

Recipes for Domesticity: Cookery, Household Management, and the Notion of Expertise

Introduction

The cookbook: its very name seems self-explanatory, yet this consistently practical genre is more challenging to delimit than the term suggests. In examining historical examples of cookbooks, one finds recipes for preparing specific dishes, but also encounters recipes for medicine and tonics, instructions on how to deliver babies, advice on how to remove stains from fabric and how best to black boots, warnings of moral failings among one's servants, and tips on fireplace maintenance.

Very early modern examples of cookbooks may not even register as "cookbooks" to the twenty-first century reader, as the books themselves, including the recipes, tend to be more discursive than we are accustomed to seeing. Indeed, this element of descriptiveness can make it difficult to define exactly what qualifies as a cookbook, as books describing or defining recipes might be part of a larger "how to" project, or be contained in works which discussed a variety of topics on the household, cooking being one of them.

By the end of the seventeenth century, increasing literacy, the rise of the middle class, and interest in the "how to" genre saw a tremendous growth in the publishing of books on cooking, wine-making and brewing, and household management. Estimates for cookbook printing during the eighteenth century places the figure at over 300 cookbooks alone being published. When it is further considered that many of these titles were so popular that multiple editions were published, the number of cookbooks published during that century numbers well into the thousands. Indeed, a cookbook was likely to figure among the books a middle class home might commonly own. As time passed, readers had access to many cookbooks, as well as books discussing the running of a household, from advice on hiring staff to how to best furnish a kitchen and dining room. Thus, while the concept of the cookbook became more specialized and defined, moving away from earlier incarnations in which recipes, household management, and even medical advice, all appeared in the same volume, these various domestic topics became the subject of their own specialized books.

Far from attempting to provide a complete chronicle of cookbook history, this exhibition instead focuses on various aspects of the relationship between the domestic and elements commonly associated with it, such as food storage and preparation, or the physical layout of the kitchen. It also takes into account the people who inhabited these spaces, from courtly chefs to kitchen maids to housewives, and the ways in which these domestic occupants presented themselves, in the case of cooks who became authors; were advised by others, in the case of those in domestic service; or were studied when the household became a subject of academic interest. Together, these representations of who contributed to domestic constructs, whether in terms of food, of space, or of behaviors, provide many and varied "recipes for domesticity."

The Printed Cookbook

Clearly, people had been using recipes in various fashions long before printing and indeed, early printed cookbooks often simply put into print the recipes and writings on food that had been transmitted in manuscript form. For instance, the first printed European cookbook, Platina's *Platynae de honesta*, was based on material he had first encountered (and written himself) in manuscript form. An earlier printed form of the work existed, ca. 1470, but the 1475 printing shown here is the first dated copy of his work, which discusses not only recipes but information about the ingredients themselves.

As seen in these early examples of cookery or household guides, recipes were only one component of cook books. Giovanni Casa's late 16th-century guide, *Il Galathea* (1582), for instance, includes etiquette directions for both servants and their masters, with advice to staff on how to comport themselves while serving, and reminding those being served to use utensils when eating, rather than their hands.

Bertolomeo Scappi's *Opera* is considered an important early classic, and covers everything from directions for the cook himself to parsing out the differences of various spices, to specific recipes organized by food group, to menus to special diets for convalescents. Scappi was in the employ of Pope Pius V when he wrote his *Opera*; the Pope conveniently also provided the printing privilege in 1570. As was typical for early cookbook authors, Scappi's resumé included a number of high-profile positions, thus establishing his expertise. He worked not just as private chef to the Pope, but to others within papal inner circles. Scappi's reach was great, and he is considered an influence on François Pierre (La Varenne).

Continental Cookery

Little biographical information is known about François Pierre, who took the name La Varenne, and whose most famous work, *Le Cuisinier François* represented a new approach to French cooking when it was first published in 1651. In addition to providing new recipes (the preceding century was dominated by reprints of older, popular recipes), La Varenne's work is significant for introducing the new method of French cooking found in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Previously, French cooking was mainly influenced by Italian works, such as those outlined in the preceding case. The seventeenth century, however, saw a significant shift in style, mainly through the influence of La Varenne, who advocated a lighter hand with seasonings and the use of local herbs, as opposed to reliance on exotic, exported spices. He also began using what was then considered new vegetables, such as cauliflower and artichokes. La Varenne worked for a number of aristocratic employers, continuing the trend of cookbook authors coming from court kitchens.

Le Cuisinier François was popular, and went into multiple editions. The copy displayed here was published in 1652. Extant first editions of early modern cookbooks can be difficult to come by, mainly due to the genre of the book: because a cookbook was foremost a practical text, used in the kitchen, the popular works became so heavily used they literally fell apart.

As a further sign of its popularity, *Le Cuisinier François* was translated into English in 1653 as *The French Cook*, the first translation of a French cookbook into English, again underscoring La Varenne's influence. The edition displayed here is a first edition of the translation, and includes a small dictionary translating key French words.

Another influential book of this time, often attributed to La Varenne, is *Le Pâtissier François*, published in 1653. This book was the first to be devoted just to pastry. While much of it focuses on sweet pastries, savory approaches, such as pastry used for wrapping meat or fish, are also included. This work, too, was translated into English, as well as Swedish and German.

Mistresses and Maids, Masters and Servants

Early cookbooks may have been difficult to define, but the hierarchy within a household was strictly elucidated, as seen in the many domestic manuals printed. These guides ranged from standalone works to directions contained within larger household manuals, and were written both for those in service and those supervising a staff.

For instance, the *Footman's Directory*, written by an experienced butler, provides specific instructions for dealing with daily tasks a footman would be expected to perform, as well as general advice on avoiding temptations and conducting oneself in a becoming manner. Eliza Heywood, perhaps better known for her novels, also penned the helpful *A New Present for a Servant Maid*, offering both moral and practical advice.

Middle-class women increasingly became a target audience for guides on managing domestic staff, as seen in works such as *Housecraft*. Such publications demonstrate that it was not always the servant who needed instruction: the middle class (or those who aspired to middle or high class status) who had not grown up with domestic help now had expert advice books guiding them through the process of hiring help and supervising the running of the home.

Iconic Cookbooks

The previous cases focusing on early printed cookbooks and continental cooking represented early modern cookbooks, written for those moving in court circles or similarly aristocratic venues. The authors represented in this case are iconic for their attempts to demystify "haute cuisine," foreign food, and/or cooking in general, attempting to make recipes accessible to the home cook, a shift that begins in the 18th century. Their audiences were pointedly middle-class, either cooking themselves, or managing a small staff.

In a marked shift from earlier cookery works, two of the most popular books of the century were written by women: Eliza Smith's *The Compleat Housewife* (1727), Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* (1747). Glasse's book enjoyed tremendous popularity, running to seventeen editions by the early nineteenth century. Her recipes were pirated by imitators (although she herself also "borrowed" heavily from Eliza Smith's work). Importantly, Glasse begins providing more specific, precise measurements compared to earlier works.

If Hannah Glasse set the standard for the eighteenth century, by the Victorian period, Isabella Beeton took on this role. *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861) was a best-seller from the start, and even after Beeton's early death, the title, and persona, carried on into many editions. As its title suggests, Beeton's tome covers not just recipes, but touches on all aspects of the household, from marketing to managing servants, to stylish table settings. And like Glasse, Beeton is further notable for presenting recipes in a style more similar to those we see today, with a list of ingredients, measurements, and directions.

Cookbooks of the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries were aimed at the well-to-do and aspiring middle class, encouraging the embrace of a higher standard of living and use of the many imported foods and beverages to be had. Yet by the mid-twentieth century, few middle class home cooks had domestic assistance, and women were instead running households and preparing meals entirely on their own. While home cooking was now an established female realm, haute cuisine remained a male sphere, not dissimilar from the world of La Varenne centuries before, when French cooking was influential and men claimed the positions of chef to their aristocratic employers. Julia Child's *The Art of French Cooking* (1961) sought to demystify French techniques and foods. Her book is filled with illustrations demonstrating techniques, as well as detailed directions designed to enable the home cook to prepare dishes previously considered intimidating to the average American homemaker.

While Child's contributions to cookery history may have been popularizing French cooking, James Beard is important for his embrace and promotion of American food. Beard's books showcase classic American cuisine, from regional favorites to the American love of grilling and barbeque.

This mid-century period also saw the development of a number of notable food writers, such as Elizabeth David in England, and M.F. K. Fisher in the United States. While their books often weave recipes into the work, their writing is more focused on reflections on food as a whole, or on the rituals and pleasures of eating.

Equipping and Designing the Domestic Realm

The majority of the books displayed here date from the nineteenth century on, and this century saw a rapid increase in both the need for such guides, and in the production of them. While technologies of cooking did change in the centuries prior – for instance, the use of coal in the 1600s led to the development of a new piece of equipment for the fireplace, the basket grate – kitchen equipment remained limited. The dramatic changes of the Industrial Revolution carried over into the kitchen, with improved utensils, for instance, becoming possible as a result of improvements in the ways in which sheet metal could be rolled. With the increase in manufacturing came a much greater range of kitchen goods available, and the household reference works of the nineteenth century and beyond provided guidance to consumers.

While the poor or those in rural areas still relied on open fires well into the nineteenth centuries, those with greater means began using closed-top ranges, which allowed the user to fry, bake, or

cook, all at the same time. Manufacturers also began creating gas-fueled ranges as early as the 1820s, but it was not until the 1880s that such devices became commonly available. Electric ovens first were experimented with in the late nineteenth century, and became an option for the consumer in the twentieth century.

All of these new appliances, from types of ranges and ovens, to the concept of electricity itself, are discussed in household reference works, often with illustrations. Advantages of various types of appliances are discussed, as are the most advantageous – and efficient – methods of laying out a room. The kitchen receives special attention in such guides – the idea of a built-in kitchen was not popular until the mid-twentieth century – with discussions of ventilation, light, and sanitation all part of the advice.

Home Cooks and Cooking at Home

Most of the cookbooks in this exhibition feature an “expert” as the author, with this expertise being generated by the author’s experience in cooking, whether from working for famous people, or by establishing a reputation through one’s writing. Yet another kind of cookbook developed, one created by those presenting themselves distinctly *not* as experts, but rather as peers of the reader. Some of these works were commercially published, such as *The Frugal American Housewife*, but the most common expression of a cookbook made by peers is the recipe collection created by a community group or other local organization. The recipes contained in such works are submitted by the group’s members, and each entry is signed, with members contributing their favorites. Often these collections are wonderful examples of regional cuisine, or provide examples of popular dishes of a given moment in time.

Also featured here is an example of an individual’s recipe collection, familiar to most home cooks. This example dates from the nineteenth century, and features hand-written recipes in the notebook pages, as well as numerous loose pages and cards stuffed into the bound volume.

Specialty Cookbooks

As items such as chocolate, coffee, and tea became more widely available in the seventeenth century, books appeared that explained exactly how to consume these imports. One such example is *The Manner of Making Coffee, Tea and Chocolate* (1685) or the French work *Traitez Nouveaux et Curieux du Café*. The latter piece includes illustrated depictions of exotic others consuming these beverages, while both guides explain to the English or European reader how to enjoy these luxury goods.

Guides also were devoted to expensive or specialty tastes, such as these two examples of works dedicated to the preparation and consumption of oysters. Still other books take the opposite approach, promoting health foods and recipes, in direct contrast to the many books promoting the enjoyment of unhealthy but delicious foods.

Finally, this case includes two examples of books written to address very specific culinary needs, such as cooking for times of famine or food scarcity. *La Cuisine des Pauvres*, for instance, provides instructions and recipes explaining ways to make flour for bread from non-wheat sources in the case of a bad or ruined crop. It appears to be aimed at either landowners responsible for tenants, or those working in religious orders involved in charity work. Similarly *Essay on Bread* explains how to determine that one's bread was unadulterated and had not been made with additions that may prove lethal, such as lye, or sickening, such as saw dust.

The Household as Subject of Academic Study

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the domestic sphere, and activities within it, found its way into the academic curriculum, both in secondary schools and in colleges. The domestic had become a subject of its own, with courses aimed at educating young women of varying classes and prospects.

The University of Chicago's records provide some insight into how the subject was taught, both at the secondary and at the university level, as one of the leading scholars in the field, Marion Talbot, joined the University faculty in 1892. Talbot both studied subjects such as the effect of diet on women students and advocated for high school girls to be taught about subjects such as marketing and budgeting, as well as gain hands-on experience preparing a variety of dishes. The change in departmental names during her time at the University indicates the shifting approaches to the subject matter; when Talbot was an assistant professor, she worked in the Department of Sanitary Science. By the time she was tenured, her department was Household Administration.

Women college students could take courses in Household Administration at the University of Chicago, which offered both practical kitchen experience as well as the opportunity to study the home from a more critical point of view. Graduate theses were written on topics ranging from an analysis of the amount of math included in home economics courses, to surveys on the most desirable qualities and skills to be inculcated in high school girls through home ec classes. The department changed names again, becoming Home Economics, when Professor Margaret Reid, published work documenting the economic contributions of women's unpaid labor within the home. She taught at the University of Chicago from 1951-1961 as professor of Home Economics and Economics, moving to the latter department after the demise of Home Economics as its own department.

At the University of Chicago, as at many other institutions of higher education, Home Economics and its variants did not last long beyond the end of World War II. With more career options opening to women, and fewer opting to major in Home Economics as a course of study, the departments had shrinking enrollments. At the University of Chicago, the department formally dissolved in 1956, as seen in the document shown here.