



PROJECT MUSE®

Global Connections and Culinary Conceptions of Cultural
Identity in Austrian Food Literature of the Nineteenth
Century

Amy Millet

Journal of Austrian Studies, Volume 56, Number 2, Summer 2023, pp.
41-51 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/895783>

Global Connections and Culinary Conceptions of Cultural Identity in Austrian Food Literature of the Nineteenth Century

Amy Millet

In 1897, Baroness Marie von Rokitansky (1848–1924) published a volume of several hundred recipes as *Die österreichische Küche*, all of which she had tried in her own kitchen in Innsbruck. Critics praised her book, a bestseller of its time, for including the finest dishes the Habsburg lands had to offer (“Aus dem Reiche der Küche”). Certainly, the book contained many predictable favorites: Hungarian goulash, Polish beet soup, Linzer Torte, and, of course, several pages of Viennese pastries. Along with the schnitzels and strudels, however, the volume also showcased recipes from other parts of Europe, the Americas, and Asia, regions far removed from the alpine climes of Central Europe. With this in mind, the book’s title may seem a bit misleading. Rokitansky had selected each recipe herself, however, and each new edition of the book reaffirmed her interpretation of its contents.¹

Rokitansky’s choice of title was therefore significant. In his analysis of cookbooks from Austria, Roman Sandgruber argues that cookbook titles often reflected political attitudes toward considerations of national identification and proposes that cookbooks invoking “österreichisch” cuisine in their titles rather than specific nationalist designations may have been addressed to Austrians with *großdeutsch* sentiments (189). Here I argue that the inclusion of foreign recipes and ingredients in a book dedicated to “Austrian” cuisine suggested a conception of Austrian-ness that was grounded in Central Europe but that incorporated elements from beyond the Habsburg lands to create a more cosmopolitan cultural identity.

Rokitansky's cookbook and other culinary writings of the late nineteenth century illustrate how food culture provided a space for cultivating and expressing notions of collective belonging that were more expansive than the political discourses of the day. Contemporary rhetoric generally emphasized exclusive national identification, often based on language, religion, and other cultural factors, as the most salient form of collective identity. In contrast, conceptions of belonging expressed through food incorporated national, imperial, and global elements. In addition, that Austrians were connecting with other areas of the world through food was itself an international trend. By showcasing recipes and ingredients from abroad and highlighting their foreignness, culinary writings invited readers to reimagine the contours of "Austrian-ness" and expand them to include tastes and flavors from a broader swath of the globe.

A rich body of literature explores the nature and workings of national identification in the Habsburg lands as well as the relationships between nationalist loyalties and other types of belonging, such as regional, religious, imperial, or urban affinities (see for example Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*; Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, King; Stauter-Halsted; Unowsky; Vushko; Wood; Zahra). Existing scholarship also examines the mechanisms through which collective identities were negotiated, including language-use regulations, religious and civic celebrations, associations, and the shared experiences of city life in an era of modernization. These studies, however, tend to focus on patterns of public life or draw attention to official institutions Habsburg rulers cultivated to ensure loyalty to the imperial state. In contrast, this article shifts the focus to private preferences and decisions that were centered in individual households. By looking beyond official narratives and exploring an often-overlooked realm of cultural expression and production—food—a study of culinary culture offers fresh perspectives on collective cultural identification in Habsburg Central Europe.

In its international scope, Rokitansky's book was consistent with contemporary Austrian culinary magazines that likewise featured foreign foods in their menus and advice columns. These publications were addressed to middle-class women, who were expected to master "die Geheimnisse der kulinarischen Künste" in order to manage their households properly (*Illustrierte Wiener Küchen-Zeitung* 2; see also Danielczyk and Wasner-Peter 80). The wife of a distinguished professor and the daughter and daughter-in-law of well-known titled government appointees in Vienna, Rokitansky started giving cooking lessons in her home in Innsbruck, then later compiled

a cookbook based on that experience (Pataky 199). She addressed her book to “jungen Hausfrauen, denen daran liegt, eine gute, schmackhafte, nicht allzu verkünstelte Zubereitung der Speisen durchzuführen” (Rokitansky, “Vorrede zur ersten Auflage”). Yet while these women were learning the ins and outs of home economy—“Hantirung mit den Küchengeräthschaften,” “Einkaufe und [die] Bereitung der täglichen Nahrungsmittel”—they were also receiving instruction on cultural identification (*Illustrierte Wiener Küchen-Zeitung* 1–2). As Sandgruber argues, “Speisen und Getränke sollen die Zugehörigkeit zu bestimmten Gruppen signalisieren. . . . Sie erstreben durch Geschmacksgleichheit Identität. . . . Daß das Essen eines der stärksten Mittel ist, Identität zu bestimmen, ist klar” (185). Ken Albala further notes that cookbooks reflected consumers’ aspirations and efforts at “social emulation” (229, 234). As instruction booklets on belonging, cookbooks and magazines enabled consumers to both imagine and aspire to an expanded, more cosmopolitan form of Austrian identity. They also invited readers to achieve this identity by imitating foreign food practices. Such writings suggested that middle-class Austrian-ness encompassed the ability to access global goods and ideas and blend them with existing practices to produce a newly concocted cultural identity.

This pattern of borrowing and blending ways of cooking (and consuming) from disparate geographical regions reflected the multinational and multicultural character of the Habsburg state itself and underscored Habsburg officials’ aspirations as imperial actors on the world stage. Although Austria-Hungary had no export-producing overseas colonies of its own, through global networks of commercial trade its subjects had access to foods from other powers’ colonies that subsequently landed on Central European tables, enabling Habsburg subjects to enjoy the fruits of others’ imperial endeavors. In this way, day-to-day practices such as cooking and eating melded household routines with the Habsburg project of becoming imperial. Culinary culture thus embodied Austria’s participation in the imperial project and solidified its location at a crossroads of the nineteenth century’s global exchange of goods and ideas.

Sampling the Globe: Ingredients for Austrian-ness

The first way culinary writings invited readers to expand their notions of Austrian-ness was by including foreign ingredients and recipes. For example, Rokitansky’s cookbook contained an extensive list of herbs and spices

with an explanation accompanying each entry on the item's place of origin and recommendations for its use (24–29). Many of the herbs were local to the Habsburg lands, but roughly half of the spices originated from outside of Europe. In addition to seasonings from Spain, Italy, and England, the list included Spanish pepper grown in India, vanilla from the East and West Indies, cinnamon from Ceylon, coriander from “the Orient,” and star anise from China. The commentary even linked onions, which were frequently used and likely quite familiar to local readers, to the remote coasts of Africa (29). The careful explanations and emphasis on the products' places of origin highlighted their foreign nature.

In addition to individual ingredients, the names of the cookbook's recipes also covered a broad swath of the globe. Typical Viennese dishes such as *Knödel*, *Powidl*, *Kaiserschmarren*, and *schnitzel* made a fair appearance, and *strudel* had its own section. *Laibacher* scrambled eggs, Bohemian *dalken*, Styrian cabbage, and Hungarian *halászlé* paid homage to other regions of the Habsburg Empire. Additional recipes were attributed to Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Greece, and the Turkish lands of the Ottoman Empire. Other recipes, however, stretched the meaning of “Austria” even further, including Armenian pilaf made with pistachios, shellfish, and tomatoes; Chinese bread; Indian curry; and *Stschy-Suppe*, annotated as “Russian National Soup” (Rokitansky 303, 456, 100, 97). These entries suggest that even dishes that represented other national traditions could make contributions to Austrian cuisine. Even the font selections emphasized the foreign nature of many dishes. For English, French, and Italian recipes, Rokitansky generally included the original name of the food along with its German translation. For many dishes from the British Isles, such as “Ham and Eggs,” or “Irish Stew,” the titles were simply printed in English, without any translation—though “Mock Turtle Soup” did require a translation (299, 223, 103). Non-German terms or foreign names were typically typeset in a different font, which further distinguished them. Thus, simply perusing the cookbook's pages provided a visual indication of the multicultural nature of its contents.

Two additional recipes were particularly revealing. The section on “warm appetizers” included “Quäker Oats consommé,” complete with German diacritic marks to assist with proper pronunciation (Rokitansky 136).² The American brand name underscored the emphasis on foreign products manifest in the earlier list of herbs and spices. Oats were not uncommon

in Central Europe; Rokitansky could easily have titled the recipe *Haferbrei*. Using the American name, however, emphasized the foreign nature of the dish, distinguishing it from a run-of-the-mill local mush. Invoking a foreign brand highlighted its origin and gave the impression of a more sophisticated dish than just a regular bowl of hot porridge. Finally, tucked among Greek, American, Spanish, and Provençal dishes, the section on seafood listed “snails, in the Austrian manner” (159). Given the cookbook’s title, ostensibly, at least, all the recipes were part of Austrian fare. Specifically designating this particular dish as “Austrian” underscored the fact that many of the other recipes came from foreign locations.

By highlighting these foreign connections, the cookbook became a source of geographical knowledge as well as a handbook on skillful cooking. As Kristin Hoganson notes in her analysis of culinary writings in North America, allusions to foreign names and locations expanded readers’ knowledge of the globe and became sources of “popular geography” (111). In the case of Rokitansky’s volume, readers from Austria could learn about countries far removed from Central Europe simply by perusing recipes and considering new menu items. Furthermore, incorporating those foreign ingredients into their meals provided a new conception of the boundaries of “Austria” itself. In this case, the cookbook did not draw borders around certain crownlands or provinces, as a statesman might. Instead, it incorporated as much of the known world as possible, regardless of proximity to the Habsburg lands. The descriptions thus oriented Austria both spatially and culinarily, placing Austria at the crossroads of global culinary culture, not just in the center of Europe.

In addition to its contents, the book’s organization and layout also communicated a message of a blended and inclusive cultural identity. Throughout the volume, recipes from various countries appear jumbled together on the same page without any explicit reference to geographical location other than the titles themselves. The cookbook’s contents were arranged by types of food, such as soups, salads, meats, baked goods, and so forth, without any sections specifically designated for recipes from abroad. Rather, all of the recipes for each type of dish were presented side by side, without any apparent order, and without regard to country of origin. This placement seems to indicate that all the recipes, regardless of origin, were of equal relevance and stature in the book. As with its recipes, the cookbook’s organization reconfigured perceptions of national and cultural boundaries by

including items from vastly different corners of the globe in the same visual space, without enforcing separations according to geographical location.

Participating in Transatlantic Currents

Culinary writings offered expanded conceptions of Austrian-ness not only by incorporating foreign foods into Austrian cuisine but also by enabling readers to participate in global food trends. The very fascination with foreign foods that characterized middle-class culinary culture in Austria was itself a transatlantic trend and led to active efforts to collect and share new knowledge obtained from overseas. In North America, a March 1880 *New York Tribune* article noted the “growing interest and even enthusiasm of housekeepers in all parts of the country in acquiring the secrets of foreign cooks” (quoted in Hoganson 107). Expanding international commerce connected middle-class households with remote locations around the world. In addition, growing numbers of individuals had the time and means to make trips abroad. They returned with new recipes and accounts of the fine delicacies they had encountered overseas. Partaking of foreign food became a symbol of social standing, offering “an opportunity to experience the exotic” (136). Both trade and travel facilitated the culinary exchange. Those who cooked, traveled; and those who traveled wrote about the foods they experienced. Food writers traveled internationally, and international travelers wrote about food.

Cookbooks and other publications demonstrated the internationalization of cooking knowledge and customs. U.S. cookbooks included foreign recipes from a range of countries but showed a particular preference for French recipes. Although *haute cuisine* was in high fashion in both North America and Europe, French chefs also demonstrated increased interest in foreign culinary practices.³ In the 1890s, the leading Parisian culinary magazine *L'Art culinaire* published Persian and Tunisian recipes, and a U.S.-based correspondent contributed instructions for cooking codfish steaks, chicken hash, and brown turkey hash. In the following years, the magazine also included articles on Wiener schnitzel and Italian polenta (Mennell 175–76). Other publications were dedicated entirely to cuisine from a particular location. In 1894, Alfred Suzanne published *La Cuisine Anglaise*, a book on English cooking written by a French chef for a French audience. Suzanne's primary audience was French food professionals working in England who were struggling to master new cooking methods. He advised they could use “good” English dishes

to their advantage, though that might partially entail “Frenchifying them” (quoted in Mennell 176). Despite this advice, fellow gastronome Philéas Gilbert commented that France seemed to be in the grip of “Anglomania,” noting that “even English food itself [was] enjoying a certain favour . . . so it was important that the profession know how to respond to this demand” (Mennell 176–77). Even for much-admired French aficionados, then, foreign foods held some appeal.

In spite of this new “Anglomania,” cooks in England could also look abroad for inspiration. *German National Cookery for English Kitchens*, published in London in 1873, explicitly encouraged its readers to expand their culinary tastes. The author asked readers to examine their existing habits, telling them, “We are apt to despise things to which we are unaccustomed; and, from reluctance to try strange flavours, many an excellent dish remains unknown to us.” Despite this initial reluctance, however, many travelers were returning home with “recollections of agreeable dishes which they would like to have produced at their own tables, but of the preparation they are ignorant” (vi). To address this deficiency in expertise, the author presented over 1,100 recipes plus a special section on “the manufacture of the various German sausages,” as a guidebook on German cuisine for English-speaking audiences. With recipes, instruction manuals, and preparation methods circling across the north Atlantic and western Europe, the art of cooking transcended national divisions.

Rokitansky’s cookbook also contained explicit connections with culinary writings from overseas. The author’s note that tapioca was harvested from “the manihot root on plantations in Brazil and India” was nearly identical to the explanation in an 1869 American housekeeping manual on the origins of the same ingredient (86; Lyman and Lyman 31; also quoted in Hoganson 111). In addition, the sections on desserts included two pages of frozen bombes, popular frozen desserts around the turn of the century. One particular recipe, “tutti frutti bombe,” was especially well loved, appearing in a New York literary magazine in 1834; a celebration of Shakespeare’s birthday held in London in 1860; a Chicago cooking school handbook in 1883, French chef Auguste Escoffier’s culinary guide in 1907; hotel menus in New York, San Francisco, and Kansas City; and aboard a Japanese cruise ship sailing the Pacific in 1900 (“Literary Notices” 232; “A Festival Commemorative of the Birth of the Immortal ‘Bard of Avon’” 174; *The Chicago Herald Cooking School* 40; Escoffier 809; “What’s on the Menu?”).⁴ These passages underscored

the intercontinental flavor of late nineteenth-century culinary trends as knowledge and practices circulated among food enthusiasts in Europe and North America. They also demonstrate that Austria was participating in these currents. The inclusion of well-traveled recipes and ingredients in a book dedicated to “Austrian” cuisine suggests an expanded meaning of the term and presents a conception of Austrian-ness unconfined by Habsburg borders or linguistic barriers.

In addition to printed material perused in private households, large public events also reflected and perpetuated global interest in foreign foods on both sides of the Atlantic. The French chef’s union started organizing annual cooking competitions in Paris in 1882, and the English chef’s union started its own competition in 1885. The trend caught on quickly and spread to other areas of the Continent in the form of culinary exhibitions: Vienna hosted exhibitions in 1884, 1899, and 1906, as did Brussels in 1887 (Mennell 172; “Internationale Kochkunstausstellung”). Frankfurt am Main and Mainz hosted exhibitions in 1900 and 1902, respectively (Beutel vi). Rokitansky’s own volume received the gold medallion at Vienna’s Kochkunst-Ausstellung in 1899 and again at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900. Foreign food became a popular sensation that drew books, foods, fairs, and people across international boundaries.

Conclusion: The Contribution of Culinary Culture

A study of culinary culture provides new ways of thinking about cultural identity and the ways Habsburg subjects cultivated those identities. It moves the discussion beyond the realms of official narratives to examine individual decisions and preferences as they played out in private homes. Culinary writings and practices also illuminate the connections between (nearly) landlocked Austria and the rest of the world and shed light on how Habsburg subjects participated in an international exchange of goods and ideas during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through perusing cookbooks and magazines, readers in Austria expanded their knowledge of foreign lands and customs. Applying that knowledge brought new flavors into their households and new ways of blending foreign and familiar ideas and practices. This intercontinental circulation led to common experiences with other readers and eaters, who were also hunting for fresh produce and concocting new seasonings for the midday meal. Not only did food transmit common knowledge

and ideas about how to blend certain ingredients, it also transmitted shared experiences of cooking, consuming, and tasting those ingredients. Habsburg subjects forged tangible, kinetic, and cognitive ties with individuals in other areas of the world through food.

Applied to other historical questions, culinary culture also provides insights regarding lived experiences with industrialization, urbanization, and other elements of modernization that transformed life during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These changes brought new technologies, large-scale migration, concerns regarding human health, and the rise of mass culture, all of which also changed the ways humans accessed and consumed food as well as the food itself. Through culinary consumption, Habsburg subjects assimilated the effects of large-scale phenomena on a personal level. An exploration of culinary culture thus integrates Austria into its global context and situates the inhabitants of Central Europe at a crossroads of global trends and transformations.

Amy Millet is a PhD candidate in history at the University of Kansas. Her work examines consumption practices such as cooking, shopping, and dining out in Habsburg Austria between 1870 and 1915. She is particularly interested in how imported foods and foreign recipes made their way into Austrian households and culinary repertoires during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By examining connections between Austrian food culture and transnational trends, she seeks to integrate Austrian history into its European and global contexts. Her work has received generous support from the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Fulbright Commission, and the Central European History Society.

Notes

1. Rokitansky's cookbook was published in fourteen editions between 1897 and 1929.
2. The Quaker Oats brand was patented in the United States in 1877 ("Our Oat History").
3. On the reputation of French cuisine, see Hoganson 107; on "French hegemony" in culinary matters, see Mennell 187. As a demonstration of French influence in Habsburg Europe, in F. J. Beutel's *Die Freie Österreichische Kochkunst*, first published in 1898, the author followed the German names for each of the recipes with a French translation.
4. Rokitansky listed both "Tutti Frutti Gefrorenes" (500) and "Tutti-Frutti-Bombe" (506). A search for "tutti frutti ice cream" between 1880 and 1915 in the New York Public Library's digital collection of menus yields 116 results.

Works Cited

- Albala, Ken. "Cookbooks as Historical Documents." *Oxford Handbook of Food History*, edited by Jeffrey M. Pilcher, Oxford UP, 2012, pp. 227–40.
- "Aus dem Reiche der Küche." *Deutsche Frauen-Zeitung*, no. 48, p. 383.
- Beutel, F. J. *Die Freie Österreichische Kochkunst*. A. Hartleben, 1904.
- The Chicago Herald Cooking School*. 1883, ia601303.us.archive.org/1/items/b21530336/b21530336.pdf. Accessed 5 August 2022.
- Danielczyk, Julia, and Isabella Wasner-Peter, eds. *Heut' muß der Tisch sich völlig biege'n: Die Wiener Küche und ihre Kochbücher*. Mandelbaum Verlag, 2007.
- Escoffier, Auguste. *A Guide to Modern Cookery*. William Heinemann, 1907, archive.org/details/cu31924000610117. Accessed 5 August 2022.
- "A Festival Commemorative of the Birth of the Immortal 'Bard of Avon.'" *The Crayon*, vol. 7, no. 6, June 1860, play.google.com/books/reader?id=-hpHAQAAlAAJ&pg=GBS.PA174&hl=en. Accessed 19 August 2022.
- German National Cookery for English Kitchens: With Practical Descriptions of the Art of Cookery as Performed in Germany*. London, 1873.
- Hoganson, Kristin. *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865–1920*. U of North Carolina P, 2007.
- Illustrierte Wiener Küchen-Zeitung*. 15 April 1889, pp. 1–2.
- "Internationale Kochkunstausstellung." *Neue Freie Presse*, 5 January 1906, p. 21.
- Judson, Pieter M. *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*. Harvard UP, 2006.
- . *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*. Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2016.
- King, Jeremy. *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948*. Princeton UP, 2005.
- "Literary Notices." *The Knickerbocker*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 232–41, archive.org/details/sim_foederal-american-monthly_1834-09_4_3/page/232/mode/2up. Accessed 5 August 2022.
- Lyman, Joseph B., and Laura E. Lyman. *The Philosophy of House-Keeping: A Scientific and Practical Manual*. 10th ed., 1869, play.google.com/books/reader?id=-bwAAAAAMAAJ&pg=GBS.PP6&hl=en. Accessed 22 August 2022.
- Mennell, Stephen. *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*. U of Illinois P, 1996.
- "Our Oat History." Quaker Oats, <https://www.quakeroats.com/about-quaker-oats/quaker-history/>.
- Pataky, Sophie, ed. *Lexikon Deutscher Frauen der Feder*. Vol. 2, M–Z, Berlin, 1898.
- Rokitansky, Marie von. *Die österreichische Küche*. 6th ed., A. Edlinger, 1910.
- Sandgruber, Roman. "Österreichische National Speisen: Mythos und Realität." *Essen und kulturelle Identität: Europäische Perspektiven*, vol. 2, edited by H. J. Teuteberg, et al., Akademie, 1997, pp. 179–204.
- Stauter-Halsted, Keely. *The Village in the Nation: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914*. Cornell UP, 2001.

- Unowsky, Daniel L. *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848–1916*. Purdue UP, 2005.
- Vushko, Iryna. *The Politics of Cultural Retreat: Imperial Bureaucracy in Austrian Galicia, 1772–1867*. Yale UP, 2015.
- “What’s on the menu? Dishes: Tutti Frutti Ice Cream.” New York Public Library digital menu collection: menus.nypl.org/dishes/11488. Accessed 19 August 2022.
- Wood, Nathaniel D. *Becoming Metropolitan: Urban Selfhood and the Making of Modern Cracow*. Northern Illinois UP, 2010.
- Zahra, Tara. *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948*. Cornell UP, 2008.