

## An Innovation in Cereal Food : Noodles

Since this working meeting on cereal food takes place in Italy, close to Naples, and since I come from Hungary myself, it is inevitable that I should choose noodles (*maccheroni*) for the subject of my contribution. The standard forms of noodles spread from Renaissance Italy, while in modern Italy noodle dishes are literally everyday food in town and village alike. Scheuermeier, showed that the peasants from Emilia, e.g., kneaded, rolled, cut and cooked the pasta for a drained noodle dish every day (1956, p. 403). In the towns, middle-class husbands give their wives a call when they are on their way home for dinner, « to boil the water » (*calare*) i.e. for the noodles. My own country is part of the secondary traditional noodle-eating zone which stretches between the South of France and Hungary. The traditional noodle area is large and the role of noodles in the diet important enough to deserve more consideration than it has been given.

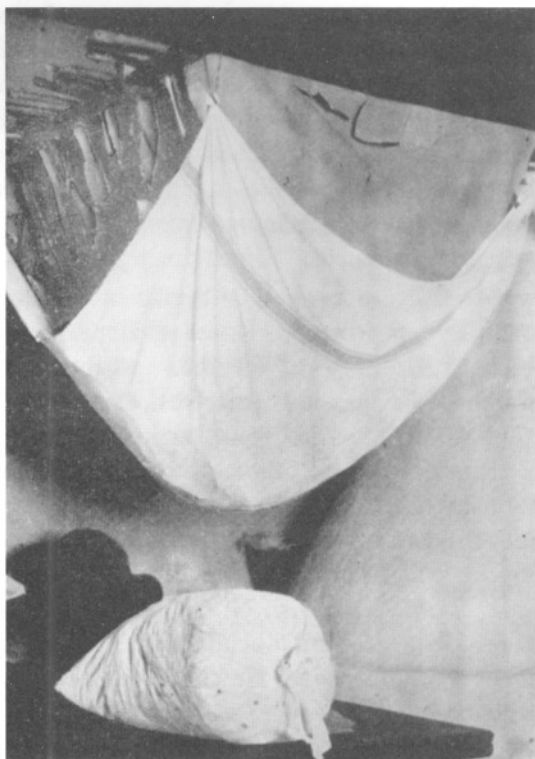
I am myself far from being able to look at all aspects of the subject in relation to time, space, social affiliations and importance in the everyday diet. I have more questions to ask than I have answers to give. But I would like to draw attention to this important form of cereal food in the hope that colleagues will contribute to the shaping of a general picture soon.

Noodles were home made or produced by the noodle maker's craft as an article of merchandise before modern industry increasingly took over the preparation. I shall use the concept of noodles in the wide sense of the word : pasta made of flour moistened and kneaded, formed into different shapes and cooked. It includes forms ranging from small crumbled pieces of dough in the shape of grain, to the pasta formed into long tubes, such as are indicated by the Italian collective term *maccheroni*. The tube form was mainly a professional product, while the classic household forms were flat and roundish strips or squares of pasta. This paper does not seek to discuss the large variety of the forms, nor the technical aspects of the noodle-maker's craft, but concentrates on the noodle dishes in chronological development, in their social rights and functions.

The story of the classic noodles began with the upper classes in 14th century Italy. Boccaccio's 14th century words about noodles are well known and included in all general Italian encyclopaedias. « They did nothing else but prepared noodles and ravioli and cooked them in the soup of a capon » (niuna altra cosa facevan che for maccheroni e raviuoli e cuocergli in brodo di capponi). The Renaissance Italian kitchen was the recognized centre for the art of cookery in Europe and its recipes were widely communicated. This explains why as early as the late 14th century a recipe for home-made noodles had reached the court of Richard II of England, showing drained noodles as a dish in itself. There is an indication that it was a fast-day food. (« Macrows. Take and make a thin foil of dough, and carve it in pieces, and cast them on boiling water, and seeth it well. Take cheese, and grate it, and butter, cast beneath and serve forth ». Wilson, 1976, p. 227. This particular initiative, however, did not have lasting consequences in England).

The two 14th century data show the two main forms of using noodles ; in soup and as a drained independent dish (*pasta asciutta*). The use of pastas in late medieval Italy is seen as most likely in cities (Montanari, 1984, p. 311 ; Sereni, 1981 was unfortunately not available for me). In the 16th century Italians were already investigating the origin of their noodle dishes. (« Nec ommittendum, quos vulgus appellat Maccaroni, non inveniri in antiquis, nec nomen, nec vsum, forte barbarum, immo nec subalpini, nec Germani, cum butyro abundant, eis vtuntur ». Nor should we omit the fact that the food vulgarly called macaroni was not invented in Antiquity, neither its name nor its use ; the Barbarians did not use it either, neither did the Subalpini nor the Germans who have plenty of butter. In Baccii, *hist. nat. vinorum*, Roma, 1596 ; Malouin and Schreber, 1769, p. 20). Beside the home-made noodles, the craft of the noodle-maker became established in Italy at some fairly early date, centred for centuries on Naples. The ordinary noodle-makers of Naples succeeded in keeping the makers of fine noodles out of their city ; these then settled in Torre Annunziata, a few miles in front of the gates of Naples (Malouin-Schreber, 1769, p. 26).

In the 14th century noodles were felt to be appropriate on the royal table. We would like to learn from the Italians if there is any way of knowing when noodles became the regular food of the common people there, and when they became the everyday occurrence of the 20th century. Another question is, what kinds of cereal food were displaced by the spread of the independent drained noodle dishes. We would like to learn how widely the function of fast-day food was given to the drained noodles. When did the craft of the noodle-maker become established and for whom did it work before the period of industrialisation ? When did noodle-makers settle in the North too, e.g. in Genoa, from where the craft was transferred to Marseille ?



*Fig. 1. Sheets of pasta being dried on bars. Pieces of noodles will break away by themselves. Debrecen, Hungary, 1933. (Photo István Ecsedi).*

The classic form of noodles appeared in South Middle Europe, both in German and Hungarian territory, in the 16th century. Earlier only small forms were used, e.g. little balls of pasta, resembling grain, formed between the palms of the hand or by using sifters. Such small forms developed in many places in Africa, Asia and Europe as indigenous developments (Maurizio, 1927, p. 349-350). In Middle Europe these small forms of noodles were cooked in water or in milk like gruel, thick or thin, and not drained. Their names were not transmitted on the new forms of noodles.

In the 16th century two new kinds of boiled cereal food appeared in South Middle Europe, dumplings and the standard noodles (Wiegelmann, 1967, p. 233). The dumplings were cereal variants of the older upper class meat-dumplings. Made of flour or bread, they appeared now as independent dishes on 16th century gentlemen's tables, frequently as food on fast-days. Already in the 16th century cereal dumplings were also especially made for common servants and were taken up by the peasant households (Radvánszky, 1893, p. 293) as meat gradually became scarcer in Southern Germany from the early 16th century on. The new noodles, however, have been found in 16th century Middle Europe on upper class tables only. To indicate their use let us quote an actual menu first.

There is a monthly menu of 1550 from the court of a magnate in South-West Hungary, with two meals a day for the table of noble officials. Of the 31 days, 9 were fast-days when meat was avoided. Out of 17 fast-day meals 12 had altogether 13 courses of the new noodle-dishes. These dishes were all drained noodles, eaten with butter alone or with soft cheese or poppy-seed. The home-made noodles were cut in two forms, in flat and roundish strips. On meat-days no independent noodle dish was served. Chicken with noodle-strips was eaten four times during the month (Belényesy, 1959, p. 112-127).

16th century cookery books in South Middle Europe all include the old and the new forms of noodles. Both were often prepared in the old way, as thick gruels in water or milk; the new forms were also eaten in soup or drained as dishes in themselves. Combinations of noodles with peas stress the emphasis on fast-day food, as in the example of pea soup with noodles given by Rumpolt, the author of the representative 16th century cookery book, published in 1581. Rumpolt is the first in this area to describe drained noodles eaten with grated Parmesan cheese. He added that this way of serving was practised especially in Tirol, that is in the far South (Rumpolt, 1581, CLV verso, dish N° 204). Rumpolt gave meat-day and fish-day festival menus for different social ranks, beginning with the emperor and ranging down to the peasant. He suggested noodles in one instance only, namely for ordinary noblemen who were sixth (and third last) in the hierarchy. The dish proposed was drained noodles with grated cheese, to be eaten on a feast falling on a fish-day (Rumpolt, 1581, 36 verso). The new noodles got their name from the respective vernacular languages, but derivatives of Italian *maccheroni* were also used, as in the Hungarian manuscript cookery book of the Transylvanian prince's court around 1600 (Radvánszky, 1893, p. 246).

In Germany and Austria some menus of actual meals for rural servants survived from the 16th century (Wiegelmann, 1967, p. 28-40; Sandgruber, 1982, p. 155-156, 177). None includes the new noodles as yet. These appear on farm servant's menus in the early 17th century (e.g. in Oberbayern 1618, Wiegelmann, 1967, p. 37-39). In Austria noodles on infirmary menus have been found from the 17th century (Sandgruber, 1982, p. 143). Drained, as dishes on their own right, noodles took the place of several kinds of gruel and porridge. In Hungary, the new noodles must have been adopted by the peasants also during the 17th century. In the early 1700s they were already mentioned amongst the most frequent food items of the peasant household, along with meat, bread, cabbage, lentils, peas and millet (Kolosváry and Óváry, 1892, p. 297). In Hungary, where there was not such a decline in meat consumption in the early modern period as in Southern Germany, dialect speakers divided the days of the week into « meat-days » and « noodle-days », as the non-meat days were consequently called in the 18th-20th centuries. At the beginning of the 18th century capon soup with noodles in it was on the menu at artisans' community feasts in Hungarian agro-towns

(Ecsedi, 1935, p. 179). The same dish was standard at peasant wedding and christening feasts at the end of the century, when sources about such feasts begin to appear (Gvadányi, 1793).

In addition to the home-made noodles, the Italian craft of the noodle-maker was introduced to Nürnberg at some point of time (Malouin-Schreber, 1769, p. 3), from where dried noodles went not only to German cities but also to Hungary for upper class clients, at latest from around 1700. (In the war provisions of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II, in 1709-10. Thaly, 1883, p. 196, 385). Tirol, which earned the distinction of serving noodles in the most Italian way with Parmesan cheese in the 16th century, was to become the only region in South Middle Europe where some pre-industrial households even used presses to form noodles (Gamerith, 1981, p. 99).

From the 16th century on, the classic home-made noodles have been continuously gaining ground amongst the food items, while the old small forms and the preparation as thick gruel have been falling behind.

At the same time several new small forms developed in the popular culture, especially for use in clear festival meat soups. One of these, the most labour-intensive form, was called snails (Hung. *csiga*), because they resembled longish, narrow snail-shells. Noodles in the shape of snails started in Hungary in the 18th century, and have become the pasta for soup at the highest peasant festivals. Before a wedding feast, relations and neighbours came together to help with the preparation of the snails, which were individually formed from small squares of pasta by winding them with a piece of wood on a section of weaver's reed or on special, ribbed, wooden or ceramic boards. These small implements became traditional gifts for girls from the boys when the snail-noodle making session became a formal social occasion. It has not yet been ascertained whether this small form of the snails in Hungary developed in connection with a Nürnberg product also called snails (*Schnecken*) in the 18th century (Malouin-Schreber, 1769, p. 4 ; Roth, 1802, p. 313).

While some noodles in soup appeared at the highest festivals, drained noodles were basically everyday food, eaten on the noodle-days, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. They followed a soup-course amongst the Hungarian peasants in the 18th-20th centuries. Poppy-seed, soft cheese or fried cabbage were spread on the noodles themselves. Amongst festival menus, such noodles only appear on fasting festival menus, such as on Christmas Eve, Ash-Wednesday and Good Friday, mostly with poppy-seed. In this function noodles displaced plain baked pastry soaked with hot water and also eaten with poppy-seed.

Noodles, both the forms for soups and for drained dishes, were not only prepared for immediate use but also for storage in great quantity. In Hungary twice a year, in autumn and in spring, noodles were dried for

storage, to be used when the farmer's wife would not have time to make them fresh. Along with cut forms a time-saving procedure also developed. The rolled out sheets of pasta were hung on bars with a cloth spread below them, and were left to dry until they broke to pieces by themselves and fell onto the cloth.

Two sets of Hungarian food statistics may indicate the role of noodles in South Middle Europe. A late 19th century one reports a 3:2 division of the total meal/flour consumption between bread and other cereal food. Two fifths of the whole consumption used for other cereal food was for the greatest part eaten as noodles in peasant and middle-class households alike. (Except for the high-mountain areas which are outside Hungary today. Keleti, 1887). According to 1958/59 statistics (when noodle-consumption was already in decline), 50 % of peasant, industrial worker and middle class households ate drained noodles as a main dish twice a week, at least, while the other half had them once a week on the average (*Menus*, 1960, p. 22-24). In the German speaking area cereal dumplings were more important, alongside noodles, than in Hungary.

To recapitulate : in South Middle Europe the new forms of noodles and noodle dishes started on the upper class table in the 16th century under Italian inspiration. They were especially welcomed as fasting fare. The new noodles reached the peasant kitchen during the 17th century. When meat became scarce and dear in several regions during the early modern period, a substitute had to be found for meat dishes amongst the common people in the town and the countryside. The frequency of use of cereal food rose abruptly. To break the monotony of gruels and porridges, several new forms of cereal food were introduced, amongst which the new noodles were also welcomed. But noodles were no less well integrated in the diet of common people, on the account of older forms of cereal food, in areas which had no shortage of meat.

The Austrian scholar A. Gamerith suggested that it must have been the invention of the mill-sifter, which began to appear in Middle Europe at the beginning of the 16th century, that gave rise to the wide spread of new noodles and pastry, all made of finer dough (1981, p. 90-92). The coincidence in time is true, even if mill-sifters also took their time to spread and get accepted. Yet I am not convinced with this interpretation. In 1894, nearly four centuries after the introduction of the mill-sifter, 11 thousand mills from a total of 20,000 in Hungary still produced wholemeal only (Molnárók Lapja - Millers' News, 31 May 1894, p. 7). People served by these mills sifted the grist themselves by hand, separating the bran, coarser meal for bread and finer flour for pastry. They still had the same kinds of cereal food, including noodles, as others who were served by improved mills. I presume that home-made noodles did spread socially in Italy before the spread of mill-sifters, and that the housewives simply sifted the wholemeal, like the noodle-maker whose elaborated hand operation we know about.

What opened the way for noodles to wide social strata must have been the desire to break the longstanding monotony of medieval cereal food in the form of gruels and porridges. Where meat began to disappear from the everyday table, the desire for variety in cereal food was even greater.

The secondary noodle-eating zone includes the South of France. Provence and Languedoc seem to form the core area. I know very little about the circumstances there and hope to learn more. 18th century French encyclopedists, like the medical doctor Malouin, were not so much interested in the use of noodle (including home-made ones) as in the craft of the noodle-maker. By that time the craft was well established at Marseille where it produced wide flat forms and narrow roundish strips, but not the tubes. The latter would be more expensive and people would not pay for it, Malouin commented. He reported proudly that it was he who had newly initiated the making of all kinds of noodles (including tubes) in Paris, which were produced in Italy and had been imported under the name *pâtes d'Italie* from Naples and Genoa to the French capital.

With due respect to the honorable craft of the noodle-maker in Italy, Nürnberg and France, it was home-made noodles, fresh and dried, that played a considerable role in the diet of the common people in quite a large area of Europe. These noodles are part of the second great wave of innovations in the field of cereal food. In Southern Middle Europe they came in after leavened bread became established as everyday food in the common diet.

Eszter KISBÁN

Institute of Ethnology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
H - 1250 BUDAPEST, Hongrie

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