

The Noodle Days

Early Modern Hungary and the Adoption of Italian Noodles in South Middle Europe

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A basic innovation in cereal foods, noodles, appeared in South Middle Europe, both in German speaking and Hungarian regions, in the 16th century. Noodle dishes spread relatively quickly over the social classes and then remained a significant, even structure-shaping part of the common diet far into the 20th century. Early Modern commentaries on noodles in this zone had already pointed to Italy as the territory from which the new food had actually been transmitted to these regions. The present study focuses on medieval and Renaissance Italy, and Early Modern Hungary respectively; it examines what exactly Italy had to offer in this particular field and what the reception was like, in terms of the example and the adoption, and of the transmission between two complex societies. These questions came about as an integral part of the examination of the development of Hungarian foodways over the long term. Italian and French publications of the last decade have qualitatively improved the insight into the Italian background. The transmission originally took place at an upper class social level while the place of noodle dishes in the arrangement of meals seems to have been changed significantly during the adoption and assimilation process. This study throws light on the dynamics of international transference of innovations and of national adoption and diffusion, leading to specific transformations, through different social strata.

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With the increase in the consumption of meat and the decrease in that of cereals, the eating of noodle dishes had already passed its peak in 1958–59 in Hungary. This was the year when the only statistically representative national dietary inquiry to specify all daily meals together with their dishes was undertaken. This revealed that just over 50% of both rural and urban households had eaten drained noodle dishes as independent courses twice a week, most of the others once, and some (up to 2%) even three times a week on average (Meals and Menus 1958/59: 22–24). With the advent of accelerating industrialization, when the agricultural population was still 73% of the total, a national food-statistics reported for the early 1880s that three fifths of the meal/flour consumption was used for bread and the other

two fifths was mainly eaten as noodles in rural and urban households alike (except for the high-mountain areas which are outside Hungary today. Keleti 1887). Middle-class cookery books in the 1900s planned home-made fresh noodles in long strips as independent dishes twice a week. Until after the Second World War, every Hungarian woman had learned to knead, roll out, cut and boil noodles at home, while noodles as ready commodities were later increasingly used.

Such drained noodle dishes came onto the table on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, which were even called “the noodle-days” in dialects. For the Roman Catholics, who formed the majority of the population, Fridays were days of abstinence from meat up to the 1960s. Festival menus included noodle dishes only

when the festival was a fast-day or at least a day of abstinence, like Christmas Eve, Ash-Wednesday, Good Friday, or New Year's Eve in some places. The statistics did not include the soups, which came onto the table with noodles in the liquid, and could be eaten on both meat-days and noodle-days. On the other hand, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays were considered as, and called "meat-days", when meat should have been eaten, at least as a rule.

Regarding the frequency of eating noodles, there is a fourfold division from South to North in Europe between the 18th and mid-20th centuries. (Here I exclude the strong promotion of noodle dishes in the north by the catering and convenience-food industries after the mid-20th century.) The "proper" land of noodles was Italy, with the most frequent occurrence of such dishes, often daily, in both urban and rural households. (There is the story of the telephone call by urban middle-class husbands to their wives when about to come home for dinner: "calare!", i.e. start to boil the water for the noodles, *Lessico* 1973: s.v. *maccherone*; for peasant households Scheuermeier 1956: 103.) Between the south of France and Hungary (including German speaking regions in South Middle Europe), there was a secondary zone, with less frequent eating of noodles than in Italy but still often and regularly at all social levels. Farther north the frequency of eating and the social representation of such dishes was decreasing in a third and a fourth zone.

The frequency of using noodles correlates with the time of the adoption and assimilation of such dishes. In South Middle Europe, noodles appeared in the 16th century as a basic innovation in cereal foods, both in German speaking and Hungarian territories. Contemporary commentaries of the period already pointed, indirectly, to Italy as the country of origin for this innovation. Later research maintained this suggestion but, because medieval Italian data were lacking, without being able to look at the example and the assimilation process in detail. There was 18th century French encyclopedic writing on the contemporary Italian noodle-makers' craft and its dried commodities, with added French occurrences and commentaries on the German situation

(Malouin 1767, Malouin et Schreber 1769), but after that only Emilio Sereni (1981) and an edited series of articles in *Médiévales* (1989) have provided greatly improved insight into the Italian background. The new materials proved Günter Wiegelmann to be correct: he had regarded Early Modern noodle dishes in Southern German speaking territories as innovations of Italian origin and initiated the search for early cases of assimilation by wide social strata in this secondary zone (Wiegelmann 1967: 233).

On their occurrence in mid-16th century sources in Hungary, noodle dishes are set in a series of day to day and meal to meal menus for the period of a full month, and appear on the table of individuals whose social status can be worked out. The source differentiates between the forms of noodles, uses names for them, and tells whether they were independent dishes in themselves or were eaten with poultry. As Early Modern Hungarian texts were amongst those pointing to Italy as the source of this innovation, before going into further details about Hungary, I should like to look at the preceding Italian situation. This will relate to the significance of noodle dishes there, to questions such as the age of the practice of preparing noodles in Italy itself by the time of the more northerly adoption; the kinds of noodles made in Italy, their geographical spread and social affiliations, the noodle dishes, and their place amongst the meals on different days in the individual menus. Answers to such questions would, hopefully, not only throw light on details of an innovation-assimilation process in Early Modern Hungary but may also help to promote further analyses of the manner of adoption in other parts of South Middle Europe. Primary sources cannot be fully reviewed here but can now be studied in the relevant publications mentioned above.

Noodles and noodle dishes in medieval and Renaissance Italy

Historical sources begin to speak of noodles in Italy in the 12th century. The food turned up first as a dried commodity. Reports on the

cooking of freshly made noodles appear from the 13th century.¹

Dried noodles, as craftsmen's goods, are first mentioned in 12th century Sicily. The geographer Edrisi mentioned Trebia, 30 kilometres from Palermo, as the centre of noodle industry on the island at that time. The commodity was exported to Calabria on the mainland and elsewhere. Using an Arabic loan-word, Sicilian noodles were called *tria*. As the medieval Arabic culture also provides the background for the noodles themselves, modern Italian historians conclude that Arabic conquerors of the 9th – 11th centuries introduced the making of noodles to Sicily.

Export-import trade agreements of the 12th century show that the fabrication of dried noodles was already being carried on in the North as well as in Genoa, the influential maritime trading city in the province of Liguria. In Italy, the Genoese noodles were called, both in northern and southern manuscripts of the 14th century, by the Arabic word plus the name of the city (*tria genovese* in a Tuscan recipe-collection, *tria iauensis* in a southern, probably Neapolitan recipe collection, while a non-Genoese codex referred to the Genoese trading goods, noodles, as *paste di Genoa*). An Italian name the Genoese themselves applied to noodles in the 14th century, was *lasagna*, and the noodle-makers, employed actually on their merchant vessels, were registered as *maestri lasagnari*. Another name probably used for dried noodles there at an early date (as Montanari interprets the source) was *macaroni*, entered into the inventory of a Genoese soldier in 1279.

On a smaller scale, the handicraft of the noodle-maker arose also elsewhere in the North. In the city of Pisa, e.g., noodles called *vermicelli* were made by paid workers in the 13th century. Noodle-makers, called *lasagnari*, were active as craftsmen in Florence in 1311.

Alongside the Genoese centre, Sicily continued to manufacture and export dried noodles, and seems to have remained the main supplier of the South up to the early 17th century. Sicilians not only traded with noodles, they also ate a lot. At that time, it was the Sicilians who were referred to as "noodle-eaters" in the South, e.g. by 16th century Neapolitans. The

latters' own fame as "macaroni-feeders" is of later origin.

The freshly made variants of the Italian noodles spread first and most widely to South Middle Europe. The earliest report on the use of such noodles in Italy dates from 13th century Emilia, a province in the North, where home-made noodles always predominated. Here, in a literary work, a friar from Parma mentioned a fellow friar from Ravenna eating noodles with cheese. The strange thing for the author was not the dish but the greedy way of eating (*nunquam vidi hominem, qui ita libenter lagana cum caseo comederet sicut ipse*. Sereni 1981: 326).

The standard form of noodles all over Italy, whether dried or fresh, was in strips. Wheaten-flour dough was rolled out thin and cut into strip-shaped pieces. The long-term historical sequence of recipes, beginning in the 14th century, allows us to identify the form of named noodles, even if the earliest recipes may not have specified how they were cut into pieces.

"De la lasangne [sic]. Togli farina bona bianca: distempera con aqua tepida, e fa che sia spessa: poi la stendi sottilmente, e lassa sciugare: debbiansi cocere nel brodo del capone, o d'altra carne grassa: poi metti nel piattello col cascio grasso grattato, a suolo a suolo, come ti piace." (Take good white flour, work it together with lukewarm water to make a thick dough; roll it out gently and leave it to dry. It should be boiled in the soup of a capon or of some other fat meat; then put in a dish spread with grated fat cheese, layer by layer, to taste). 14th century Tuscan manuscript, Redon et Laurioux 1989: 53.

Two basic forms of strip-shaped noodles were used in parallel with each other in Italian households at least from the 14th century onwards. These were narrow and wider strips respectively, the use of which has continued. *Vermicelli* was the name for the fine, narrow form, and households were advised to dry these if they wished to dry noodles at all. The wider noodles, flat strips, were called either *lasagna* or *maccheroni/maccaroni*, *macaroni*. Noodles formed into long tubes, later chiefly known as

"macaroni", were not made even by noodle-makers as late as during the 16th century. The popularity of noodles is stressed by the fact that, within the basic forms of noodles, contemporaries assigned some variations of form to specific regions and cities already in the 14th century. One example is an author from Reggio Emilia, and therefore familiar with the North, who mentioned such noodles for Tuscany, Bologna, Venice, Reggio and Mantua in his dietary treatise of 1338.

Neither the word *vermicelli* nor *lasagna* spread to South Middle Europe but derivatives of "macaroni" and etymologically related words did so, and also appeared early in some other countries outside Italy. Linguistically, Italian *maccheroni* and *macaroni/macaroni* were variant forms, of which *maccheroni* became the literary form later while *macaroni* and *macaroni* remained in dialectal use, scattered over northern and southern regions alike.²

In terms of social affiliation, 12th-16th century Italy shows a wide-ranging use of noodle dishes. Montanari stressed the urban and the maritime use (by sailors undoubtedly, sea-fishermen presumably) but no less the consistent presence of noodle dishes in the elite foodways (standard entries in recipe collections, cookery books and treatises). 13th century friars of Parma and Ravenna, and 14th century Florentine traders can be mentioned individually as consumers. The only early recorded occurrence amongst peasants appears in a short story by Giovanni Sercambi (1348-1424). The author was a politician, a native of Lucca, situated just north of the Tuscan plain. In the story, an Augustinian friar from the city of Lucca was invited to visit a peasant family. He asked the peasant's wife if she had enough flour and cheese. After a positive answer, he asked her to make noodles (*lasagne*). The woman readily prepared them and put the noodles onto the table, with a layer of cheese (Redon et Laurieux 1989: 53).

The preparation of noodle dishes was similar whether cooked of fresh or dried noodles, though the latter needed longer boiling. As the predominant way of preparation, 14th-16th century sources unanimously report the boiling of noodles in fatty liquid (soup of poultry or

meat); the noodles came onto the table without any liquid, as an independent dish (such as the dishes later called *pasta asciutta* 'dry noodles'), spread with grated cheese.³ Noodles were most frequently boiled in the soup of capon. Any reference to the sort of cheese is exceptional and then it is Parmesan. The concept of noodles became inseparable from cheese. Giordano Bruno first recorded, in variants both with *lasagna* and *maccarone*, in the 16th century the proverb which has since remained in use: "It has fallen into it, like noodles into the cheese" (Sereni 1981: 324). Recipe collections and cookery books often mention the spreading of sugar or spiced sugar on noodles with cheese. With a good supply of sugar in upper class Italian families, this was no problem where master cooks served the households. A spice used in the sugar was cinnamon. The prominent preparation of noodles by boiling them in the soup of poultry or meat, indicates the predominant place of noodle dishes in general in the arrangement of meals on different days. The fat, independent noodle dishes must have been courses on meat-days.

Noodles were sometimes served together with poultry or meat on meat-days. Cristoforo di Messigburgo's recipe in the mid-16th century puts the capon, duck or meat, in the soup of which the noodles were boiled, on a dish, and the "dry" noodles, spread with a mixture of cinnamon and sugar, on top.

Noodles were also prepared to suit days of abstinence and fasting. In such cases, they were most frequently boiled in water and served "dry", with butter when the latter was not forbidden. Boiling in milk does not seem to have been too frequent, although Platina (1475) mentioned boiling noodles in goat's milk for days of abstinence. More frequent was the suggestion of using almond-milk for similar occasions in the elite culture. (At this social level, almond-milk was a liquid used in various ways in cooking at the fasting period.) On fast-days, usually no cheese went with the noodles.

The early recipes did not tell much about what happened to the liquid in which the noodles were boiled but the noodles were themselves then served dry onto the table. Neither straining nor strainers were mentioned. Con-

sidering this and also 16th–17th century practices in the Tyrol and Hungary, there is a possibility of alternative ways of handling the noodles. One is to boil the noodles in as much liquid as they would fully absorb. The other is to use plenty of liquid and strain the noodles out of it (a practice mentioned with the most Italian-like noodle dishes, those eaten with grated cheese, by Rumpolt in the 16th, and for the South West and the East of Hungary in the 17th century).

One way of eating the long strips of noodles at the table was by using a fork, at the social level of Florentine traders already in the mid-14th century. This is mentioned in the collection of short stories by Franco Sacchetti (c.1330–c.1400), together with the first occurrence of the term *macaroni* (*maccheroni*) to be unanimously accepted by Italian historians as denoting ‘noodles’. Both the *macaroni* and its eating with a fork are mentioned in connection with events before 1347. Story No 124 tells about the trader Noddo d’Andrea, a gross feeder. The author was himself a member of a Florentine trading family. His story No 98 mentions that Noddo with his fellows used to go to dine at the author’s father’s place. A modern commentator has found out that Noddo was a real person, listed as a Florentine trader in the city of Vilegia. Noddo’s main story is a moral one: that not even a gross feeder should be greedy in eating. A friend tries to develop Noddo’s manners while the two of them eat at the same table. The dish they have is noodles. While Noddo gobbles them, his friend eats quietly, patiently holding every forkful (*forchetta*) of *maccheroni* for a moment before taking it (Sacchetti 1946: 216, 275–277).

Using a fork, however, was hardly the only way of eating noodles during the period, considering how the job was done even much later at a humbler social level in Italy. Thus noodles were eaten, though decreasingly during the 18th–20th centuries, by holding high a hand full of the long strips, and keeping on biting them away from there. A favourite portrayal of Pulcinello and Pulcinella, the national clowns, is when they bite noodles hold up high in the hand.

An example is the drawing by Giambattista

Tiepolo from 1751. The clown does not eat that way because of being a clown. In 19th century lithography, costermongers selling macaroni and spaghetti provide them on plates and the customers, both adults and children, eat in the above mentioned way. Neapolitan photos from about 1900 show the same scene. Eating noodles by hand was not restricted to consumption on the streets. A 19th century painting by G. Dura shows a fisherman’s family in their home, sitting around a common dish of noodles and eating by hand in the popular way.⁴ In Sicily, peasants bite long strips of noodles away from their high raised hands even today, even at high festival occasions in public.⁵

It was only the ways of preparation of noodle dishes which allowed the conclusion that such dishes appeared both on meat-days and the days of abstinence and fasting in Italy, with a dominant attachment to the more numerous meat-days. For lack of serial menus, the frequency of noodle dishes in everyday eating is not yet known for the period. (The modern every-day-consumption cannot be projected back to earlier centuries.) Neither are enough menus of the period in question published to show the place of noodles in the sequence of dishes at meals. The only relevant source discussed so far refers to a peasant family in the vicinity of Lucca at about 1400. In Sercambi’s short story, already mentioned, such a family started the meal with salad, continued with noodles spread with cheese, and finished with scrambled eggs, when they had a friar as their guest.

As a spectacular innovation in cereal food, noodle dishes were capable of catching the fancy of distant foreigners who personally came across them. Thus a recipe of such an exotic dish, with home-made noodles, was communicated as early as the late 14th century to the court of Richard II of England, and entered in the *Forme of Cury*, ‘the proper method of cookery’, a 14th-century collection of about 200 recipes, surviving in several copies. (This particular initiative, however, did not have lasting consequences on the far North.):

”*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 above ... and serve forth." *Forme of Cury* c. 1390. Wilson 1976: 227.

All in all, dried noodles had been made by artisans as articles of trade for at least four centuries, and home made fresh noodles had been used for three centuries; noodle dishes were well established, even if with different emphases for different strata, throughout the whole society, and all over Italy by the time when similar cereal food and dishes began to appear, with a lasting effect, in South Middle Europe in the 16th century.

Adoption in Early Modern Hungary

On their first occurrence in 1553 in the sources known so far, noodle dishes were already well established at upper social levels in South West Hungary, the part of the country nearest, as it happens, to Italy. From there, from one of the households of Lord Tamás Nádasdy, an educated, wealthy, powerful member of the higher nobility, there is a monthly menu from October 1553. This follows the medieval system with two meals of equal status regularly each day, except for the last day of the month when there was one such meal only because of fasting. The household had joined the Reformation by that time but had not given up two days of regular abstinence during the week, Friday and Saturday, when no meat or poultry was eaten. Within the month, this structure meant 9 days altogether of abstinence and fasting, with 17 such meals. Of these, 12 meals had 13 courses of dry noodle dishes, and no whole day passed without such a dish. On the other hand, no independent noodle dish appeared at all on the 22 meat-days, but 4 of the 44 meals on such days included "hen with noodles", on separate days. The dish was always the last of the four or five courses (and so undoubtedly not a soup as yet).

There is no direct way of knowing where Lord Nádasdy was when these menus came to the dining room for his numerous household. My interpretation, which is based upon the low number (4 to 5) of courses at meals, is that he

was not at home but away on his frequent long travels on duty. If this is accurate, the meals were served only for his middle-class officials, persons of noble and burgher origin, who served in the court and on the estate. This does not mean that the Lord would not have shared the same courses, including the noodle dishes when at home, only that there would have been a few additional, finer, courses only for his own table. (The principle of arranging meals according to ranks in the same dining room mentioned here can be proved both in Hungary and elsewhere in South Middle Europe at the period in question.)

Denominations used for noodles in these menus reveal that two forms were used in parallel. The names for both derived from Hungarian words. One name, *metélt*, meant 'pieces cut into flat, long strips', while the other, *mácsik*, is a compound of *mák* 'poppy seeds' and *csík* 'a form (of noodles) resembling the long, narrow, roundish body of a certain marshland fish, popular itself as food'. (In the latter case the comparison is reminiscent of the one with 'worms' in the Italian *vermicelli*.) The compound of the two elements was also used in reverse, as *csíkmák*, soon after in the country. (Both variants, however, have remained as dialect words.) Thus not only did the number (2) of basic parallel Italian forms of noodles turn up in Hungary as well as in Italy, but the two actual forms were alike as well. The same cannot be said for the condiments used for the noodles. In the Nádasdy-menus, six independent noodle dishes cooked from *metélt* were eaten with butter alone three times, and with butter and curds (soft cheese) three times. Seven such dishes cooked of *mácsik* were actually spread with poppy seeds twice, but were eaten with butter and curds only once, and with butter alone four times.⁶

Recipes

The master cook of the Nádasdy household did not leave a recipe collection. In view of the Turkish occupation of the middle third of the country, and the continuous state of war all around during the 16th–17th centuries, the chances for the survival of such manuals were

not too good. Only four significant, complete examples of the genre survived from these centuries: (1) a manuscript cookery book from the Transylvanian prince's court of about 1600, with 706 recipes; (2) a random manuscript recipe-collection of 1601, by the cook of a North-Hungarian household, the head of which, a mighty, prosperous cattle-merchant, had just bought himself into the nobility, and indeed straight into the higher nobility (49 recipes); (3) a manuscript cookery-book from the South West Hungarian court of the magnate, Lord Miklós Zrínyi from before 1662 (394 recipes); and (4) the first printed, but anonymous, Hungarian cookery-book, called, after the publisher, the *Tótfalusi-cookery book*, printed in 1695 in Transylvania (334 recipes), which was addressed to the middle classes, noble and burgher alike.

The four collections together contained 21 entries for noodle dishes, including 16 recipes for independent dry noodle dishes, and 5 for noodles served with poultry or meat. (The original recipes are collected and reprinted in: Kisbán 1992: 18–23.)

The dough for noodles in the recipes consisted of flour, salt, water and/or eggs; it was kneaded and rolled out thin with a pin. Then it was cut, in 17 out of the 21 cases, into long strips. All four sources indicate the use of two different forms of such noodles by applying two different names (*metélt* and *laska*), without, however, explaining the difference between them clearly. (*Laska* itself was an old word, but its application to 'noodles' was a new development, though it was not capable of giving further explanation of the exact form.) The remaining 4 recipes, all in Transylvanian cookery books, mentioned the cutting of noodles into larger or smaller rectangular pieces, which came near to the form of a square. These had no name of their own as yet. All the noodles in question were always used fresh.

The preparation of the 16 independent noodle dishes falls into three main categories. The most numerous first group includes 10 recipes, all of which indicate the boiling of the noodles in as much liquid as they would absorb in order to come dry onto the table, without needing to be strained. The standard suggestion, repre-

sented in all the sources, was to use milk (cow's) as the liquid (7 recipes). Butter, saffron and ginger could be used but need not be boiled with the food in the milk, but (more) butter was regularly put on the dish when ready. Both in c. 1600 and in 1695, one recipe suggested the frying of the noodles for a short time in a pan prior to boiling in the milk. Water was also used for this kind of preparation (2 recipes). Boiling the noodles in water was recorded in the c. 1600 Transylvanian cookery book especially for days on which abstinence excluded milk and butter. The dish could be enriched then with vegetable oil, onion, pepper, saffron, ginger and raisins, all together. This dish happened to be called *makarónya*, deriving from Italian *macaroni*, used as a Hungarian word. The 1695 cookery book discussed noodles of this group as food which could be boiled either in water or in milk, now in this sequence. An alternative to boiling noodles on days when milk had to be avoided was to use soup of peas (1 recipe in 1695). (Such liquid used to be a wide-spread, humble equivalent to the exclusive almond-milk in medieval – Early Modern cookery.) None of the noodles that absorbed their liquid while boiling, were dishes with further condiments spread on them (such as poppy seeds, curds or cheese).

The second category of preparation was represented by a minor group of 4 recipes in these sources, two from a. 1662 and two from 1695. Noodles as long strips in these cases were always boiled in water, plenty of it, then strained, and buttered. No special noodle-strainers, such as known later, were used as yet. When served in a dish, the food was spread with condiments. This was grated cheese once (a. 1662), crumbs of bread once (1695), and a mixture of grated cheese and crumbs of bread twice. The last variant of the dish, as against the last but one, was again called, in 1695, by a derivative from Italian *macaroni*, and even 'Italian macaroni', *olasz makaró*. The publisher's editor in 1695 must have been shocked by the absence of noodles with poppy seeds in the actual manuscript; he entered such a dish into the suggestive table of contents at least, having used a dialect different from that of the author's, when calling such food *csikmák*,

which according to him should be eaten oiled, and with poppy seeds and honey on days when milk products were avoided.

The third and last group of 2 recipes for independent noodle dishes (a. 1662 and in 1695) indicates a category of preparation where the fresh noodles were not boiled at all but only fried in butter instead. Such a dish could be spread with sugar when ready. The writer tried to indicate that this was a German fashion.

The proportion of the application of the three Early Modern categories of preparations of independent noodle dishes changed soon after, inasmuch as the boiling in water, straining, and eating of the noodles with condiments connected to that preparation became absolutely predominant, while the two other ways of preparation seriously declined.

The 5 Early Modern recipes for noodles served with poultry or meat, are distributed over all the four Hungarian sources. Poultry (hen, capon) predominated, and the humble boiled beef occurred as an alternative only in the middle-class cookery book in 1695. All were heavily spiced. The noodles were pre-cooked in different ways so that they should not put much starch into the soup of poultry or meat in which they were then finished. The dishes were eaten without their liquid at that time. From about 1690, soup as the introductory course for meals began to be established in Hungarian foodways amongst the upper classes, and the above dish then became separated into a soup with fine noodles in it, and into the boiled poultry or meat from the soup (eaten with a separate sauce). Both were then eaten amongst lower social circles as well, mainly as festival or Sunday foods.

Linguistically, all the above recipes are Middle-Hungarian texts, and, like other similar directions, are not always exact in their instructions. Avoiding interpretation through translation, I choose a German recipe from the same zone to give a sample. This is from Rumpolt's *Ein new Kochbuch* in 1581. The volume was the most distinguished publication of the genre in Middle Europe at its time, and especially adequate for the southern regions there. Rumpolt's several further noodle-recipes rep-

resent other categories of preparation as well. The one chosen is an instruction for boiling noodles in water, straining them, and dishing up the food buttered, and spread with a mixture of grated Parmesan cheese and crumbs of bread. The master cook pointed especially to Tyrol as the characteristic region of this preparation.

"/Also richt man die Nudel zu./ Mach ein Teig mit lauter Eyern vnd Mehl / zimlich hart / vnd wen er wol gearbeitet ist / so treib in fein dunn auß / bestraw dz Blat / das du hast außgetrieben mit lauterm Mehl / wikkels vberinander / vnnd schneids fein klein / setz mit Wasser auff ein Fischkessel / vnd laß sieden / zeuch den Teig hinein / rurs mit einem Löffel / daß nicht zusammen kompt / rürs vmb / biß daß auffseudt / schut es auff ein Durchschlag / nim gesotten Wasser / das zimlich gesaltzen ist / wasch die Nudel darmit auß / nim ein gerieben Parmesankaß / vnd geriebenen Weck / oder gerieben Ruckenbrot / thu es durcheinander / vn wenn du es wilt anrichten / so schut den Kaß am ersten an den Boden / vnnd richt die Nudel darein an / bestraw es darnach mit Kaß vnd Brot / geuß heisse Butter daruber / so wirdt das Brot fein resch / decks flugs zu mit einer Schussel / vnd gibts warm auff ein Tisch. Also richt man die Nudel zu / sonderlich in der Graffschafft Tyrol". Rumpolt 1581: CLV verso, recipe Nr 204.

In view of these preparations, it is relevant to ask, what kind of the dish or food still seemed particularly "Italian" to contemporaries during the naturalization period in Hungary. In chronological sequence, these were a dish of fresh noodles boiled in water (not in milk) at 1600; a similar dish eaten with grated cheese in 1695; carefully packed dried noodles as commodities of trade in 1709; and similar food imported from Nürnberg in 1789. The latter were still in the form of strips, not tubes.⁷

The prominent role of days of abstinence in the eating of noodles

The Nádasdy-menus showed already in 1553 that the prominent place for noodles in the arrangement of meals was on the days of abstinence. Observation of such days was marked in Hungary during the Early Modern period, if not equally frequent in different confessions, households, or during the whole period. The number of days of abstinence in any week alternated between one (Friday) and three (Friday, Saturday, Wednesday), if no special fast- or festival day fell in the week. Abstinence on these days could alternate between avoidance of all animal foods (except fish), often called "fast-days", and of meat and poultry alone, but with milk products permitted on "milk-days".

The cookery books of the period arranged their recipes in groups of dishes suitable for "meat-days", "milk-days", and "fasting-days". Thus, even if a recipe did not tell directly (but they often did), the covering chapter itself made clear for which kind of day a dish was intended. All the recipes of independent noodle-dishes pointed to milk-days and fast-days. At the social levels at which the recipes were aimed, "milk-days" were more numerous than "fast-days". This is one reason why noodles boiled in milk were so frequent as well. The condiment, poppy seeds, was seen as especially suitable for fast-days when the noodles had to be boiled in water but the same condiment was not excluded from milk-days either.

Thus both actual menus and cookery books reported the days of abstinence as such where the new noodle-dishes found a prominent place in Early Modern Hungarian foodways. The same can be observed with Rumpolt, who gave examples of festival menus, both for meat-days and days of abstinence, for eight different social ranks from the emperor down to the peasants, and suggested the dish of noodles (with grated cheese) once, for the abstinence-day table of ordinary noblemen (Rumpolt 1581: 36 verso, 8th dish in the 2d course). This tendency does not mean that this position was necessarily the first in chronological sequence in individual households also. From January 1603, there is a monthly menu from the household of

Lord Szaniszló Thurzó in Galgóc, Northern Hungary, of the same rank as the Nádasdys. The Protestant household observed Friday as their weekly day of abstinence. During the month, Lord Thurzó was partly at home, partly away. In neither case did the kitchen prepare any independent noodle dishes at all. Making noodles, however, was not unknown. They appeared on one of the 62 meals, on a meat-day, as capon with noodles, in the presence of the Lord, as the second course in a sequence of 12 on his table. The kitchen in this court served ordinary common servants as well, supplying two courses at meals. No noodles were cooked for them as yet.

Noodle-days in the rural society

The introduction of noodle dishes was not limited to the narrow upper class band, but continued through all groups of the rural society, in the households of peasants, crofters, agricultural labourers, village craftsmen, artisans and traders in the agrotowns, who, together, represented 96% of the population. Wheat and rye were the main crops in the country in any case, the first being the primary source, but the second also producing a manageable flour for noodles. The 17th century seems to have been the period when rural households made their crucial experiments with the new food, similar to the timing in the West of South Middle Europe (Wiegmann 1967: 37–39; Sandgruber 1982: 143).

In the early 18th century, noodle dishes were already widely popular with the rural Hungarian society. Amongst them, independent noodle dishes constituted the main form of use again, and were primarily seen and eaten as food for days of abstinence, especially Fridays and Saturdays. Noodles offered an alternative to cereal gruels there, and took their place increasingly as time went on. The noodles were either the only course or one of two overall courses of main meals up to the mid-20th century. Whereas such noodle dishes were already weekly standards in peasant and crofter households by the 1710s, boiled poultry with noodles hardly proceeded beyond the artisans' and tradesmen's table in the great, pres-

tigious agrotowns. For common festival meals in their circles, such a dish was an alternative to poultry with rice, when rice itself was a rare prestige food, and probably noodles were the same also in this position. At peasant festivals, barley or millet was cooked with mutton or poultry instead.

By the late 18th century, peasant festival menus regularly had an introductory soup of beef or poultry with fine noodles in it, a century after such a dish and course had been a novelty on upper class tables. This, however, was not seen any more as a noodle dish but as a "meat-soup", *m̄eat* meaning both beef and poultry. Alongside the use of fine strips of noodles, several small forms made of dough were developed for such clear meat soups in the country. Amongst them, a special form, primarily called "snails" (*csiga*), and reported from 1774 onwards, was and has remained especially popular at peasant festivals. Small squares of dough were wound with a wooden pin on a section of weaver's reed or on a special, ribbed, wooden or ceramic board, and the resultant shape of the dough resembled longish, narrow snail-shells. Further German studies will explain sooner or later if such "snails" derived from "snails" (*Schnecken*) for soups, a small product of the 18th century Nürnberg noodle-makers, or were just a parallel development.

Independent noodle dishes remained an important part of rural food ever after. They also kept a strong connection to certain days of the week, even if the actual days changed. Saturday remained a day of abstinence with the Roman Catholics until the late 1800s, but the noodle dish was moved from it to another day after potatoes became generally accepted as a food about 1840. Then potato dishes took the place of noodles on Saturday, still alternating with gruels. The removal of the more labour-demanding preparation of fresh noodles from that day, gave the necessary time for the baking of fine bread for Sunday, as had recently become customary. Noodles kept their place on Fridays, were strengthened in use on Wednesday, and entered the Monday menus as well, especially when meat became scarce and expensive from the mid-19th century onwards. This development established a well balanced

alternation of meat and cereal food in the main meals during the week. Even if there was no meat on meat-days amongst poor families, they were still called *meat-days*, and soups or vegetables were cooked which could include meat. Noodles were seen as the leading cereal dish, as they actually were, and all their three days were now expressly called the *noodle-days*, regardless of whether noodles or another cereal dish was actually being eaten. The compound, *noodle-day* (*tésztaevő nap*), however, has never entered the literary language. Although Roman Catholic rules and customs of abstinence at different periods played a role even in the final arrangement of the alternation of foods during the week, and in the direction of noodles towards certain days, the arrangements were common to households of all Christian confessions, regardless of any obligation to practice of abstinence. When the middle classes were later increasingly built up from different strata of society, they carried on two or at least one fixed noodle day(s) in the week up to the mid-20th century.

Up to the Second World War, the cooking of freshly made noodles predominated. Peasant households, however, expecting labourers to be fed during the summer, stored noodles in advance. It must have been felt difficult to store regular long strips in great quantity without damage. Thus they rolled out several large sheets of dough at once, and hung them up one by one on bars near to each other, to dry. A large cloth laid underneath was to catch the irregularly shaped pieces breaking away from the sheets. Such noodles were then stored in large sacks.

Transference and transformation

The well established status of the food and dishes in question in Italy prior to the appearance of noodles in Hungary, as well as details of their preparation, reinforce the conclusion that this new group of cereal foods in South Middle Europe originated from Italy. Middle European noodles did not develop independently out of the only local medieval form of pasta to be boiled, the grain-sized tiny balls of dough, cooked like a grain-gruel.⁸ Neither did

they develop out of the medieval dish, consisting of kneaded dough rolled out into very thin sheets, baked, then broken into pieces, and softened with hot liquid for eating.

Though printed Italian cookery books became available from the late 15th century on, knowledge of noodles, however, would have primarily been communicated by personal experience, of which the period was not short. There were lively connections of all sorts to Renaissance Italy, the centre for trade and culture, and also the recognized centre of the art of cookery. Merchants, nobles and burghers, students and intellectuals travelled back and forth from Hungary, with common people in attendance. Wealthy noblemen regularly sent their sons to Italian universities, and they could even have their cooks with them, or if not, they could make their cooks learn Italian foodways later. It may be by chance, but Lord Nádasdy (1498–1562), from whose court the established, regular use of noodles was first reported, personally studied in Bologna and Rome before 1521. Distant parts of Europe also had similar connections to Italy, but less frequently than the neighbouring regions.

Thus many Hungarians, mainly males, could have come across and eaten noodles in Italy, as a novelty in food which was not to be overlooked. The food and dish, however, seem to have been communicated to this country probably at the elite social level, where its early use appeared, that is through the kitchens of the elite culture. Having experienced the range of Italian social affiliations, those who introduced the food did not consider the noodles only as special delicacies for topmost tables in Hungary either. So officials of middle class ranks and even common people in service could share the novelty of eating noodles in magnates' households, where some of them would only be repeating their experience from Italy. The qualified cooks who began to cook noodles in such households, also entered the recipes into cookery books and recipe collections and exchanged their experience with colleagues in the same business. The circumstance that, at the same time, noodle dishes began to be eaten in nearby German speaking regions, an area to which personal connections

were similarly close, further reinforced the innovation in Hungary. Cooks and kitchens of magnates' households as significant intermediaries mean that the novelty could continue to spread widely down the social scale, from several innovative centres all over the country, and did not need to proceed along a continuous path village by village. For a geographically continuous spread from Italy, Tyrol on the South would come into the question in Middle Europe.

The fact that the relatively infrequent but non-festival dish, noodles with poultry, were, for a time, made with poultry only, and not as yet with beef as an alternative, also points to the initiatory role of the upper class culture, as poultry was not eaten outside high festivals by the common people at the period.

The transference of noodle dishes led to serious transformations. The main change, as far as we are able to judge by the available Italian material, was in the place of such dishes in the arrangement of meals, when noodles came to be primarily associated with days of abstinence during the period of naturalization beyond the Alps. As a consequence of such a role, independent Hungarian noodle dishes were frequently boiled in milk, and also in simple water but not in the fatty soups of poultry or meat that were so common in their preparation in Italy. Because of differences in milk processing between the two regions, cheese was not easily available in Hungary everywhere. Here the nearest equivalent, curds, was used instead from the very beginning. Poppy seeds as a condiment were a characteristic addition outside Italy.

The same hypothesis to explain the significance of noodles in the popular culture was developed independently by Günter Wiegmann (1967) for German regions and by Emilio Sereni (1981) for Naples. Both argue that a certain condition developed respectively when meat became scarce and not easily available for wide strata of the population. The two cases, however, were different. In Naples, noodles had been known, imported, made and eaten for centuries before their status changed from that of just one food to that of the basic dish. This happened only after 1630 when the

big city and its 270,000 inhabitants began and continued to sink into poverty. Formerly, the Neapolitans had been characterised as “vegetable- (precisely leaf-) eaters”, *mangiafoglia*, and the fresh leaves they had all the year round went together with meat. It is only after the date mentioned that they began to be mocked as “macaroni-feeders”, *mangiamaccheroni*.

Wiegmann indicated that the quick taking of noodles amongst the lower classes in western South Middle Europe was a process during a period when meat became scarce there in many places during the 16th–17th centuries. This brought about a change in the diet of wide social strata, which meant a considerable fall in consumption of meat and a parallel rise in that of cereal food. During such a development, new forms of cereal food to widen the variety were welcome. Parallel to noodles, cereal dumplings, a domestic invention, were also incorporated, while the cooking of old gruels did not stop either. Noodles, individually, did not acquire the same position of the basic dish as in Naples.

In Hungary, with its substantial trade in cattle, historians have been unable to detect any significant decline in the availability of meat in the long term during the early modern period. Nevertheless, households of the lower social strata incorporated noodles into their food at the same time as in western South Middle Europe. Previously, only bread and gruels had been staple weekday cereal foods.⁹ That means that noodles were attractive enough to be taken up also without a forced rearrangement of the diet. Gruels had been and continued to be eaten on any day, but now they had a rival to offer variety on days of abstinence. Thus the desire to break the long-standing monotony of medieval cereal dishes in the form of gruels could itself open the way for the introduction of noodles, once people had become aware of them.¹⁰

Notes

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1. Further analyses are especially based on sources referred to, and conclusions drawn by Montanari (1989), Montanari (1984), Sereni (1981), Redon et Laurieux (1989), and Flandrin (1989). My Hungarian article (1992) gives the detailed references to the exact page-numbers.
2. It is necessary to note that in the period in question, “macaroni” was not only used in different linguistic forms but the family of words associated with the noun also denoted things other than noodles in Italy. Emilio Sereni interprets even the famous occurrence of the dish *maccheroni* in Boccaccio as dumplings. In the story VIII.3. of the *Decameron*, which originates from 1348–53, the Land of Cockaigne or in other words the Land of Plenty is being described. There is a mountain of grated Parmesan cheese there, and the people living on the mountain pass the time by preparing *maccheroni* and *raviuoli*, and rolling them down the mountain, after having boiled them in the soup of capons; at the foot of the mountain, there is a river, which is, of course, of sweet wine. Sereni pointed out that the *maccheroni* rolling down the mountain, are much more likely to be the dumplings than flat strips of noodles. He also reminded us that the 16th century Italian volumes of the burlesque genre of macaronic verses (*poesie maccheronica*, invented in the late 15th century) were actually not illustrated with noodles but with dumplings. “Macaroni” in this meaning even reached Hungary, as the 1695 Transylvanian cookery book shows when the Hungarianized name *makaró* describes dumplings.
3. Another meaning of “macaroni” was ‘small cake or biscuit (made with ground almonds)’, that is, not a boiled but a baked, luxury, food. This spread to France and England (*macaroon*) as well as to Germany and Hungary. Rabelais mentioned it as *macaron* in the 16th century.
4. In the following I keep the term “dried noodles” for the uncooked food if it is dried, and shall call every boiled dish “dry noodles” if they absorbed their liquid or if the liquid was strained out of it prior to its being put onto the table.
5. Croce (1989) offers a good collection of pictures.
6. Salvatore d’Onofrio (University of Palermo) showed it on a recent video in 1988, at a conference on cereal food (Fournier et Sigaut 1991).
7. For documentation of the Hungarian material see Kisbán 1992.

7. It is not clear yet when the tube form, only called "macaroni" outside Italy in recent centuries, emerged. In the mid-18th century, alongside *lasagna* and *vermicelli* (both in strip form), the tube form (now *macaroni*) was already standard in Naples and Genoa, now the two main centres of the fabrication of noodles in general. At the same time, the noodlemaker's craft in the South of France and in Nürnberg, both originating from Italy, only went as far as to make the strips, plus very small forms of noodles, used in soups in Germany. Malouin 1767; Malouin et Schreber 1769.
 8. The only dough to be boiled in the late medieval centuries in Middle Europe was of the size of grain or lentils, and was cooked like thick gruels of grain or pulse when boiled in milk or water. For this purpose, small firm pieces were formed by crumbling the dough between the palms. These could be dried for storage. The names for such food (Hungarian *gombóta*, Middle High German *Varvel(n)*, later *Farfel(n)*, were not extended to the noodles later. Such small pieces of formed dough were used as an alternative to a peculiar gruel of flour. For the latter, flour was moistened a little and not kneaded, but cut criss-cross on a board until the particles became just rougher than meal, and were then boiled in milk or water. Both simple forms mentioned have developed independently in several regions of the Old World.
 9. I have used "gruel", for the sake of simplicity, as a collective term for thick gruels and porridges, dishes boiled of whole or broken seeds of grain, and also of meal or flour.
 10. The Austrian scholar A. Gamerith suggested that the invention of the mill-sifter, which began to appear in Middle Europe at 1500, would have decisively helped the introduction of noodles and new pastry, all demanding fine flour. In fact, prior to such development, Italian craftsmen and households alike sifted and separated the grist by hand, as did most Hungarian households up to the 18th, and many into the 20th century, because the mill's mechanical sifters were often avoided (Gamerith 1981: 92). The same explanation was proposed earlier by Belényesy (1958: 142).
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