

Kuti, Klára: Rend és rendetlenség Bornemissza Anna asztalánál. Táplálkozás és háztartásvezetés az erdélyi fejedelmi udvarban [Order and Disorder at the Table of Anna Bornemissza. Nutrition and Housekeeping at the Princely Court of Transylvania].

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BOOK REVIEW

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We have so little comprehensive and consistent knowledge concerning the history of Transylvanian cuisine that today's gastronomy-oriented claims scarcely find any solid ground, despite the fact that, in the public discourse, ancestral traditions are spoken of with such enthusiastic idealization. However, if any justification exists for the idealization of one particular period, it would be the aristocratic food of the era of the Principality, since it is primarily the documents of this period that have to date attracted the interest of researchers, in the form of several important studies.

From this perspective, it is easy to see why the manuscript of Marx Rumpolt's recipe book — the 1680 Hungarian translation of which by János Keszei, commissioned by the princess consort of Transylvania, was published in 1980 in Bucharest by Kriterion, transcribed by Elemér Lakó, under the title *Bornemissza Anna szakácskönyve 1680-ból* [The Cookery Book of Anna

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Bornemissza from 1680] — has become an iconic work in Transylvanian cuisine. It continues to be regarded as a reflection of the rich and varied world of the princely court, almost entirely ignoring the fact that it is actually a translation of a German-language book. Nevertheless, there is no reason to belittle its merits, since, as one of the few surviving tangible relics of troubled Transylvanian history, the very fact that it has survived the historical turbulence to become a testimony to our place in the civilized world, makes it even more valuable.

However, in her work *Order and Disorder at the Table of Anna Bornemissza. Nutrition and Housekeeping at the Princely Court of Transylvania*, Klára Kuti also shows convincingly that the recipe collection is in fact about nothing other than the complex relationship between desires and reality, since hitherto overlooked details in the text suggest that it should rather be interpreted as reflections of a lifestyle. The researcher first examined the Rumpolt cookery book material in her 1996 thesis, subsequently expanding the scope of her research for her doctoral dissertation in 2001 by supplementing it with the housekeeping accounts of Anna Bornemissza. She subsequently reinterpreted the cookery book following the paradigm shift in theory that took place over the following two decades, eventually formulating in the present volume the possibility to further developing the concept of historical documents and their crucial importance. Consequently, using quantitative analysis made possible by computer data processing, she re-examined the aspirational image of the kitchen — that is, the contemporary reality that can be discerned from the translation of the Rumpolt cookery book, the housekeeping accounts kept by the princess /Szádeczky, Béla (ed.) I. *Apaffy Mihály fejedelem udvartartása. Első kötet. Bornemissza Anna gazdasági naplói (1667–1690)* [The Court of Prince Mihály Apaffy I. Volume 1. The Housekeeping Diaries of Anna Bornemissza (1667–1690)] MTA Könyvkiadó Hivatala, Budapest, 1911/, and the network of contacts of her husband, Mihály Apafi, based on his diary. By publishing the study in print form well after it was written, she has not only allowed the material time to mature but has also expanded its horizon, taking advantage of more accurate measurability.

The first edition of *Ein new Kochbuch* (transcribed by Elemér Lakó: *Bornemissza Anna szakácskönyve 1680-ból*, Bucharest, 1983, 33, based on the 1604 work *Egy új főzésről való könyv... Marx Rumpolt Ein new Kochbuchja*, translated by János Keszei in 1680, manuscript: Kolozsvári Ref. Koll., Kolozsvári Akadémiai Kvt. Section 2 MsR 1812) was published in 1581, almost one hundred years before the Transylvanian translation. The modern historian will already have an insight into why the eating habits that characterized the transitional period between the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, as described by Rumpolt, the head cook of the Elector of Mainz, were still considered relevant a century later in Transylvania. By this time, the Transylvanian court had also been swept by the winds of change. However, taking into account the slower pace in the eastern provinces, the subtle differences apparent along the borders could be truly appreciated only by posterity. Although Baron Péter Apor is often seen as a nobleman nostalgic for the ancient customs of the principality, who glorifies the perfection of the past in his *Metamorphosis*, it must be acknowledged that the everyday reality of his own life did not always reflect what he described in his great work.

The volume of studies highlights how, in the hundred years after Rumpolt's cookery book was written, the flavors used in the prince's kitchen had indeed changed, although some of the required ingredients mentioned in the book remained difficult to obtain. Kuti notes these discrepancies along with the incompatibility between the ingredients recommended in the recipes and those that were actually produced and commercially available. Spurred on by her



curiosity, she investigated the contradictions between desires and reality; since she could not be satisfied with a simple analysis of the recipes, which had been paraphrased into Hungarian, she endeavored to discern, with the help of the household budgets of the princess who commissioned the work, whether the economic context and commercial potential of Transylvania at the time made it possible to come by the ingredients required by the recipes. Using this comparative method, she also developed a kind of nutrition history research methodology, and by comparing the original and the translated texts, she presented a much-needed analysis, filling a gap outlined forty years ago by Sándor Iván Kovács during his search for the sources of the first printed Transylvanian cookery book published by Miklós Tótfalusi Kis in 1695 in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca): “until a comparative study and critical source analysis of old extant Hungarian cookery books is carried out, we cannot say much more about the origins of the *Szakács mesterségnek könyvecskéje*” (Kovács, Sándor Iván: “A gyomros matéria” [The Material of the Stomach]. In: Király, Erzsébet (ed.) *Szakács mesterségnek könyvecskéje. A csáktornyai Zrínyi-udvar XVII. századi kéziratok szakácskönyve és a Tótfalusi Kis Miklós által kiadott kolozsvári szakácskönyv* [The Little Book of the Craft of Cooking. The Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Cookbook of the Zrínyi court in Csáktornya and the Kolozsvár Cookery Book Published by Miklós Kis Tótfalusi]. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest, 1981. Magyar Hírmondó series). Kuti’s present work reveals a kind of escape route from the as yet impenetrable cultural-historical labyrinths of Hungarian culinary history: when interpreting the works of later periods, answers should not be sought in the history of Hungarian cookery books, dominated as it is by compilations, but among German, Italian, and French original editions, calculating, of course, with the risk that certainty can never be established.

Although Keszei did a thoroughgoing job as a translator, Kuti does not allow herself to be taken in when reading the delightfully Hungarianized texts, and with Cinderella-like diligence she picks out telling details in the translation that reveal that some of the dishes in the recipe book could not in reality have been served on the tables of the nobility in everyday Transylvania in the late 17th century. On the one hand, she identifies dishes that Keszei omitted from the original text due to the supposed obsolescence of the concept, or examples of where, being unable to find an appropriate Hungarian equivalent for a term (in the case of a dish not prepared in practice), he attempted to replace terms with existing names. Bearing the above in mind, Keszei may be regarded not only as a translator but also as a transcriber. According to Kuti, it may even have been the case that by means of such simplifications, the translator was simultaneously preparing the text for printing. This assumption is supported by the princess’s activities as a patron of culture. Kuti points out that Keszei simply omitted fish that he was unfamiliar with and translated only the instructions on how to prepare the food while omitting advice, ideas, and variations, sometimes even supplementing what was missing in the original source by providing explanations and instructions based on his own knowledge. “János Keszei did not aim for a word-for-word translation, which would not in itself be surprising if these one-sentence translations did not appear precisely in the case of the Hungarian recipes. One might be forgiven for thinking that the recipes Rumpolt listed as Hungarian dishes were considered so well known by János Keszei that he considered it sufficient merely to mention them by name. In the case of one recipe, János Keszei is clearly familiar with the dish in question. First, he translates it literally, adding the Hungarian name by which he knows it, and subsequently he refers to it by that Hungarian name only” (p. 40). After all, Rumpolt’s cookery book was intended not only as a recipe book but also as a behavioral guide.



The value of Klára Kuti's book lies precisely in the application of a quantitative method to a period of nutritional history in such a way that she succeeds in substantiating her conviction that everyday life in Transylvania at that time was not lived in isolation but followed the fashions of distant lands, even if with a certain delay. At the same time, however, she adds a further aspect to her discoveries by examining, sentence by sentence, the texts available to her, demonstrating that Rumpolt's volume did indeed become very Transylvanian via the translator's pen. In her reading, the "author" omitted details that appeared alien to him, while preserving those that were still alive. When Kuti places tiny details from documents dating from the final period of the ancient regime side by side, the anthropological reading of history expands the boundaries of analysis, making possible the utilization of data that traditional historiography could not have noticed precisely because of the absence of this method. In describing the aspirations towards quantification in her methodology, she also provides a model for future researchers through the application of computer data processing. She maintains that by looking behind the data in the source, we are able to discern interrelations that contemporaries, lacking the basis for comparison, could not have noticed, being unable to attain sufficient distance from the source to recognize them, and being without the means to assess their inconsistencies. Kuti concludes that their errors might, surprisingly, be interpreted as a violation of norms.

The database contains 16,505 consignments, and their digital processing has helped to reveal hidden correlations: while the recipe book suggests two meals a day a century earlier, the household budgets and personal diaries occasionally indicate three or more meals a day. While the possibilities for group research are increasingly limited, and while there are fewer possibilities to count on results that support and complement the work of others, computer programs fortunately provide a way out of this predicament. However, the classification of huge amounts of data, and the entering of these data into the database, remain a challenge. Tasks of this kind can "waste" many productive months or years of a trained researcher's time, while other problems to be solved and other ideas to be explored simply accumulate and get postponed; if, during the data processing, the researcher does indeed find time to raise their eyes from the charts and tables, they may realize that they have only one life, and that there are many new and exciting topics for investigation awaiting them. There is a fascinating ambiguity inherent in this situation: while research into household budgets follows a quantifying method and relies on accounts, when it is applied to the study of the past, an individual's own codebreaking ability is still indispensable. This is why a historian's intuition can never be replaced even by a perfectly written computer program. In the case of Kuti, besides her comprehensive knowledge of the literature of the history of nutrition, she also demonstrates her theoretical proficiency through her skillful analysis of the abundant German-language sources. In the meantime, she discerns something for which there is no rational explanation and that can only be discovered through professionally informed intuition: by commissioning this translation, Anna Bornemissza was not only expressing Transylvania's place in European culture but was also indicating the prestige of her court, since cookery at that time was still a respected craft. Kuti's study also refutes the widespread belief that the princely court was characterized by poor management, carelessness, and the excessive consumption of spices.

According to Kuti, Keszei's translation is incomplete from two points of view: on the one hand, the translation is no longer Rumpolt's recipe book, while on the other hand, it is not Anna Bornemissza's either, since "it has nothing to do with the intentions of the princely household. Rather, it is a noble and belated intention that has not been fully executed" (p. 42). She reaches



this conclusion not only by a comparison of the German and Hungarian texts, but also from a detailed analysis of the everyday life of the household. Kuti's research includes a comparison of the accounts of the princely household published by Béla Szádeczky with the archival records that comprise the basis of the publication. This was necessary because the source publication contains only the summary of the household officials but not the accounts of stewards working at lower levels, which might also have proven to be useful indicators. This source is also important because, while not unique in Hungary, it is rare in the international literature on nutritional history to mention courtly assets received in kind. In addition to the accounts, the original document also outlines the geographical routes taken by the court, thus telling the story of the goods produced in the Transylvanian countryside. In relation to the missing data, Kuti notes, "Had Anna Bornemissza perhaps lived a few years longer, the increasing administrative bureaucracy might have registered even the very last cabbage" (p. 82).

The author concludes that cookery books have always provided a more representative overall picture than everyday practice: "The table and kitchen of the Apafi-Bornemissza household, and the leaving of the translation of a printed recipe book with normative force in manuscript form, are examples of the simultaneity of different times, of a missed past and a failed future" (p. 249).

Kuti raises the question of why Rumpolt's cookery book is more important for Hungarians than for European research. Her answer makes it clear that the text, which refers to the Hungarian culinary tradition on several occasions, is addressed not only to Hungarians via Rumpolt but, in Keszei's interpretation, also achieves a transcendent Transylvanian idealization. In the almost half a century since the manuscript cookery book was first published in printed form, the widely circulated work has become a symbol of Transylvanian nutritional history and has enjoyed a trajectory greater than any other collection of recipes associated with Transylvania. This is what enables us to speak of it as a work that can never be closed, and, as a result, as a legacy to be passed on to future researchers.

