

Rumohr and *The Essence of Cookery*

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Despite the magnitude of the man's achievements, the name Karl (or Carl) Friedrich Ludwig Felix von Rumohr (1785-1843) is hardly known today. Of course, those interested in the historical research of art may have come across his name before through previous reports*1. Moreover, considering that *The Essence of Cookery* has long been a part of Reclam's Universal-Bibliothek catalogue, Rumohr may be familiar to German-speaking readers. However, Rumohr is relatively unknown outside of German-speaking countries. While it was Rumohr's extensive knowledge of cuisine, such as ancient cuisine, Italian cuisine and traditional German cuisine in which readers of this classic book have expressed interest, *The Essence of Cookery* has seldom been referred by researchers of art history. The fact that Rumohr served as an architect for laying the foundation of the study of modern art history has been relatively ignored. However, it is by no means insignificant that it is this same person who succeeded in both setting the foundation of the historical research of art and in leading discussions on cooking and eating. This paper is my attempt to take these two sides that appear far apart at first glance and consider them as part of the same foundation. In conclusion, the *aesthetics* as a critique of judgments whose theoretical foundations had just been established, drawing on the charm in *enlightened* sophistication and the *natural beauty of uncivilisedness*, connects the spheres that these two problems encompass. By focusing on the study of aesthetics, I wish to elucidate the reason this author, who penned *The Essence of Cookery* on topics ranging from ingredients to recipes to eating etiquettes, was able to play an important role in the establishment of the empirical study of art history in the modern times.

The first section of this paper examines Rumohr's life and writings; the second section presents an overview of *The Essence of Cookery*, delving into the conditions of its creation. Finally, the third section contemplates the historical significance of *The Essence of Cookery* from the standpoint of aesthetics.

1 The Life and Writings of Rumohr

On 6 January 1785, Rumohr was born to Henning von Rumohr and his second wife Wilhelmine Caroline von Fersen at their family estate in Reinhardtsgrimma, a municipality near Dresden*2. As wealthy aristocrats, his paternal family owned a large area of land in the Schleswig-Holstein dukedom. After his birth, Karl's family returned from Saxony to their estate in Rothenhausen near Lübeck, where he spent his childhood. A precocious child, Karl was dissatisfied with his education by his tutors and immersed himself in reading in his father's large personal library. Having witnessed Karl's behaviour, his parents entrusted him in the care of an abbot in Holzminden in the Principality of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Karl encountered a collection there that enlightened him about the arts. However, Karl was dissatisfied even in this environment. Following the death of his father, Rumohr inherited the family estate in Rothenhausen and gained employment in public service. Subsequently, he studied classical philology and history at the University of Göttingen. It was there that he took drawing lessons from Johann Dominik Fiorillo*3, who became the world's first absolute professor of art history. Rumohr visited prominent art museums in Kassel and Dresden, developing a fundamental eye for drawing, printmaking and painting. In Göttingen, he befriended the Riepenhausen brothers, who were avid art lovers, and began collecting prints and paintings to decorate his estate in Rothenhausen. In 1805, after completing his academic studies in Heidelberg, Rumohr left for a trip to Italy. On his way there, he stopped in Munich where he met the poet Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) and joined Tieck and other young travellers on their way to Italy. The group visited Verona, Mantua, Florence and Siena before Rumohr settled in Rome. While in Rome, Rumohr became close friends with the artists Joseph Anton Koch (1768-1839), Johannes Christian Reinhart (1761-1847), the brothers Wilhelm (1767-1835) and Alexander (1769-1859) von Humboldt. After a two-year stay, Rumohr left Rome. He travelled to Munich with his friend Tieck, crossing Naples, Florence, Parma and Milan. Upon leaving Munich, he returned to Rothenhausen and once again worked in public service. While working, Rumohr kept close contact with many artists and writers such

as Tieck, Caroline Schlegel-Schelling (1763-1809), Philipp Otto Runge (1777-1810), Clemens Brentano (1778-1842), Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859) and Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869) through invitations, visits and letters. Although Rumohr was concerned about his poor health, he frequently invited people to his home where they were treated to luxurious meals. Indeed, despite his capricious and irritable personality, he attracted the interest of his guests with his profound knowledge and creative ideas.

Following Napoleon's occupation of Lübeck, Rumohr travelled to Vienna and Munich before returning to Italy, where he resided from 1816 to 1822. Thereafter, he visited Italy a total of three more times (1828, 1837 and 1840), during which he found favour with Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia and Crown Prince Christian VIII of Denmark. Subsequently, Rumohr was personally involved in the creation of copper-plated engravings and, at the same time, served an important role in taking care of young aspiring artists. Rumohr became well known for giving support to the generation of artists born after 1800, including Christian Morgenstern (1805-1867), Adolph Friedrich Vollmer (1806-1875), Otto Speckter (1807-1871) and Friedrich Nerly (1807-1878). His support to Nerly is particularly well known*4. Nerly was active in Italy, and Speckter provided illustrations for Rumohr's witty poem *Der Hunde Fuchsenstreit* [Dog and Fox Fight] (1835). When Rumohr visited Italy in 1816, he was accompanied by the painter Franz Horny (1798-1824), who was only 17 at the time.

In 1842, Rumohr was invited by Frederick William IV of Prussia to visit Berlin and give counsel on the challenges faced by art and museums. However, Rumohr was afflicted with sudden edema and had to return to Lübeck. In the early summer of 1843, Rumohr left for the hot springs of Bohemia to receive treatment. However, Dr. Carl Gustav Carus, whom he consulted in Dresden while stopping by, immediately forbade him from travelling any further. Reportedly, Rumohr's final moments were tragically appropriate for a gourmand. On 25 July, at the age of 58, he suffered a heart attack while having breakfast and died at the dining table.

Although it was *The Essence of Cookery* in 1822 that brought him fame, Rumohr's greatest contribution to the study of historical art research was his collection entitled *Italienische Forschungen* (Italian Research), published between 1827 and 1831. In

these works, Rumohr resolved various problems inherent to Italian art utilising the methodology of Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831), who was known for his studies of Roman history. In particular, Rumohr carefully conducted a source criticism of documents dating back from ancient times to the Middle Ages to the Renaissance period in Umbria and Tuscany. In doing so, Rumohr established research of the arts as a scientific discipline that eliminated both the anecdotal tradition of Giorgio Vasari and Hegel's speculative reasoning. Rumohr is also responsible for writing *Sammlung für die Kunst und Historie* [Collection for Art and History] (1816–1823), *Drei Reisen nach Italien* [Three Journeys To Italy] (1832), *Deutsche Denkwürdigkeiten aus alten Papieren* [German Memorabilia from Old Documents] (1832) and *Schule der Höflichkeit für Alt und Jung* [School of Courtesy for the Old and Young] (1834-35); he is also credited with a variety of other works including criticism, essays, translations and witty stories, which are numerous to be mentioned here.

2 *The Essence of Cookery*

In 1822, the long-established publisher Cotta, known for releasing the complete works of Goethe, published the first edition of *The Essence of Cookery*. Interestingly, the original German title *Geist der Kochkunst* was reminiscent of Montesquieu's masterwork *De l'esprit des lois*. The book's cover credited authorship to Joseph König, supervised and edited by C.F. von Rumohr. However, in the preface of the re-print published in 1832, it was revealed that Rumohr himself was the actual author of the book. In actuality, Joseph König was Rumohr's personal chef (Mundkoch)*5. The role of the personal chef, who always accompanies his master, is not only to prepare meals but also to taste the food before it is served. The position is especially important as it requires the confidence of the master.

It is not evident why Rumohr chose to publish the book under his employee's name. It may be due to a persisting custom of aristocrats to not reveal their names in their respective works, or perhaps, as Rumohr suggested in the book's 'preface of the publisher', it was not considered appropriate in Germany at that time for intellectuals to speak of cooking and eating. Furthermore, as Rumohr described in the preface of the

second edition, it was also due to the intention of ‘charity’ for providing economic support to König. The year 1822, when the first edition was published, was also the year that Rumohr returned to Germany after his six-year sojourn in Italy. In this year, Rumohr had been attacked by bandits in Olevano Romano and was troubled by the untimely death of his friend Franz Horny who had accompanied him. Thus, another reason for not revealing himself as the author of the book could have been that he simply wanted to refresh his mood.

The overall structure of the book consists of three major parts.

The first section is called ‘Elements of Cookery Animal Foodstuffs’. The second section is called ‘Foodstuffs and Seasonings from the Plant World’, and the third section is entitled ‘Eating’. The first section, which comprises of nineteen chapters, begins by defining the art of cookery. After explaining kitchen utensils, the origins of the kitchen and its fundamental uses, Rumohr delves into ‘the most primitive methods of cooking for people’ such as ‘grilling’, ‘broiling’, and ‘frying’ as techniques of applying heat to meat-based ingredients. The second section, which consists of thirteen chapters, discusses grains (such as flour, bread, cereal and rice porridge), and also vegetables, spices, sugar, fruits and confections. Finally, in the third section, which consists of six chapters (although in the first edition of the book it only had five chapters), Rumohr elucidates the dining etiquette required of civilised persons, disciplining children, taboos at the dining table, the amount of food to be consumed and ideal menu configurations.

In the book, calm and rational sentences are arranged in the form of a picture book or a dispassionate ‘catalogue’. Rumohr’s basic writing style was based on his extensive knowledge of ancient cuisine and cooking, his experience from eating in various countries (especially Italy) during his recurrent travels and his collection of information on traditional Bavarian local cuisine which he had gathered in Munich upon his return to Germany. As much as possible, he omitted unnecessary anecdotes and organised types of eating and cooking methods with either historical or regional classifications. I have chosen to quote a few passages that illustrate Rumohr's views:

Whatever the conditions, one must be careful when cooking, because it is actually quite unfortunate—but this happens quite frequently due to excessive or intentional cooking—the nutritional content is suppressed or destroyed. On the contrary, we must continue to make a ceaseless effort to maintain and better the conditions. For the same reason, we must be careful not to destroy the nutritional contents of basic ingredients before cooking (Part 1, Chapter 2).

Mandrakes (tomatoes) are used for flavouring in sauces and soups in southern Europe. If tomatoes are used, a pleasant acidity and delicious orange colouring are delivered to the recipe. It aids in thickening blood if consumed in large amounts. I do not understand why Germany has not tried cultivating this delicious fruit (Part 2, Chapter 10).

Going back to the basic rules of cooking food, I have explained the application of these rules with examples, but it is not sufficient. Any cooking technique increases the feeling of being alive and healthy, but if it does not realise the objective of maintaining and supporting health, it is nothing but a useless gimmick. One can begin to attain this condition by adopting a thoughtful way of eating. At a glance, thoughtful eating appears to be merely instinctive, however in actuality, it is one of the most important human skills that depends more on culture than one might usually think (Part 3, Chapter 1).

Perhaps what most frankly expresses Rumohr's viewpoint is a quotation from Pliny that appears on the book's binding:

From this point on, I would like to consider the best products of nature. I am talking about what is most nutritious for humans. People are not aware of by what means they are alive. The following account confirms this ignorance. Whatever kind of person someone is, if there is a misunderstanding due to unfamiliarity with terminology, I would hope that the topic stated so far is not considered

inconsequential and vulgar (*Natural History*, Book 20).

3 Historical Significance

During the beginning of the 19th century, at which time *The Essence of Cookery* was penned, there were so many books published on the study of eating and culinary that it could have been called ‘the era of cookbooks’. Such developments can be attributed to improvements in agricultural production technology and the influx of colonial products occurring against the backdrop of an increase in the number of restaurants due to urbanisation. Some of the notable works from the period were the following, Grimod de la Reyniere’s (1758-1837) *Almanach Des Gourmands* was published in 1803, Antoine Beauvilliers’s (1754-1817) *L'art du Cuisinier* was published in 1814, Marie Antoine Careme’s (1783-1833) *Le Patissier Royal Parisien* was published in 1815, and most importantly, the famous Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s (1755-1826) *The Physiology of Taste* was published in 1825. Rumohr sometimes referred to these works (in the 2nd edition he added references to Brillat-Savarin); however, even when compared to the aforementioned works, the characteristics of *The Essence of Cookery* are unique.

It is especially interesting to compare Rumohr’s book with *The Physiology of Taste*. As clearly illustrated in the above citations, *The Essence of Cookery* placed strong emphasis on the significance of health and dietetics by underscoring the use of natural ingredients (every page attached importance to vegetables) and warning against overcooking. On the contrary, rather than focusing on the cooking of game or nutrition, *The Physiology of Taste* emphasises on the pleasure from the perspective of the study of good flavour, as a sort of ‘discriminating gourmand’. Indeed, we cannot overlook the common characteristics of these works. More important than anything else, both of these books strive for a scientific description of cuisine while considering eating and flavour (taste), which plays a significant role in eating and meals as a sociable or social concept.

As a course matter, I am reminded of Kant’s theory of taste in his *Critique of Judgments*. In fact, Brillat-Savarin hinted at a connection with Kant’s theory by using

the subtitle *Meditations de Gastronomie Transcendante*. In this book, Brillat-Savarin tried to make a physiological (if not transcendental) study by directly linking ‘aesthetics’ (the sense). On the other hand, the senses are hardly mentioned in Rumohr’s book. Rumohr’s analysis suggested a process of cooking and eating that avoids harm to one’s health by giving the reader an accurate indication of the processing of ingredients and the ideal nutritional intake from foods by adopting an empirical, scientific approach.

Readers of either the *The Physiology of Taste* or *The Essence of Cookery* may observe that the ‘technique of cooking’ discussed in both books may share similarities with Kant’s ‘skills that produce pleasurable feelings’. However, the ‘cookery’ that Rumohr emphasises is not intended for sensory ‘pleasure’. Rather, Rumohr emphasises on social considerations and manners as a common sense while in a dining environment (especially in the third chapter). Rumohr insisted that *personal taste* as a sort of ‘sensus communis’ was required at the dining table. As indicated by the inclusion of the word *kunst* in the work’s title, as he stated from the beginning, Rumohr held the notion that like poetry or the fine arts, cooking should also be understood as a skilled art form.

The art of cooking is to provide nourishment for people by taking the natural ingredients that are necessary for living and by using fire, water and salt, to concoct something rich in nutrition that also encourages our good mood. Horace once famously stated, ‘mix the pleasant with the useful’. These words are something that should precisely apply to cookery, just as how poetry and art are apt to be neither above uselessness, nor completely one-sided fine arts (Part 1, Chapter 1 ‘The Concept of Cookery’).

In addition, I would like to indicate the connection between this book and Rumohr’s achievement in the ‘foundation of historical art’ in his work *Italienische Forschungen*.

The following passage continues directly from the quoted material above:

Incidentally, in the various eras and schools of cookery, there is always a certain characteristic that gains dominance. Thus, in cooking, just the same as in the fine arts, it can be postulated that there exist strict styles, elegant styles and styles that sparkle (Part 1, Chapter 1 ‘The Concept of Cookery’).

Whether he was discussing cookery or conducting an analysis on Italian paintings and classical era poetry, Rumohr maintained a consistent fundamental position. For him, the study of cookery was stylistic wherein while enumerating the elements that gave the style its intuitive form, it was none other than a described style which positioned itself in historical time and geographical space. The ingredients (flavour) of food were perhaps a secondary issue for Rumohr. Neither the anecdotes of Vasari, nor the indulgence in Hegel’s speculations about the ‘Spirit’ theory is important in this context. Thus, with his rational and simple writing style (in *Cookery*), an influence of the classical era, Rumohr aimed to create a high and noble impression.

4 Conclusion: From the History of ‘Enlightenment’ and ‘Uncivilisedness’

As I discussed in a previous article*6, the ‘aesthetics’ that Kant described in his *Criticism of Judgments*—‘Enlightenment’ and ‘Uncivilisedness’ (or perhaps ‘personal taste’ and ‘genius’)—were established by maintaining a delicate balance between two opposing concepts. We cannot verify certainly that this aesthetic trend is applicable for Rumohr, who was active in the generation that followed Kant. It appeared that having inherited the traditions of Baldassare Castiglione and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Kant’s aesthetics, Rumohr tried to find balance between two seemingly contradictory orientations—aristocratic sophistication and a return to nature.

It is difficult to find a single word that characterises the achievements of Rumohr. He was a man who could be described by many titles, such as art historian, connoisseur, critic, writer, collector, an art amateur, patron, museum advisor, draftsman, copperplate printmaker, gourmand and gastronome. However, as we have already observed, these many aspects of the man’s character were not entirely unrelated. All of these characteristics reveal the profile of a single person, Rumohr, who the ability to balance

the contradictory.

Notes

- (1) Yoshioka, 1972; 1975, Ota, 1984. Important references aside from these are listed at the end.
- (2) Rumohr's life and works have been summarised at the end. This chronology is referenced from Tarrach, 1921; Yeomans, 1993; Dirk, 2000; and Hauer, 2005.
- (3) For information on Johann Dominique Fiorillo, see Kato, 2002.
- (4) See Hirschfeld, 1931 and Gädeke, 1991.
- (5) The drawing Rumohr made of his “personal cook” Joseph König, was published in Hirschfeld, 1931, S.261, Anm.2, Abb.2, S.262.
- (6) See Kato, 2004.

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- *Sammlung für die Kunst und Historie*. Hamburg: Perthes, 1816 - 1823.
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- *Deutsche Denkwürdigkeiten aus alten Papieren*. Hrsg. von C[arl] Fr[iedrich] v. Rumohr. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1832 -.
- *Ein Band Novellen*. München: Georg Franz, 1833 -.
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- *Kynalopekomachia: Der Hunde Fuchsenstreit*. Hrsg. von C. Fr. v. Rumohr. Mit sechs Bildern von Otto Speckter. - [1. Ausgabe]. - Lübeck: Rohde, 1835.
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Chronological History of Rumohr

- 1785 Jan 6, born in Reinhardtsgrimma, near Dresden.
- 1803 Death of father. Employed in public service after receiving inheritance.
Studied art under the direction of Johann Dominicus Fiorillo at the
University of Göttingen.
- 1804 Converted to Catholicism.
- 1805 Travelled to Italy. Stayed in Rome. Appreciation of art and cuisine.
- 1807 Returned home to Rothenhausen (near Lübeck) via Munich.
- 1808 Occupation of Lübeck by the French general Jean Bernadotte. Escaped
to Vienna.
- 1810 Visited Munich and made copperplate prints. Returned to Lübeck.
Published the first written work that discussed Greek sculpture.
- 1813 Gave up his dream of becoming a copperplate engraving artist.
- 1816 Revisited Italy; stayed until 1822. Returned to Italy in 1828, 1837, and
1840.
The Collection for Art and History (-1823)
- 1822 *The Essence of Cookery* 1st edition
- 1825 *The Physiology of Taste* by Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

- 1827 *Italienische Forschungen* (Italian Research) (-1831)
- 1832 *The Essence of Cookery* 2nd edition
*Drei Reisen nach Italien / Deutsche Denkwürdigkeiten aus alten
Papieren*
- 1834 *Schule der Höflichkeit für Alt und Jung* (-1835)
- 1835 *Kynalopekomachia: Der Hunde Fuchsenstreit / Geschichte der
königlichen Kupferstichsammlung zu Copenhagen*
Became chamberlain to Prince of Denmark (later Christian VIII) (-
1836)
- 1836 *Hans Holbein der Jüngere in seinem Verhältniss zum deutschen
Formschnittwesen*
- 1840 Explained works of art to Prince Frederick William (IV) of Prussia in
Florence and Siena.
- 1842 Sold estate in Rothenhausen, and moved to Lübeck.
- 1843 Died in Dresden on the way to Bohemia for recuperation.

The Essence of Cookery, by Karl Friedrich von Rumohr. An Everlasting Meal: Cooking with Economy and Grace, by Tamar Adler. A History of Cooks and Cooking, by Michael Symons. The Bread Baker's Apprentice: Mastering the Art of Extraordinary Bread, by Peter Reinhart. The Bread Builders: Hearth Loaves and Masonry Ovens, by Daniel Wing and Alan Scott. English Bread and Yeast Cookery, by Elizabeth David. Peter Reinhart's Whole Grain Breads, by Peter Reinhart. Tartine Bread, by Chad Robertson. Emeril's The Essence of Emeril (K. Katz, 2002a) was a good example of the traditional domestic cooking show, as it was softly lit and he was alone in domestic space. Viewers were intimately invited into Emeril's personal kitchen. Within this program, he had already developed some of the now-parodied language that is an important symbol of him and his energy. Whenever he adds. This allowed view-. The Essence of Cooking Shows 225. © 2005 SAGE Publications. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution. at UNIV OF ILLINOIS URBANA on August 6, 2008 <http://jci.sagepub.com> Downloaded from. ers to understand this space as open and social. Because of the number of people The Essence of Emeril. Hosted by Emeril Lagasse. Main. Episodes. Recipes. Pinterest. Facebook. Wok Cookery. Emeril's Fried Rice, Mrs. Hays Stuffed Chicken Wings w/ Hoisin Sauce. See Tune-In Times. Previous Episode. Ginger. Next Episode. Making Consommés.