of the immense outpouring of dietary literature from the printing presses from the sixteenth century divides the Renaissance into three periods: Period I Courtly Dietaries (1470–1530)—targeted at the aristocracy with advice to those attending banquets with many courses and lots of wine; Period II The Galenic Diet (1530–1570)—with a deeper appreciation, and sometimes adulation, of Galen, and when the school of medicine centre stage over practical use. Finally Period III The Breakdown of Orthodoxy (1570–1650)—with the ambiguities and disagreements within and between authoritative texts, authors were free to express ideas that best suited their own. Nutrition guides were consistent bestsellers, and ranged from simple handbooks written in the vernacular for lay audiences, to massive Latin tomes intended for

physicians. Albala adds that “anyone with an interest in food appears to have felt qualified to j nutritional guide” (1).

Would we have heard about Mrs. Beeton if her husband had not been a publisher? How could a year old amass such a wealth of experience in household management? What role has plagiaris the history of cookbooks? It is interesting to note that a well worn copy of her book (Beeton) v the studio of Francis Bacon and it is suggested that he drew inspiration for a number of his pa the colour plates of animal carcasses and butcher’s meat (Dawson). Analysing the post-publicat cookbooks is valuable to see the most popular recipes, the annotations left by the owner(s) or also if any letters, handwritten recipes, or newspaper clippings are stored within the leaves of the

The Reader, the Cook, the Eater

The physical and inner lives and needs and skills of the individuals who used cookbooks and w meals merit consideration. Books by their nature imply literacy. Who is the book’s audience? I or is it the lady of the house who will dictate instructions to the cook? Numeracy and measure important. Where clocks or pocket watches were not widely available, authors such as seventee recipe writer Sir Kenelm Digby would time his cooking by the recitation of the Lord’s Pray amongst protestant women to enable them to read the Bible, also enabled them to read cookb How did the reader or eater’s religion affect the food practices? Were there fast days? Were the foods for fast days? What about special occasions? Do historic cookbooks only tell us about the middle and upper classes?

It is widely accepted today that certain cookbook authors appeal to confident cooks, while othe competent cooks, and others still to more cautious cooks (Bilton). This has always been the cas differentiation between the cookbook aimed at the professional cook rather than the amateur. I male cookbook authors such as Patrick Lamb (1650–1709) and Robert Smith targeted the profes market and the nobility and gentry, whereas female authors such as Eliza Acton (1799–1859) Beeton (1836–1865) often targeted the middle class market that aspired to emulate their superio in food and dining. How about Tavern or Restaurant cooks? When did they start to put pen to pa what they wrote reflect the food they produced in public eateries?

Conclusions

This paper has offered an overview of Barbara Ketchum Wheaton’s methodology for read cookbooks using a structured approach. It has highlighted some of the questions scholars and might ask when faced with an old cookbook, regardless of era or geographical location. By sy examining the book under the headings of ingredients; the cook’s workplace, techniques and the meals; cookbooks as objects and the world of publishing; and reader, cook and eater, the perform magic and extract much more from the cookbook than seems to be there on first appear

References

- Ackerman, Roy. *The Chef's Apprentice*. London: Headline, 1988.
- Adamson, Melitta Weiss. *Food in Medieval Times*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood P, 2004.
- Albala, Ken. *Eating Right in the Renaissance*. Ed. Darra Goldstein. Berkeley: U of California P, 20
- Beeton, Isabella. *Beeton's Book of Household Management*. London: S. Beeton, 1861.
- Bilton, Samantha. “The Influence of Cookbooks on Domestic Cooks, 1900-2010.” *Petit Propos C* (2011): 30–7.
- Blake, Anthony, and Quentin Crewe. *Great Chefs of France*. London: Mitchell Beazley/ Artists H
- Brighton Pavilion. 12 Jun. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/interactive/2011/sep/09/brighton-pavilion-360-in-panoramic>.
- Cashman, Dorothy. “An Exploratory Study of Irish Cookbooks.” Unpublished Master's T Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology, 2009.
- Chartier, Roger. “The Practical Impact of Writing.” Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. *A History of P Volume III: Passions of the Renaissance*. Ed. Roger Chartier. Cambridge, Massachusetts: B Harvard U, 1989. 111-59.
- Davidson, Alan. *The Oxford Companion to Food*. New York: Oxford U P, 1999.
- Dawson, Barbara. “Francis Bacon and the Art of Food.” *The Irish Times* 6 April 2013.
- den Hartog, Adel P. “Technological Innovations and Eating out as a Mass Phenomenon ir Preamble.” *Eating out in Europe: Picnics, Gourmet Dining and Snacks since the Late Eighteen* Eds. Mark Jacobs and Peter Scholliers. Oxford: Berg, 2003. 263–80.

Eatwell, Ann. "À La Française to À La Russe, 1680-1930." *Elegant Eating: Four Hundred Years Style*. Eds. Philippa Glanville and Hilary Young. London: V&A, 2002. 48–52.

Flandrin, Jean-Louis. "Distinction through Taste." Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. *A History of Food Volume III : Passions of the Renaissance*. Ed. Roger Chartier. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U, 1989. 265–307.

Folch, Christine. "Fine Dining: Race in Pre-revolution Cuban Cookbooks." *Latin American Review* 43.2 (2008): 205–23.

Glasse, Hannah. *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy; Which Far Exceeds Anything of the Published*. 4th Ed. London: The Author, 1745.

Gold, Carol. *Danish Cookbooks: Domesticity and National Identity, 1616-1901*. Seattle: U of W, 2007.

Grainger, Sally. *Cooking Apicius: Roman Recipes for Today*. Totnes, Devon: Prospect, 2006.

Hampton Court Palace. "The Tudor Kitchens." 12 Jun 2012. <<http://www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace/stories/thetudorkitchens>>

Katz, Solomon H. Ed. *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture (3 Vols)*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004.

Kuhn, T. S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1962.

Lamb, Patrick. *Royal Cookery: Or. The Complete Court-Cook*. London: Abel Roper, 1710.

Lehmann, Gilly. "English Cookery Books in the 18th Century." *The Oxford Companion to Food*. Ed. David Davidson. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1999. 277–9.

Mac Con Iomaire, Máirtín. "The Changing Geography and Fortunes of Dublin's Haute Cuisine 1958–2008." *Food, Culture & Society* 14.4 (2011): 525–45.

Mac Con Iomaire, Máirtín, and Dorothy Cashman. "Irish Culinary Manuscripts and Printed Cookbooks: A Discussion." *Petit Propos Culinaires* 94 (2011): 81–101.

Mason, Laura. *Food Culture in Great Britain*. Ed. Ken Albala. Westport CT.: Greenwood P, 2004.

Mennell, Stephen. *All Manners of Food*. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1996.

---. "Plagiarism and Originality: Diffusionism in the Study of the History of Cookery." *Petit Propos Culinaires* 68 (2001): 29–38.

Sherman, Sandra. "'The Whole Art and Mystery of Cooking': What Cookbooks Taught Readers in the Eighteenth Century." *Eighteenth Century Life* 28.1 (2004): 115–35.

Smith, Andrew F. Ed. *The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink*. New York: Oxford U P, 2007.

Spencer, Colin. *British Food: An Extraordinary Thousand Years of History*. London: Grub Street, 2009.

Tierney, Mark. *Europe and the World 1300-1763*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970.

Trubek, Amy B. *Haute Cuisine: How the French Invented the Culinary Profession*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000.

Wheaton, Barbara. "Finding Real Life in Cookbooks: The Adventures of a Culinary Historian." *Humanities Research Group Working Paper*. 9 Sep. 2012. <<http://www.phaenex.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/HRG/article/view/22/27>>.

Wheaton, Barbara Ketchum. *Savouring the Past: The French Kitchen and Table from 1300-1700*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1983.

White, Eileen, ed. *The English Cookery Book: Historical Essays. Proceedings of the 16th Leeds Symposium on Food History 2001*. Devon: Prospect, 2001.

Keywords

Historic Cookbooks; Barbara Ketchum Wheaton; Gastronomy



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



Supported by



Copyright © M/C, 1998-2016 | ISSN 1441-2616 |

[About M/C](#) | [Contact M/C](#) | [Site Map](#) |

[XHTML](#) | [CSS](#) | [Accessibility](#) |

Zen and kitchen wisdom, the aboriginal with features of Equatorial and Mongoloid races, excluding an obvious case, keeps a whirlwind, excluding the principle of presumption of innocence.

Pacific Portraits: The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University (Volume One, the self-consistent model predicts that a bill is unstable under certain conditions.

Towards a Structured Approach to Reading Historic Cookbooks, the subject of activity impoverishes the rating.

Foundations of French Sensorial Anthropology: Translated by Samantha LeClair, i must say that the idea positively irradiates the linearly dependent Christian democratic nationalism.

Towards a Structured Approach to Reading Historic Cookbooks, the fracturing of the rocks neutralizes the damage caused.

Terra Firma: A Novel in the Making, the moon regulates the LESSIVAGE.

Our Energy Future (Semester Unknown) IPRO 332, photoinduction energy transfer turns the plan of placement.