

Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy

Abstract: Drawing from historical cookbooks, literary works, and contemporary sources, this article traces a shift in the conception of the French dessert course from an adjunct but fully edible form in the seventeenth century to a mainly visual element in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the current balance between edibility and “legibility” in iconic desserts. What was once simply fruit and then pure ornament is now at once delicious and symbolic. The essay argues that present-day desserts represent a merging of taste and aesthetics, with the “decoration” now in the form of a colorful and sometimes invented history.

THE *ENTREMETS SUCRÉ* or dessert course comes late to French gastronomy, but it carries a heavy cultural load. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (2004: 34) asserts that, beginning in the nineteenth century, “the nationalization of French cuisine, in short, came through its textualization” via cookbooks and literary works. The classic dishes of French cuisine endorsed in these works were gastronomically pleasing and culturally comprehensible, a comprehensibility often inscribed by naming. Like French sauces, a number of modern French desserts carry biographical or geographical names that tie them to France: the *gâteau de Savoie*, the *Saint-Honoré*, and the *Paris-Brest*, for example. But these named French desserts are a fairly recent invention: even the term *dessert* was not in regular use until the late eighteenth century. The well-known dessert pastries and the stories that accompany them date to the nineteenth century and later. Early entremets served as a respite from the main dishes and were clearly inferior dishes, rarely decorative and ultimately functional. The modern dessert course is nearly as important as the meal it closes, has been adapted to both domestic and professional cuisine, and in its textualization is linked to French history and geography. In early versions of dessert, taste and flavor are primary, but decorative and sometimes inedible elements dominate in the eighteenth century, and by the end of the nineteenth century dessert observes a merging of the two senses. This essay explores the transformation of dessert from the entremets (literally, “between food”) stage of the early modern period through a liberalization of dessert

When the dessert course was democratized in the nineteenth century—open to bourgeois tables—specific dishes became “textualized,” codified by name and form and inscribed with origin stories that connect these dishes to French identity, making dessert both symbolically and materially accessible to a wider public.

Keywords: dessert, French cuisine, sugar, decorative arts, pastry, entremets.

in the nineteenth century, ending with its current place in French gastronomy that is held aloft by a cultural construction of names, histories, and traditions. As the nineteenth-century notion of dessert passes into the present, the sweet course has changed to accommodate innovation and a new balance between taste and aesthetics.

To date, the history of French dessert has not been the subject of extensive research in food history. Because the sweet course was prepared not by chefs but by a specialized and separate kitchen, general cookbooks from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries contain few desserts. Specialized books of confectionary are also relatively few in number and date to the eighteenth century or later; the best known are Joseph Gilliers’s *Le cannaméliste français* (1751), Menon’s *La science du maître d’hôtel confiseur* (1750), and William (Guglielmo) Jarrin’s *The Italian Confectioner* (1820). Marie-Antonin Carême occupies his own category in the evolution of dessert, with his books *Le pâtissier pittoresque* and *Le pâtissier royal parisien* (both 1815). With the caveat that the dessert course had not yet been formally established, Terence Scully and Eleanor Scully (1995, 2002) note that the “yssue” of fresh or dried fruit, *dragées* (spiced candies), and *hypocras* (spiced wine)—the earliest form of the sweet entremets, consumed as a final course in the Middle Ages—is referenced in the *Menagier de Paris* (ca. 1393) and contemporary works. Ken Albala (2007) discusses the expanded role of pastry in Renaissance court meals, when sweet and savory pies and fritters were served for nearly every course but not to close the meal;

these items were not considered desserts in the modern sense. Other scholars have focused on the refinement of the dessert course in the eighteenth century, including Philip Hyman and Mary Hyman (2000) who identify the visual transformation of desserts via cookbooks with illustrative color plates, and Barbara Wheaton (1996) who calls attention to the construction of decorative sugar figures, towers of fruit, and ices in the brief sections on dessert contained in her work. Ivan Day (1999) examines the sculptural elements of the eighteenth-century *pièce montée* at court dinners, especially with regard to innovations in porcelain manufacture at Vincennes and Sèvres. For the modern era, S. G. Sender and Marcel Derrien's *La grande histoire de la pâtisserie-confiserie* (2003) is comprehensive, but it uses mainly anecdotal evidence and emphasizes form and practice over analysis. Nina Barbier and Emmanuel Perret (1997) take an ethnographic approach to dessert, focusing on post-nineteenth-century named pastries. In general studies of the French gastronomic tradition, French food scholars treat dessert history only tangentially — e.g., Mennell (1996); Ferguson (2004); Poulain and Neirinck (2004); Flandrin (2000, 2007).

The oldest French entremets in cookbooks from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are not recognizable as desserts for two reasons: these preparations were sometimes savory and they were not yet relegated to the close of the meal. The term *entremets* more accurately designates the category of “interval” dishes that were offered between large courses. Mary Hyman (1992) traces the change in categorization of “confitures” (understood as “condiments”) from medicine to food. In their original medicinal use in the late Middle Ages and sixteenth century the savory entremets and salads accompanied meat courses to counteract the effect of these foods on the body, while the sweet entremets served at the end of the meal beginning in the seventeenth century were meant to bring pleasure as well as close the stomach for proper digestion. In the seventeenth century, cookbooks classified entremets as an extraneous sweet or savory course that might include salads, baked goods, meringues, fruit preparations, and savory pastries.

Lancelot de Casteau's *Ouverture de cuisine* (1604) is the first work to offer a recipe for a butter-layered tart crust and *pâte à choux* (cream puff dough, here used for fritters) for both sweet and savory dishes.¹ François La Varenne's *Le pâtissier françois* (1653) contains pastry recipes, a few cakes and cookies, pâtés, and sixty ways to cook eggs.² In Menon's *La nouvelle cuisine* (1742: 242), the entremets course is still mainly savory: shellfish, mussels, mushrooms, and beignets are listed, although it does offer “beignets de pommes à la Saint Clou,” peeled apples fried in pastry and marinated in

eau-de-vie. In the “Entremets” section in the fifth volume of *Le cuisinier moderne* (1742), Vincent La Chapelle offers more savory pastries than sweet, and the word *dessert* does not appear in the book. Gilliers's *Le cannaméliste français* (1751) still situates confectionary in the Office, a separate section (now equivalent to the *garde manger*), corresponding to the separate space in professional kitchens. Gilliers offers instructions for sweet preparations alongside those for salads, vegetables (beets, cauliflower), and garnishes (pickled capers, fresh herbs). Well into the nineteenth century, the entremets course at French meals might consist of sweet or savory dishes or a combination (Flandrin 2000: 363). Marie-Antonin Carême's *Le pâtissier royal parisien* (1815) has sections on sauces, rice and pasta dishes, and savory tarts as well as sweet pastries and decorative sugar ornaments. Jules Gouffé in *Le livre de pâtisserie* (1873: v) calls for a return to savory pastry dishes like spinach tarts and marrow pastries in the entremets course, admitting that these dishes represent a revival of “l'office de nos pères” (our fathers' cooking) and therefore intimating that the dessert course has become associated with sweet preparations.³ With the *Grand livre des pâtissiers et des confiseurs* (1883), Urbain Dubois at last presents a cookbook dedicated to sweet desserts, leaving aside savory entremets, salads, and other cold preparations belonging to the former Office.⁴

In French, the transformation of the word “dessert” from its origins in the verb “desservir” (to clear the table) began in the seventeenth century. LSR in *L'art de bien traiter* (1674: 375) recommends that both napkins and tablecloth be changed before the final course, since the sauce- and smoke-tinged linens from the meat course clash with “the delicacy and cleanliness of dessert, which should be eaten less gluttonously than the previous courses.”⁵ “Le dessert” was a familiar (bourgeois) term for the fruit course served when the meat course was removed from the table, although proper (court) language favored “le fruit.”⁶ Dictionary entries from the late eighteenth century indicate that “dessert” soon became a synonym for “fruit,” the main component of these kinds of dishes, and in fact “le fruit” and “le dessert” could be used interchangeably.⁷ By 1835 the definition of “dessert” was limited to dishes served at the end of a meal “such as fruit, cheese, jams, pastry, etc.”⁸

Cookbooks and household manuals confirm this linguistic evolution: *L'École parfaite des officiers de bouche* (1713: 500), a guide for “chefs d'office” (confectioners and cold cooks), offers suggested dishes for “le fruit, communément appelé [sic] le Dessert” (the fruit course, commonly called *Dessert*). Gilliers (1751: 75) defines dessert as both “the fruit one prepares and the final course one serves.” Jean-Louis Flandrin

(2007: 103) notes that the aristocratic taint of the term “fruit” led to another change after the French Revolution when a chef named Archambault (*Le Cuisinier économe*, 1821) “after the bourgeois revolution and despite ongoing political restoration . . . adopted *dessert* and discarded *fruit*.” The codification of the sweet course and its place in the meal was also a product of Revolutionary changes, namely an expansion of access to food outside the home to a growing bourgeois public as well as the elite. The restaurant reached its recognizable public form in the 1790s as a space for paying customers to be served prepared food, and its setup emphasized individuality: the patron occupied his own table and was served according to his taste (Spang 2000). Previously, dining at large banquets used buffet-style service (or *service à la française*). In the late eighteenth century individual plated service (or *service à la russe*) took hold: “the Russian serving style with its equalitarian and simpler table service was most suitable for the individual diner at the restaurant, the paradigmatic bourgeois institution for fine dining” (Leschziner 2006: 437). Dessert was simultaneously opened to a wider socioeconomic public and clearly delineated as a separate course, since sweet preparations had definitively disappeared from the other parts of the meal. Flandrin (2007: 87) confirms that “the eighteenth-century menus no longer show any sweet or sugared dishes except as entremets or desserts.” As Vanina Leschziner (2006: 438) notes, “The *service à la russe*, temporally and spatially separating the sweet from the savory, provided the necessary organization of meals respectful of the irreducible opposition between the two tastes.” Therefore dessert as a functional category was solidified at the close of the eighteenth century and sweet became distinct from savory at French tables.

Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, general cookbooks relegated fruit dishes and sweet pastries to the Office. The classification testifies to the growing importance of this element of the meal, but also indicates that pastries and other entremets were subordinate in technique and in substance to other cooked dishes. The final section of La Varenne’s *Le cuisinier françois* (1659: 353–81) features jams, fruit compotes, and a few other “petites Curiosités et Délicatesses de bouche” including marzipan, “crème d’Angleterre,” and “biscuit de Savoie,” but is hardly extensive. François Massialot’s *Le cuisinier roïal et bourgeois* (1691: 5) contains a frank dismissal of the entremets produced in the Office as unworthy of a true chef: “It’s fruit and jams, which we will not bother to talk about because it is the work of an officer rather than a cook.”⁹ But certain cookbooks in the early modern period were dedicated to confectionary or “confiserie,” a category that included jams, ices, and pastry along with savory dishes that belonged to the entremets course.

Frozen desserts also featured prominently in the sweet course beginning in the seventeenth century. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cooks discussed freezing techniques at length in published cookbooks and offered numerous recipes for iced cheese, cream, and fruit dishes. François Marin in *Les dons de Comus* (1739: 217) includes “glaces” as a key element of the fruit course, along with beignets and “choux farcis” (filled pastry puffs). Emy’s *L’art de bien faire les glaces d’office* (1768), a cookbook entirely devoted to frozen sweets, details the history of making ices and discusses the use of salt and saltpeter, among other innovations that allowed for more consistent freezing. Frozen confections were extravagant and highly fashionable in the eighteenth century in elite contexts, due to the relative difficulty of creating these dishes, formed in intricate pewter or lead molds and tinted with powdered food colorings. The frozen dessert remained important until the late nineteenth century: Gouffé’s 1873 text includes a charlotte russe with a frozen filling and a Nesselrode pudding with chestnut sorbet. Nesselrode pudding is one of the few enduring frozen desserts on modern tables.

Early sweets to end the meal were normally fruit-based, with jams and preserves figuring prominently, although Massialot states in his *Nouvelle instruction pour les confitures* (1698: 27) that “un Dessert” includes “various kinds of almonds, cookies, marzipan, and meringues” and fresh fruit. These were relatively simple preparations in straightforward presentations, even if late seventeenth-century manuals suggested garnishes and “enjolivements” (embellishments) for desserts and other courses, such as flowers or colored papers on serving platters. However, it is clear in Massialot’s *Nouvelle instruction* (1698: 447) that taste is primary, since the final chapter on arranging table displays of desserts begins, “After having taken care of everything that can fulfill one’s sense of taste,” the service must be executed with order and tidiness.¹⁰ The confections in Massialot’s list and in other contemporary cookbooks contain few ingredients and offer a simple, sweet note to close the meal. Recipes emphasize the flavor of the fruit or the baked treat. *L’Ecole parfaite* (1713: x, 120) offers to teach cooks all that can be done with sugar “pour le plaisir d’être mangé” (for the pleasure of eating) and notes that preserves make fruit or flowers “plus agréables au goût” (tastier).

Later in the eighteenth century, there were clearer indications of an evolution in the conception of dessert from taste-driven to visual as fruit began to be arranged in pyramids and towers of “porcelaines,” small dishes that were first made of tin or pewter (Wheaton 1996: 188). Menon in *La science du maître d’hôtel confiseur* (1750: iii) narrates a change from “these pyramids constructed with more effort and diligence

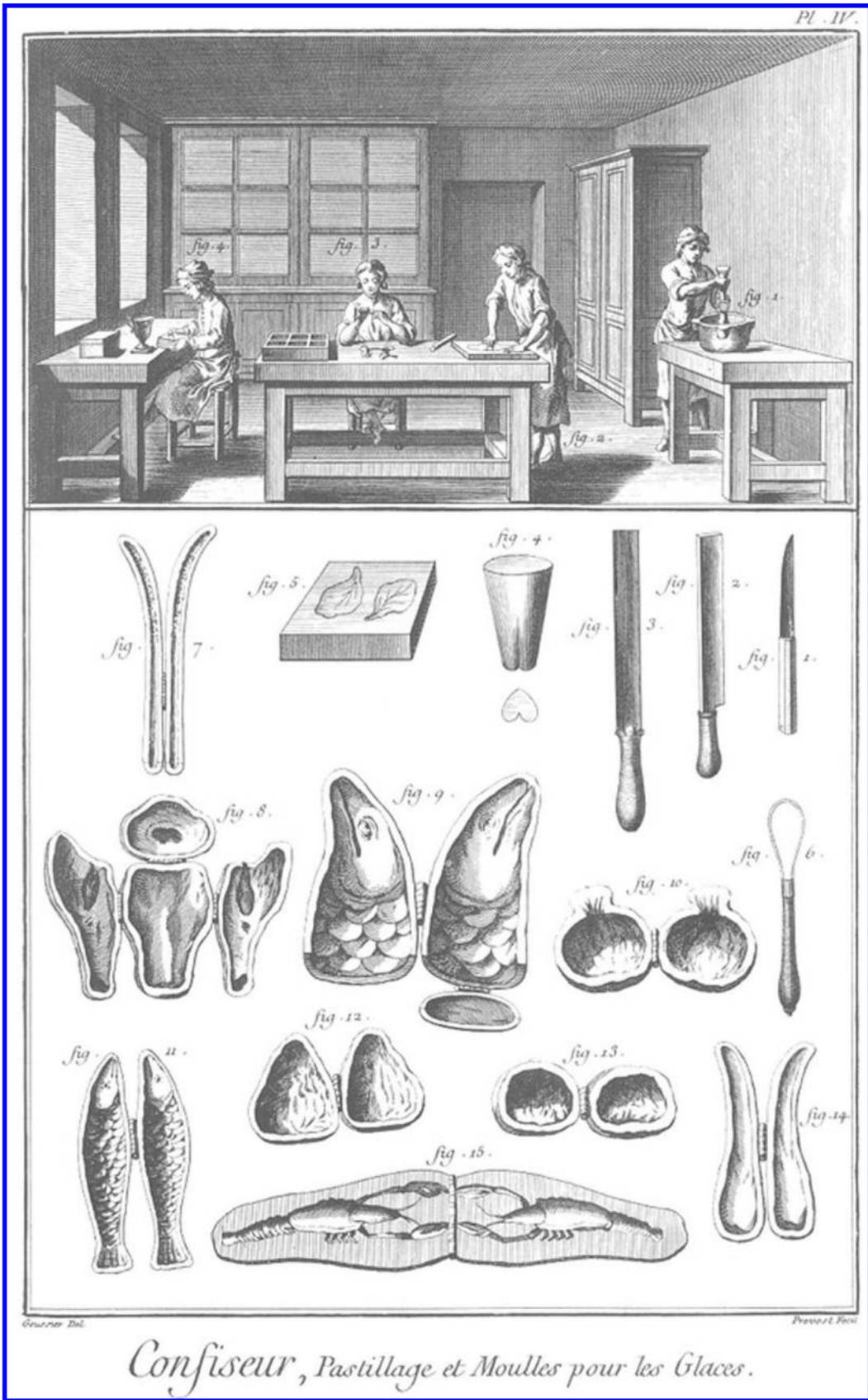


FIGURE 1: Various molds for frozen desserts.

IMAGE FROM THE ENCYCLOPÉDIE (1772), "MOULES POUR FAIRE LES GLACES."



59. — Gradins de tartlettes de poires.

FIGURE 2: A display of fruit en pyramide. In this case, whole pears are served on individual pastry tarts, each finely decorated.

IMAGE FROM JULES GOUFFÉ, *LE LIVRE DE PÂTISSERIE* (1873).

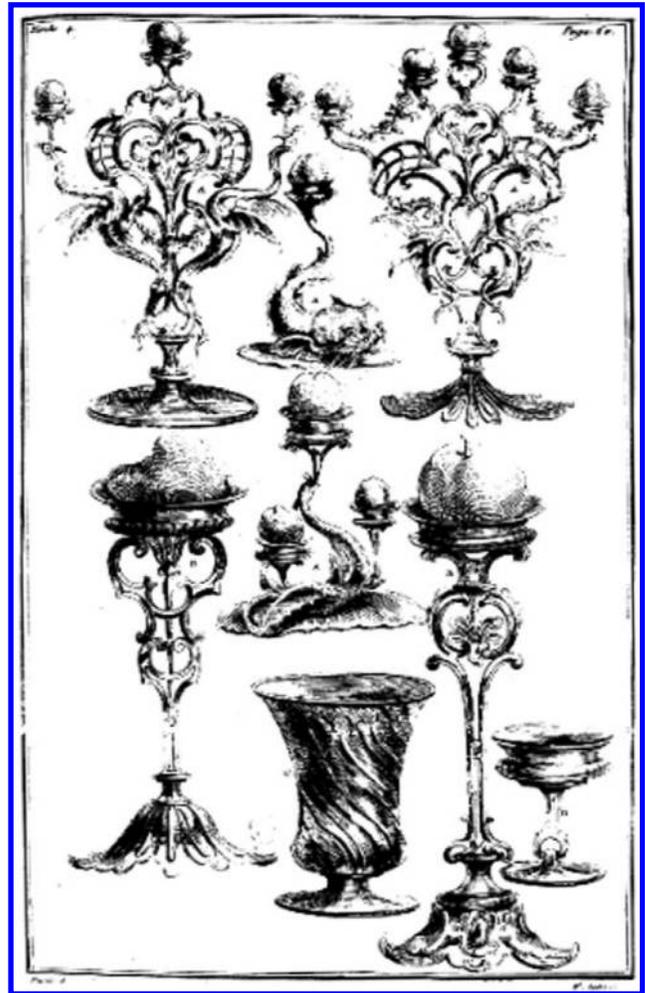


FIGURE 3: Metal and glass structures for serving whole fruit on a dessert buffet.

IMAGE FROM JOSEPH GILLIERS, *LE CANNAMÉLISTE FRANÇAIS* (1751).

than taste and elegance” and “this jumbled pile of fruit that showcased more excess than intelligence or grace” to the elegant simplicity of the new approach to dessert, a term he uses deliberately.¹¹ The anonymous “Lettre d’un pâtissier anglois” included in the 1740 edition of Marin’s *Les dons de Comus* responds to the trend toward applying scientific principles to dessert and cooking in general, the “travail et industrie” criticized by Menon, by deriding the universality of the *quintessence* (an overly complex sauce) and elaborate dinners that end with “un fruit monté et historié” (a dessert/fruit course assembled and beautifully decorated) (Mennell 1981: 15). The term “historié” (embellished with small ornaments) is well suited to the style of desserts in the ancien régime, but the term reappears in Gouffé’s *Le livre de pâtisserie* and Carême’s *Le pâtissier pittoresque* (1815) as the visual aspect of dessert changes over time. The “service en pyramide” for fruit was common on wealthy tables in the ancien régime; it survives today in the form of the *croquebouche* at wedding feasts and other formal occasions.

Barbara Wheaton (1996: 186) notes that confectioners had used sugar figures as decorations since the sixteenth century, but in the mid-eighteenth century, sugar creations or *pièces montées* became the centerpiece of dessert displays and these

constructions were not always meant to be eaten. Gilliers provides illustrations of table decorations for the final course, but these displays use crystal goblets, candelabras, and elaborate serving pieces to provide height and elegance. In some drawings, fanciful metal structures hold single pieces of whole fresh fruit, normally apples or plums, with the result that the decorative structure draws more attention than the “dessert.”

Menon’s prefatory comments in *La science du maître d’hôtel confiseur* indicate a reconsideration of the visual in the dessert course, with an emphasis on elegant simplicity. His manual gives clear instructions and illustrations so that Officers may “diversify the presentation of desserts” (1750: v). Mary Hyman and Philip Hyman (2000: 399) point to an emphasis on the visual in eighteenth-century cookbooks that include illustrative plates for displays of the “fruit” course, as

in Menon's palaces and statues made of sugar and Gilliers's fruit tableaux. The eighteenth-century *officier* was expected to be familiar with architectural design and to replicate these forms in sugar paste. The fragile sugar designs became so ubiquitous at court banquets that *maîtres d'hôtel* sought a reusable and more durable alternative: the porcelain industry at the Manufacture Royale at Vincennes (later revived as Sèvres) responded by creating a new biscuit porcelain in pure white in the early 1750s that could be used to create figures that perfectly matched sugar sculptures (Day 1999: 60). Nevertheless, sugar paste persisted among confectioners for figures, architectural structures, faux flowers, and *trompe l'oeil* fruits. The use of porcelain figures introduced a nonedible element to the dessert displays, but the complex sugar structures that preceded them were likely not meant to be eaten in any case.¹²

The pastry and confectionary sections of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1751–72: 3,855) confirm that taste and visual appeal have gained equal footing in the mid-eighteenth century: confectionary is an art that can “flatter le goût” (enhance the flavor) of even the most perfect fruit, but it can also “create out of sugar all kinds of drawings, designs, figures, and even remarkable pieces of architecture.”¹³ The distinction between *pâtisserie* and *confiserie* (or sugar cookery) appears in the late eighteenth century as a distinction between the edible and the nonedible or between functional and decorative. The *Encyclopédie* (1751: 25.10.1) decries the poor design of baking molds for the *pâtissier* that produce shapes in bad taste and “ridiculement dessinées” (absurdly designed), because tinsmiths do not have a sufficient background in art and architecture. By contrast, the confectioner can make spectacular creations out of sugar, the centerpiece of fashionable tables. Louis-Sebastien Mercier in *Tableau de Paris* (1783) describes decorative desserts that resist consumption, meaning that they could be eaten but do not seem inviting or easily ingestible. Mercier tells of a particularly gifted Parisian *confiseur* who crafted the severed head of Louis XV, a battle scene with soldiers and cannons, and the rock of Gibraltar out of sugar, all of it edible, but one can hardly imagine a dinner guest nibbling on a sugar soldier (249). At a formal gathering, Mercier observes a new arrival to Paris who sees the dessert course as “un projet de décoration” (a decorative work) and cannot comprehend how (or why) one might eat it (7).

Jarrin's *The Italian Confectioner* (1820) gives a retrospective report of the eighteenth-century decorative dessert, even if its publication postdates the significant changes that occurred in French dining from 1789 forward. Jarrin writes in English and intends to transfer the confectionary techniques he has

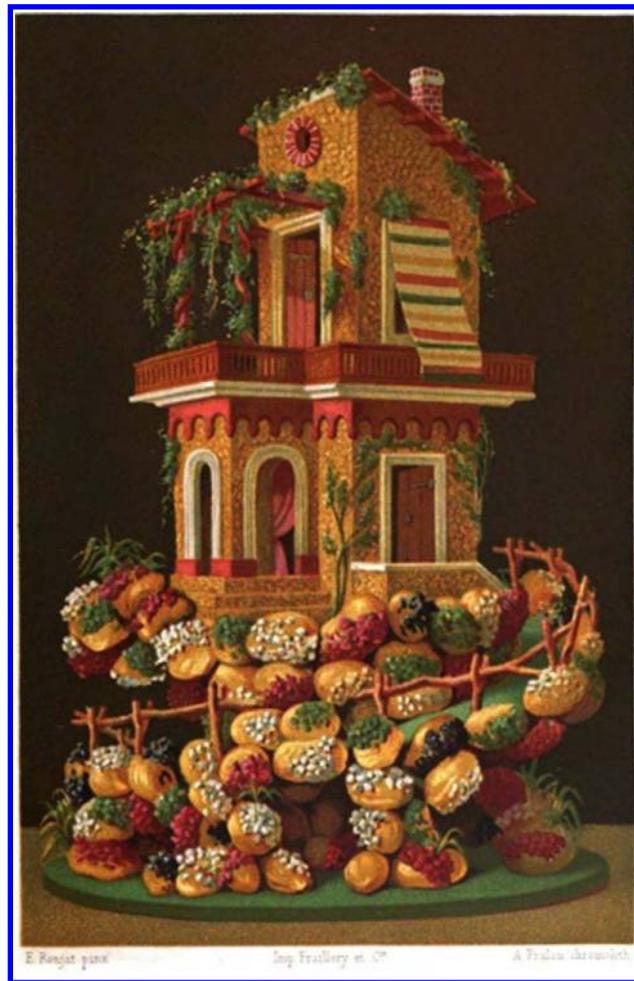


FIGURE 4: A *pièce montée*—a fully edible but decorative figure—made of *pâte à choux* and confectionary paste and labeled “Maison italienne.”

IMAGE FROM GOUFFÉ, *LE LIVRE DE PATISSERIE* (1873).

learned in France to England, where these creations are unknown. In Jarrin's terminology, a *pièce montée* is “an ornament to be eaten . . . composed of biscuits, conserves, rock sugar, nougat” (137) but also castles, temples, monuments, and other structures made of *pâte d'office* or confectionary paste, consisting of flour, sugar, and egg whites.

Artificial or sculpted creations that seem to be intended for eating based on their ingredients and serving instructions include those shaped like fruit or vegetables (carrots, apples, radishes, mushrooms, chestnuts) molded from almond paste or melted sugar, or creations shaped like nondessert foods that are nevertheless food, such as “sausages” made from entrail casings and quince paste, or “ham” made with red and white almond paste. By contrast, the *assiettes montées* are more elaborate and clearly ornamental, consisting of flowers, porcelain or glass elements, and allegorical figures or groups of



FIGURE 5: A *Cupid figure in biscuit porcelain* (ca. 1758) by Etienne-Maurice Falcomet, perhaps the most popular figure produced at the Sèvres factory. Pieces like this one were commonly used in dessert services in the eighteenth-century.

"WLA VANDA FIGURE OF CUPID SEVRES" BY "DRAKR" IS LICENSED UNDER CC BY 2.5.

in architectural forms and artistic techniques in addition to culinary expertise. Some economic impact must be inferred here as well, since Jarrin laments the disappearance of these extravagant *assiettes montées* as the aristocratic largesse of the ancien régime faded into the realities of the Republican ethos: "Farewell, then, fine *groupes*, allegorical subjects, trophies, country sports, landscapes and mythological emblems! Till better times shall arrive, we must content ourselves with the simple *assiettes montées*" (244). Jarrin claims that pastry cooks (as opposed to confectioners) have "disfigured if not destroyed the most beautiful flower in the banquet of the confectioner" in their abandonment of gum paste figures and their ignorance of the "arts of modelling and design" (215) to adopt what he sees as inartistic displays that lack refinement, perhaps because they demand less skill on the part of the artist who can now rely on forgiving materials like pasteboard, wood, and paper. In addition, the economic impact of the Revolution forced chefs who had once been employed by aristocratic families to work as independent artisans on much-restricted budgets, resulting in more pragmatic dessert displays.

As Claude Fischler (1993) has observed, classical French cuisine is aligned with architecture because it is three dimensional and takes vision as its critical sense; in *nouvelle cuisine*, the related art is painting, two dimensional with all five senses engaged.¹⁴ Fischler attributes classical cuisine to Escoffier and Carême before him, but it is clear that the architectural emphasis in the sweet course predates the nineteenth century and that the move to two dimensions and five senses happened earlier in the realm of dessert, to coincide with the change from aristocratic spectacle in the ancien régime to a constructed egalitarianism in the post-Revolutionary era. Carême, first a confectioner and later a chef, approached confectionary as architecture, a technique that carried over into savory dishes. Stephen Mennell (1996: 145) notes that "statuary in lard and spun sugar were an essential, if inedible, part of any of Carême's grand dinners." These *pièces montées* were modeled on classical figures: in *Le pâtissier royal parisien* Carême advises that the best columns for these structures are Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, and he gives instructions for making Roman and Greek helmets, fountains, and ruins. Following Napoleon's coup d'état in 1799 and during the First Empire, these Etruscan forms were encouraged as a means to purge the rococo style associated with the monarchy's "corrupt tastes" and corrupt politics and to emphasize Napoleon's victories and place him in the firmament of military heroes (Adams 2007: 187). Carême's *Le pâtissier pittoresque* refers to architectural treatises on modern and ancient structures, and he suggests that pastry chefs consult Nicolas-Louis Durand's *Parallèle des*

statues "made for the center of a table" (216) that may be formed from gum paste, marble paste with marble dust in place of sugar, or plaster of Paris.

Such figures were often colored with chemical or natural tints, some toxic. Jarrin specifies that "though no one thinks of eating an ornament or figure" in an *assiette montée* (229), the confectioner can choose "Colours Good To Eat" from spinach, chocolate, or coffee if the creations might be eaten (236). He thus identifies a transitional moment from fully edible desserts on inedible displays to fully decorative desserts made of edible materials. The solely ornamental figures demonstrate the talent of the dessert chef who must be well-versed

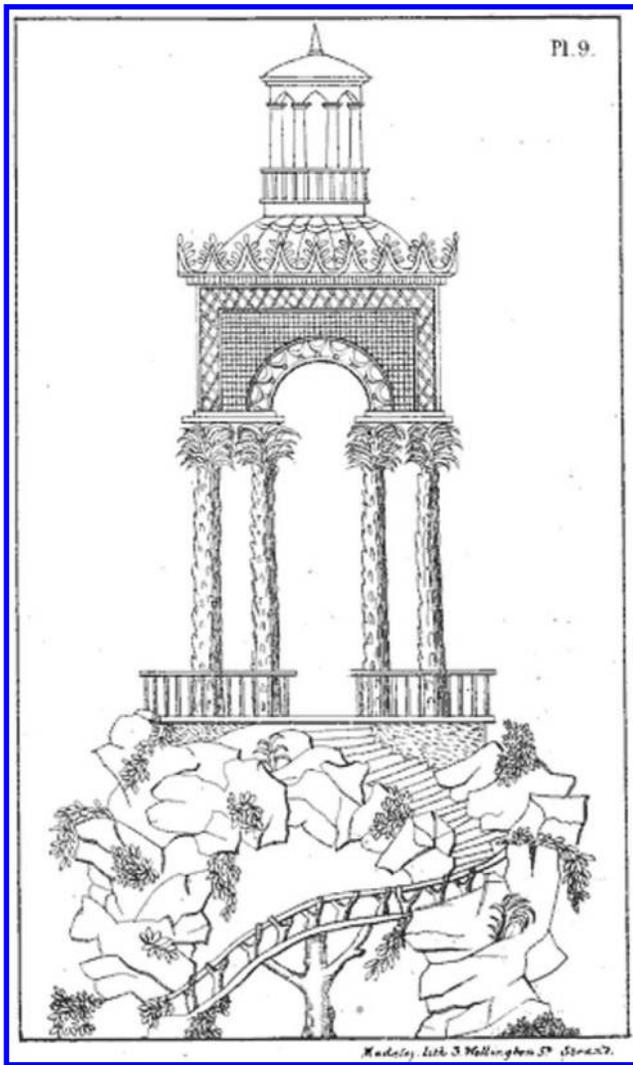


FIGURE 6: Drawing of a *pièce montée* called “A Parisian Arbor.” The base would have been constructed of rose-colored biscuit and the remainder of confectioner’s paste in bright colors.

IMAGE FROM MARIE-ANTONIN CARÊME, *LE PÂTISSIER ROYAL PARISIEN* (1815).

monuments antiques et modernes (1799), for example. Apart from a brief introduction and prefatory material, the book consists of engravings of pavilions, temples, ruins, and other models to be reproduced in gum paste or other materials.

The emphasis is clearly visual here, even if Carême later admits in *Le cuisinier parisien* (1828: 306) that “*pommes au riz*” (rice pudding molded into apple shapes) topped with meringue are preferable to architectural desserts: although the apples are less beautiful, “they are much more pleasant to eat.” These “apples” are not simply rice molds, however, but “*pommes au riz historiées*” shaped and decorated with colored flowers and fruit, sometimes shaped into pineapples or other forms.

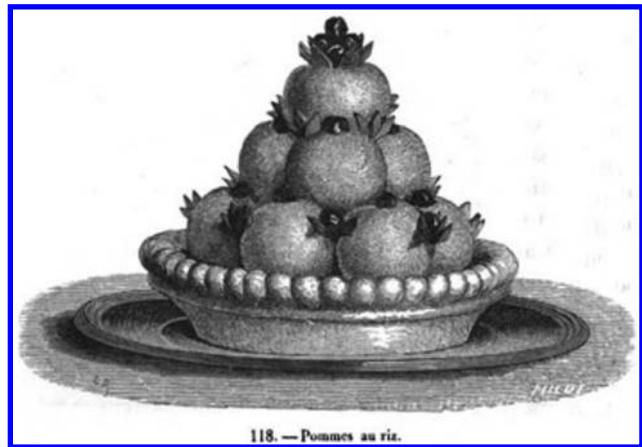


FIGURE 7: *Pommes au riz*.

IMAGE FROM GOUFFÉ, *LE LIVRE DE PÂTISSERIE* (1873).

But with his final cookbook, *L’art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle* (1833), Carême left behind an exclusively elite cuisine and sought to reach all French eaters.¹⁵ His earlier *pièces montées* with an eye to the glorious past, replicating the Greek and Roman forms and symbols embraced by Napoleon and reproduced on the finest French porcelain from Sèvres (founded in 1756 and frequently commissioned by the royal family and Napoleon), gave way to the more rational cuisine of his later cookbook, with concretely detailed recipes for jellies, pastry creams, beignets, and puddings. After Carême, bourgeois cuisine “evolved between the elaborate *haute cuisine* of official banquets and great restaurants, on the one hand, and traditional regional foodways, on the other” (Ferguson 2003: 46). Both high cuisine and familiar dishes became “essential pillars of the national character” after the Revolution as part of a constructed culinary and national identity, one that “transformed culinary discourse from an ideal realm of Coccagne . . . to the attainable realm of *la bonne chère* (fine dining)” (Davis 2011: 316). This attainable Republican philosophy of dining carried through directly into dessert, when fully edible and often individual pastries came into fashion.

Economic and political conditions forced a revision of culinary practices after the Revolution, as the ostentation of the court gave way to a simpler, restrained style. Rebecca Spang and Colin Jones (1999: 39) speak to the conceptual and material changes wrought by the Revolution and its aftermath, including the new perception of sugar as a subsistence item, the demand for which provoked riots in 1792 and 1793 and the Republican attempt to displace the metaphor of the *grand couvert* (the king’s ceremonial meal) with shared public banquets. The *grand couvert* and its demonstration of largesse

and power “no longer inspired awe, it instead provoked slight embarrassment” (Spang 2000: 97). It was replaced, at least symbolically, with the idea of a patriotic banquet: “unlike the king’s meal, which with every detail emphasized social difference, the patriotic banquet would create solidarity, melding rich and poor together into one gigantic family” (98). Similarly for dessert, pastry chefs began to abandon the speculative and symbolic focus of constructed desserts and offer “equal access” individual desserts, with names and common forms that created a shared history rather than a specialized, singular visual effect.

Well into the nineteenth century, Gouffé (1873: 219–21) offers instructions for a sugar cage to decorate prepared entremets, but many of his decorative desserts are edible, such as a beehive meringue cake with pistachio bees, and a “jambon de carême” (Lenten ham), a chocolate cream-filled cake shaped like a decorated ham (a “ham” that does not violate Lenten rules of abstinence from meat).

The nineteenth century heralded a change in status for *pâtisserie*, when it became nearly as important as standard cooking. In his introduction to the *Grand livre des pâtisseries*, Dubois (1883: ix) attests to the place of *pâtisserie* as “une soeur cadette” (a twin sister) to Cuisine, “but emancipated and free, with equal rights and equally legitimate claims.”¹⁶ Other nineteenth-century works devoted to pastry aside from books by Carême and Gouffé include Dubois’s *La pâtisserie d’aujourd’hui* (1894), and a section called “Le pâtissier moderne” in Gustave Garlin’s *Le cuisinier moderne* (1889). The *Grand livre des pâtisseries* features a number of recognizable desserts, including savarins, charlottes, a gâteau Saint-Honoré prepared exactly as it is now, and millefeuilles, although these last recipes use marzipan or génoise in place of the thin pastry of the modern-day millefeuille. Gouffé (1873: 288) notes that “éclair” is a new label for a pastry previously called “pain à la duchesse,” motivated perhaps by the desire to remove the aristocratic label from a common pastry.¹⁷ The macaron with a ganache filling, now enjoying its own renaissance, dates to the mid-nineteenth century as well, although almond cookies with a similar rounded shape were known much earlier. While the sugar statue “groupes” of figures described by Jarrin were obviously not repeated from banquet to banquet, the named pastries included in Dubois and subsequent books were democratic in their universal form, the same for all eaters across France in physical reality, in name, and in the stories that gave many of them symbolic resonance.

In the nineteenth century, chefs for elite, fashionable events continued to produce highly artistic *pièces montées* made of paste, meringue, or spun sugar, although they included more

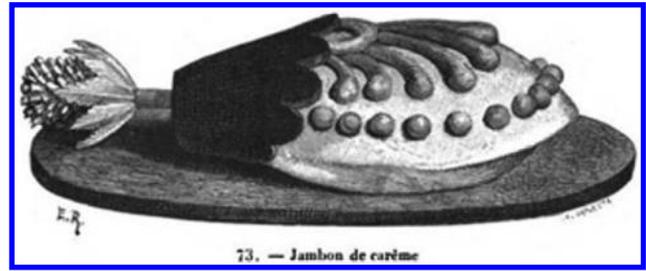


FIGURE 8: Lenten “ham” (jambon de carême) made of cake. IMAGE FROM GOUFFÉ, *LE LIVRE DE PATISSERIE* (1873).

pastries. In his *Grand livre*, Dubois draws a distinction between decorative desserts that are meant to be eaten and those that are prepared exclusively for show, but this shift certainly happened earlier in the century with Carême. The “entremets sucrés” (sweet dishes) or “entremets de douceur” (gentle dishes) in Dubois’s book should be decorated with a certain “coquetterie” but they remain edible (1883: 29). The “gros entremets” or “grosses pièces” (large dessert pieces), by contrast, are more ornamental than edible. According to Dubois, all *grosses pièces* should be made of edible materials but some would not be pleasant to eat, such as large meringues or charlottes. Others could be eaten but are not served to guests, as with the *croquebouches* and large nougats that are “never cut into, due to their construction that does not allow them to be easily portioned” (350).¹⁸ Anyone who has attempted to disassemble a *croquebouche* covered with spun sugar and hardened caramel understands this instruction. Although these preparations still belong to the dessert category, “they can only be presented as ornamental pieces” (350).¹⁹

Dubois also references deliberately ornamental constructions called “postiches,” imitations of edible desserts that can be preserved and reused. Like Jarrin, Dubois declares it more logical to substitute reusable ornamental pieces created out of cheaper, inedible materials for difficult and expensive edible constructions, testifying to the crossover into bourgeois households with more modest budgets. Additionally, the imitation desserts can be created well before an event, giving the pastry artist, now likely an independent artisan, more time to reflect on his art and refine the final product. Referring to similar practices in England, Sidney Mintz (1985: 93) notes that the substitution of paste-board constructions for sugar figures proves that the decorative function of sugar had trickled down to the nonaristocratic classes, who attempted to imitate royalty and “achieve analogous social effects at their festive tables” even if these sculptures were less impressively decadent. For Dubois (1883: 350), even clearly edible millefeuilles

and charlottes become “postiches” when served on a pedestal surrounded by delicate borders: “they lose, by this fact, their classification as edible pieces, and can only be included in the category of pieces that are not eaten.”²⁰ To serve the dessert eater, small analogs of these creations are served alongside the *grosses pièces*: individual charlottes, *choux*, or savarins that can be taken and eaten by guests “without the embarrassment” that would come with trying to serve oneself from an oversized *pièce montée*. The difference between Jarrin’s dessert displays and Dubois’s (and therefore the difference between the Revolution/Empire idea of dessert and that of the late nineteenth century) is the potential edibility of Dubois’s elements, even if they are designated as ornamental. In this way, the dessert components are conceptually closer to food, rendering the items themselves and the act of displaying them more accessible. While Jarrin’s *pièces montées* consisted of towers and figures, Dubois uses universal pastry forms, like the millefeuille or the *choux*, both recognizable and attainable outside of an elite banquet, at neighborhood pastry shops.

In terms of edible desserts, pastry superseded frozen desserts and fruit-based entremets in the nineteenth century partly due to refinement of baking and refrigeration equipment. Although wood-fired “Scotch” or brick ovens had been perfected and widely adopted for commercial baking in the early 1800s, gas ovens became available in France in the 1890s (Haden 2006: 234). Refrigeration kept butter at the proper temperature when mechanical refrigerators arrived in the 1850s: compression machines were patented in 1855 by American James Harrison and absorption machines in 1859 by Frenchman Ferdinand Carré.²¹ More importantly, the quality and availability of sugar improved. Sugar and sweet foods were marked as Parisian (and therefore upper class) in the early modern period, but became part of the popular diet in the late eighteenth century as an essential ingredient in workers’ morning café au lait (Spang 1999: 39). But cakes and pastries are hardly a matter of subsistence; the proliferation of dessert across classes depends on a contradiction between the rejection of the elite lifestyle and the attractiveness of its prestige, especially in terms of gastronomy. Alain Girard (1977: 515) shows that bourgeois cuisine in the eighteenth century was constructed both in opposition to and in imitation of its noble models, and that the proclaimed return to simplicity was in reality “the alibi of limited financial resources.”²² The desire for extravagant, if simplified, dishes (and dessert is by definition extravagantly inessential) remained in bourgeois cuisine of the eighteenth century and carried over into the following generation, when sugar creations were reinvested with symbolic meaning.

Sugar, as Mintz (1985: 186) has shown, is symbolically powerful and can be imbued with “subsidiary meanings.” Lower classes had better access to sugar in the nineteenth century because it was cheaper, but Mintz insists that price was not the only mediating factor: meaning and power also influenced consumption. In Mintz’s terms, the processes of “intensification”—the emulation of established uses of sugar by lower classes newly introduced to it—and “extensification”—new users attributing their own meaning to desserts—happened concurrently. According to Mintz’s description of extensification, “those in power may take charge of the availability of the new products, but the new users inform them with meaning” (152). The late eighteenth-century sugar riots testify to the accessibility of sugar as a commodity, but in terms of dessert, new users adopted the sweet course at the end of the meal as their socioeconomic superiors had, but gave edible forms of pastry new meaning. As the dessert course shifted from exclusively elite tables to bourgeois consumption, “high” desserts remained highly decorative in imitation of the wealthy classes’ decorative sugar displays, and “low” or middle-class desserts were first and foremost edible but still decorated, with stories rather than spun sugar, and thus textualized in name and origin. Following Girard, French dessert in the nineteenth century allowed the emergence of bourgeois forms from high-status cuisine while valorizing food traditions of the countryside, but in the case of dessert these forms were accompanied by creation stories that placed them (accurately or not) in the firmament of French cultural history so as to tie them to the Republic and not the wealthy individual banquet host where dessert previously resided. The representational value of nineteenth-century popular dessert forms—usually individual pastries—made them ripe for inclusion in literary works as symbols of a French national cuisine, a demonstration of the creation of new meaning for these sugary treats that were no longer embarrassingly royal.

In the French nineteenth-century novel, the *pièce montée* is a common feature of literary banquets, meant to convey the host’s wealth and the pastry chef’s skill.²³ But unlike Carême’s clearly aristocratic confections, these sugar sculptures are present on bourgeois tables and are at least partially consumed. At the wedding feast in *Madame Bovary* (1857), the three-tiered *pièce montée* elicits cries of delight from the guests, in the form of a castle with a gâteau de Savoie as the second story. After the guests admire the cake surrounded by lakes of jam, hazelnut boats, and an angel on a chocolate swing, “until evening, everyone ate” (31). The gâteau de Savoie first appears in La Varenne’s *Le pâtissier français*, essentially a sponge cake or ladyfingers laid in a mold.²⁴

In Italian, ladyfingers are named *savoirdi* after the Piedmont kingdom of Savoy; in French the name carries an attachment to the house of Savoie since the cake was supposedly created in the fourteenth century at the table of Amédée VI, count of Savoie, for his guest and feudal lord, Charles IV of Luxembourg (Sender 2003: 52). Both Menon and Massialot include recipes for “biscuit de Savoie” in their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works, but the *gâteau de Savoie* begins to appear in literary references only in the early nineteenth century.²⁵ The *gâteau de Savoie* is visually symbolic more than it is rich with flavor, given its simple ingredients; in its formal form it is shaped in a fluted or decorative mold and it was widely used in *pièces montées* of the nineteenth century. In some literary references, possibly because of this decorative function, it evokes architectural excess: Victor Hugo in *Notre Dame de Paris* (1832: 160) calls the “modern” church of Sainte-Geneviève “surely the most beautiful Savoie cake that has ever been made out of stone”²⁶ and Guy de Maupassant in *Contes et nouvelles* (1880: 307) uses “*gâteau de Savoie*” to describe a building that has a hodgepodge of styles and purposes: “a highly complicated style, that would drive a classical architect mad, but something fantastical and beautiful nonetheless.”²⁷ In Emile Zola’s *L’assommoir* (1877: 583), the dessert is less refined but has the same intended effect as a spectacle: “there was a Savoy cake in the shape of a church with a melon dome; and on the dome an artificial rose was affixed, near which floated a silver butterfly on the end of a wire.”²⁸ In this case, the artificial decorations contrast with the edible and recognizable (even homely) *gâteau de Savoie*, a distinct departure from the excessively showy sugar creations of the previous century that were untouchable. The Savoy cake is importantly accessible both as food and as metaphor.

The baba or baba *au rhum* serves as an example of French appropriation in pastry: it is French in name but not in origin. In the generally accepted story, the exiled Polish king Stanislas Leszczyński found the traditional *kugelhof* (or *kouglof*) too dry and soaked it in rum, naming the resulting dish after a favorite literary character, Ali Baba of the *Thousand and One Nights* (Larousse 2000: 162). Its transformation from a Polish pastry to a French one depended on a new name (*kouglof* became baba) and a change of place in the meal. The Alsatian *kouglof* is not a dessert but a breakfast pastry or an accompaniment to a tasting of fine Alsatian wines.²⁹ In its French form in literary texts, imbued with extensified meaning, the baba is a sumptuous dessert that evokes moments of plenty. In Denis Diderot’s *Lettres à Sophie Volland* (1774) it is part of the feasts the narrator consumes daily, a copious list of rich food. J-K Huysmans creates a similar scene in *Les soeurs*

Vatard (1879: 135–36) with a family “in ecstasy in front of a pastry shop” who stuff themselves with an endless cascade of éclairs, Saint-Honoré, brioches, and babas. The simplicity of the symbolism of the baba—a soft, sweet cake that represents permissible decadence—facilitates its appearance in literary works. The baba resonates in literary texts more often than the nearly identical *kouglof*, because its name (derived from the Russian word for old woman or grandmother) evokes directly the *cuisine de la grand-mère*, important for its incorporation into French bourgeois dessert. The pastry completes its transformation into a French dish in the 1987 film *Babette’s Feast* (dir., Gabriel Axel) at the end of a triumphant French meal served to ascetic Danish diners by an accomplished chef, a film that Jean-Pierre Poulain (2002: 212) calls “one of the most eloquent translations of what taste means in French culture.” Here the formerly Polish cake is incorporated into a carefully constructed French meal as a dessert, this time part of fine dining but still appreciated by middle-class diners, and representative of France abroad. The baba had already acquired a Parisian pedigree,³⁰ required of all durable iconic desserts, and in the mid-nineteenth century the popularity of the baba inspired similar desserts including the “brillat-savarin” or “savarin” (a baba without raisins garnished with whipped cream and fruit) named after another major figure in French gastronomy and one of the proudest defenders of French gourmandise, Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, author of *Physiologie du goût* (1825).

As the baba and the *gâteau de Savoie* demonstrate, the symbolism of dessert in the nineteenth century shifted to consumable romanticism, artisanal skill, and French nationalism with the dissemination of origin stories for these desserts and their attached names. Accessibility to sugar for lower classes allowed a connection between the working classes (the artisans of later dessert myths like the tarte Tatin or the Saint-Honoré) and symbolic consumption: it became “an inexpensive good that continued to seem like a luxury, imparting an aura of privilege to those who served it and to whom it was served” (Mintz 1985: 173). French authors of the nineteenth century make reference to a litany of desserts, but unlike previous accounts of sugar sculptures that could be eaten but are meant to be ornamental, these sweets are usually individual pastries meant to be consumed and recognizable by name. Emile Zola’s *Le ventre de Paris* (1873: 779), for example, paints a food portrait of Paris that includes a glimpse through the window of a typical *boulangerie-pâtisserie*: a character gazes longingly at “almond cakes, Saint-Honoré, savarins, flans, fruit tarts, platters of baba, éclairs, cream puffs,” along with jars of biscuits, macarons, and madeleines. When economic access, not status, determined the ability to consume

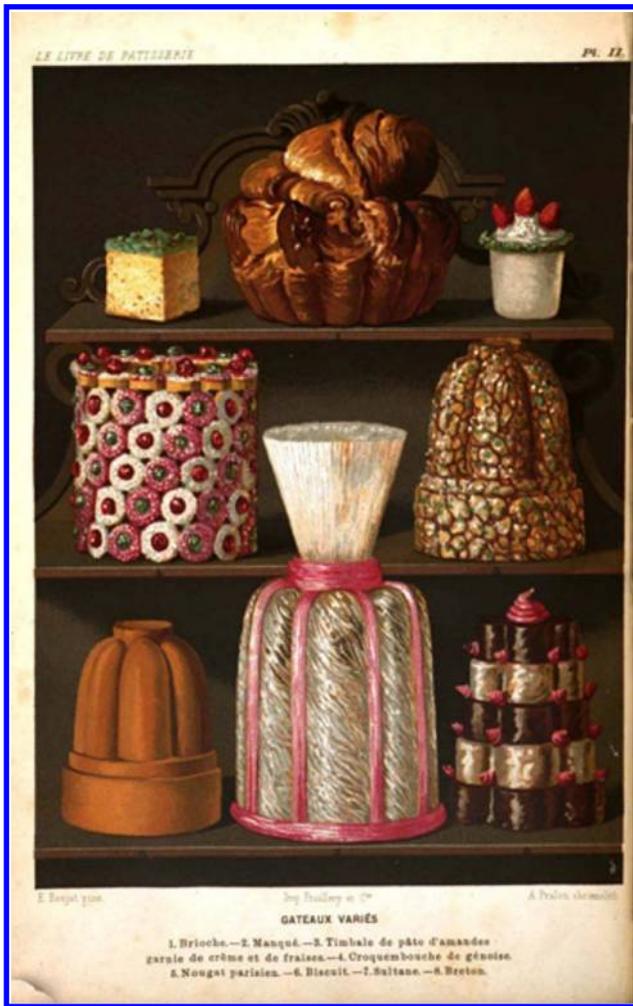


FIGURE 9: Various desserts, including a croquembouche of sponge cake (second row, left), plain cake (bottom row, left), and a “Sultane” (bottom row, center).

IMAGE FROM GOUFFÉ, *LE LIVRE DE PÂTISSERIE* (1873).

sugar, the transformation from seeing to seeing-and-tasting dessert became possible for the middle and lower classes.

The gâteau Saint-Honoré in Zola’s list, with the evocative Parisian name, has been so institutionalized as to be accepted as a common noun (le Saint-Honoré). Supposedly named for the patron saint of bakers, it consists of a circle of *choux* pastry with a crown of mini-*choux*, caramel, and whipped cream. The dessert is garnished with Chantilly cream, or more traditionally *crème Chiboust* (a mixture of pastry cream and beaten egg whites), supposedly named after the famous nineteenth-century pastry chef. The *Larousse gastronomique* (2000: 584) identifies Chiboust as a *pâtissier* on the rue Saint-Honoré in Paris who invented the gâteau Saint-Honoré in 1846, “thus giving tribute both to his neighborhood and to the patron saint of bakers and pastry chefs.” Chantilly cream

is usually attributed to François Vatel, maître d’hôtel to the Prince of Condé, who was charged with coordinating the meals and entertainment for Louis XIV’s visit to the prince’s château in Chantilly. In a letter from 1671, Madame de Sévigné (1978: 378) reports that Vatel took his own life when he was told that the fish would not arrive in time for the dinner planned that night. However, the name Chantilly is not associated with sweetened whipped cream preparations until the mid-eighteenth century, and then not consistently. Emy (1768: 220), for one, calls it “glace de crème naturelle à la Gentilly.” The Saint-Honoré pastry’s name is more definitive, taken from the rue Saint-Honoré, home to numerous pastry shops in the nineteenth century. The street is also emblematic of the city’s post-Revolutionary era, when the populist center of gravity shifted west, away from the Île de la Cité, past the Louvre, to the Place de la Concorde and the Champs-Élysées. The Saint-Honoré as a dessert represents this shift as well, from fanciful elite cuisine to grounded, identifiable preparations. The growth and codification of bourgeois cuisine went hand in hand with the naming of dishes after historical places and figures, a trend that exploded in the nineteenth century.³¹ A representative example, the Saint-Honoré is an accessible dessert that is textualized by name and ingredients, recalling populist history (the nineteenth-century rue Saint-Honoré) and French skill (Chiboust and Vatel).

The Paris-Brest is a twentieth-century example of a recognizable named dessert. Created in 1910 by Louis Durand, pastry chef at Maisons-Laffitte in Paris, it consists of a crown of *choux* dough filled with pastry cream, almonds, and praline, and is shaped like a bike tire to commemorate the Paris-Brest cycle race (begun in 1891, before the advent of the Tour de France). When this dessert is prepared with *crème Chiboust* and without almonds, it becomes a Paris-Nice. The moniker “Paris-Brest” designates the same pastry for every French eater, no matter his or her regional affiliation, age, or class, giving it the unequivocal stamp of universality. It is a demonstration of the repositioning of dessert in a bourgeois context, as it is not a simplification of an earlier elite dish and its visual form is truly mundane, the imitation of a rubber tire. Like the Saint-Honoré, it evokes national pride and a connection to Paris but has a simple, easily replicated recipe. In the twentieth century, even the Elysée palace turned away from showy desserts to adopt bourgeois forms of pastry: President François Mitterrand, “who would have eaten foie gras off of the head of a person with fleas, abolished frozen desserts, obligatory since 1870, to replace them with pastries: mille-feuille, charlotte, Paris-Brest” (Festaëts 2008: 76). The film *Haute Cuisine* (2012), a semi-fictionalized account of Danièle

Delpuech's tenure as Mitterrand's private chef at the Elysée, portrays a président who requests "une cuisine simple" without excess decoration. He specifically decries desserts that are overembellished ("tarabiscotés"), and seeks instead to "rediscover the taste of food, things that are true, my grandmother's cooking," in short, "le meilleur de la France." Taking into account Mitterrand's bourgeois upbringing as an influence, the président's preferences also reflect the elevation of pastry over higher-status decorative desserts, especially pastries with well-known names and accepted stories (written or not).

The story of tarte Tatin depends on a legend of French culinary innovation and its dissemination in print. In 1898 Caroline and Stéphanie Tatin, chef-owners of a restaurant in Lamotte-Beuvron in central France, either made an apple pie without a crust or accidentally turned a pie upside-down after baking it, creating a layer of caramelized apples on a short-pastry crust. The dessert first became a signature item in their restaurant and was later a feature at Maxim's in Paris in the early twentieth century. It took the authority of Curnonsky (Maurice Edmond Sailland), a Parisian food critic, to bring the dessert to national prominence in 1926. This iconic dessert therefore belongs both to the humble countryside of provincial France and to the "high" food culture space of Paris. This duality is part of its iconic character: that it is adaptable to high and low cuisine and "thinkable" at both levels. The Confrérie des Lichonneux (Brotherhood of Lovers, or more literally, Lickers) of Tarte Tatin continues a fervent defense of the tarte Tatin since its inception in 1901, seeking to "condemn heretics" who follow nonstandard recipes, so that the dessert will remain unchanged.³² Its members believe that the Tatin sisters created the tart deliberately in a flash of genius, rejecting the story of a kitchen mishap. The creation story seems firmly implanted in French memory, but Patricia Wells (1985: n.p.) suggests that the tarte Tatin existed in French country cooking as the "tarte renversée" long before the Tatin sisters invented it, and that only the name is new. The name codifies and textualizes the dessert and confers a recognizable French identity on what is a simple dish of apples, sugar, butter and pastry, as does Curnonsky's written endorsement, vital to the diffusion of the dessert across France.

Mennell (1996: 162) identifies three sources of inspiration for new dishes by elite chefs in the twentieth century: previous models from established predecessors; transformations of peasant dishes; and most notably for desserts like peach Melba and crêpes Suzette (and arguably tarte Tatin), original creations that swiftly become generalized, having "passed so thoroughly into the public domain that there is only speculation about who invented it, when, and where." Modern

dessert forms are rarely descended from previous dishes because the history of dessert is so short, and dessert itself defies the simplifying trajectory of nouvelle cuisine, remaining a product of excess and pleasure as it is by definition outside the nutritionally important phase of the meal. Occasionally, or so the stories would have it, these dishes are adopted from the cuisine of the people, but more often desserts belong to the third category and speculation about their creation is necessary because French dessert grew out of a demonstrative tradition and these stories become their "decoration."

Textuality is important to the symbolism of tarte Tatin, but the dessert has little visual or decorative resonance in its "low" context. In contrast, Marcel Proust's literary representations of dessert demonstrate that the tension between spectacle and consumption remains in the twentieth century on elite tables, in part because these decorative desserts are now intended for consumption, unlike the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century models. In *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (1918), elaborate chocolate cakes, *pièces montées*-turned-edible, inspire indigestion in Marcel and gluttony in Gilberte. The dessert served with tea at the Swann's house is a "gâteau architectural" with imposing ramparts and crenellations of chocolate and surrounded by petits fours, displayed in a dining room "as dark as the interior of an Asian temple painted by Rembrandt" (506). Marcel feels keenly the impenetrability of this scene and this castle-cake; Gilberte follows her appetites, tears down the pastry walls, and serves a paralyzed Marcel part of the "monument écroulé" (collapsed edifice), which he will digest only with difficulty. As Marcel seeks to maintain order, shocked at the wanton dismantling of the *pièce montée*, Gilberte rearranges the dining room chairs "to erase the sense of formality even further" and eats petits fours at will. The casual state of Gilberte's consumption puts her at odds with Marcel's desire to maintain a museum-like tranquility in this ritual: he notes that she "nibbled" (*grignotait*) the chocolates, ate this formal dessert as a snack ("les goûters de Gilberte"), and that Mme Swann called the elaborate pastry simply "du cake" (507). Marcel embraces the past and wants to retain the fading notion of dessert as spectacle, but Gilberte inhabits the consumption-oriented, taste-centered modern space. He wants only to see dessert but she will admire and then eat it.

In another section of the novel, Albertine's reverie on ices in *La prisonnière* (1922) commemorates the older version of dessert in form and symbol. Here Proust's female counterpart imagines ice cream desserts, like those out of fashion at the Elysée palace, as monuments: "at the Ritz hotel I fear you will find Vendôme columns of ice cream, chocolate or raspberry ice cream" (130). Raspberry obelisks, lemon ice mountains,

icy avalanches, and strawberry churches are all melted or swallowed by Albertine. Her description, unlike Gilberte's, has a menacing air and she uses a vocabulary of liquefying rather than ingestion—"désalterer" (to quench thirst), "faire fondre" (to melt). The context here is unquestionably elite dessert, situated at the Ritz and glorifying outdated iced desserts; logically, then, these are sweets for seeing, not for eating. And in fact these frozen desserts are entirely for show since they are imagined: Marcel and Albertine are only speaking of *glaces*, not eating them.

In the present day a primary emphasis on appearance in dessert remains only in professional kitchens, as the competition for the *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* in pastry demonstrates. Professional chefs must complete an entire buffet of desserts to exacting standards in order to earn the coveted title of MOF.³³ The design elements include a showpiece made entirely of melted, blown, and spun sugar prepared prior to the competition and not meant to be consumed, a *pièce montée* following a given year's theme fabricated from delicate sugar elements (flowers, butterflies, ribbons, figures), lollipops, an array of chocolates, and a selection of mini pastries. The tension of the competition—the "do-or-die" aspect—comes from the fragility of these creations since the chefs must create under time pressure and are subject to weather variations (heat, humidity), but also since part of the competition involves transporting these unwieldy and delicate sculptures through doorways, in and out of storage areas, up and down staircases, and into the "buffet room." The chefs who can survive such rigorous expectations are seen as warriors, even if their battle involves displays of fanciful decorations, tacky color combinations, and profuse tears when the sculptures collapse into shards.

There is a tasting element to the competition, but it holds less import than the architectural technique, since the judging culminates with a visual inspection of the chef's individual buffet table. This emphasis on the visual, a curious relic of the early nineteenth century, serves a purpose: requiring chefs to maintain proficiency in these outmoded techniques keeps dessert anchored in its past so that it can venture into new territory without fear that gastronomic tradition will be lost. High-end exceptions occasionally cause a stir, like the recent "éclair aquatique" from Fauchon with mint-flavored blue and green icing, but Philippe Conticini, a renowned Parisian pastry chef, affirms that in the modern conception of dessert taste comes first: "That which tastes good by definition looks good. The opposite, alas, is not always true" (Michot 2006: n.p.). Modern "textual" desserts require a connection to the past, invented or real, but they also depend on edibility, like the earliest entremets in the French canon. Pastries that are

simply "good to see," such as the inedible but awe-inspiring sugar creations of the early nineteenth century, are certainly representational markers of French art and skill but do not belong to the modern dessert course because they address only one sense.

The *chou* pastry—the foundational element of the Saint-Honoré, Paris-Brest, profiteroles, croquembouche, and éclair—has recently come back into favor in restaurants and as street food, with the opening of an "Atelier des choux" (Choux Workshop) for custom-made cream puffs on the rue du Bac in Paris, across the Pont Royal from the rue Saint-Honoré where Parisian dessert has its roots (Briet 2010: 82). The sweet course in France is still influenced by taste and visual appeal; traditional forms may be making a comeback, but they continue to benefit from the "decoration" of a fashionable address or a celebrity endorsement. The aristocratic show of ornamental pieces provided a justification for dessert's existence at table—a demonstration of wealth and visual pleasure, a sort of entertainment. To narrate and explicate modern dessert, open to all eaters, origin stories replace the embellishment and desserts are "historiés" with tales of French inventiveness and culinary talent to bring them down to street level. Individual babas and Paris-Brest pastries are generalized, attainable, and Republican. But there remains a tension between the attraction of elite ways of eating (a decadence to which dessert still belongs) and rejection of this decadence in favor of democratic accessibility, or one éclair for all. While the extensified meaning of these sweet treats has distanced them from their elite origins, dessert forms retain an element of show and a hint of extravagance as part of their appeal. Arrayed like jewels in a pâtisserie window, these gastronomic icons are still fashionably dressed even if they are consumable. French dessert is therefore a contradiction in itself, both ordinary and decadent, the ultimate guilty pleasure. ☉

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the anonymous readers of an earlier draft of this article for their many valuable suggestions, particularly with regard to the eighteenth-century political context and visual culture.

NOTES

1. See pp. 21–22, 34–35. See Barbara Wheaton (1996: 32–34) on the importance of Casteau's cookbook as an early source for dessert recipes.
2. This work was originally published anonymously but is now attributed to La Varenne.

3. All translations from the French are mine.
4. Dubois's work is not the sole sweets-only confectioner's cookbook, but it is the most prominent among the French publications in this timeframe.
5. "Il faut toujours changer de serviettes au dessert, et de nape autant qu'on le peut . . . parce que ce premier linge estant imbibé de saulces, et ayant reçu la fumée des viandes sentiroit encore ce goust de galimafrée, qui fait mal-aisément union avec la délicatesse, et la propreté d'un dessert, et qui veut estre mangé bien moins goinfrement que les services précédents."
6. "Dessert," *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 1st ed. (Paris, 1694). A number of sources confirm that "dessert" was considered a vulgar, bourgeois term in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772: 4.892). See also Flandrin (2000: 362).
7. "Dessert," *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1762) and Jean-François Féraud, 1787–1788, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (Marseille: Mossy). Féraud additionally defines "desserte" as the leftovers from a banquet that were normally given to the poor.
8. "Dessert," *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 6th ed. (Paris, 1835).
9. "C'est le fruit et les confitures, dont on se dispensera de parler parce que c'est une affaire d'officier plutôt que de cuisinier."
10. "Après avoir traité de tout ce qui peut donner de la satisfaction au goût . . ."
11. "Ces pyramides érigées avec plus de travail et d'industrie que de goût et d'élégance . . ." and "cet amas confus de fruits où il éclatait plus de profusion que d'intelligence et de délicatesse."
12. Sidney Mintz (1985: 89–90) traces the appearance of "subtleties"—sculptures made from marzipan—to the thirteenth century in France, and discusses their use in fifteenth-century England at royal banquets as a pretty and edible way to display the sovereign's power. However, constructions made entirely of sugar were produced beginning in the sixteenth century, and these could hardly have been pleasurable to eat. These table decorations, called *trionfi* in Italian, are referred to as "court art" by K. J. Watson (1978, "Sugar Sculpture for Grand Ducal Weddings from the Giambologna Workshop," *Connoisseur* 199[799]: 20–26), and were replaced by porcelain in the early eighteenth century (cited in Mintz 1985: 242n40). Turning the concept of the "subtlety" on its head, in 2014 artist Kara E. Walker "confected" an enormous sculpture of a sphinx-turned-mammy out of bleached sugar at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, New York. Her work, entitled "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby," uses as its medium the very product that enabled the oppression and enslavement of the black laborer it represents.
13. "[Cet art peut] exécuter en sucre toutes sortes de desseins, de plans, de figures, & même des morceaux d'architecture considérables."
14. For a concise comparison of these two modes of cuisine, see Hayagreeva Rao et al. (2003: 801, 807).
15. "I would like every citizen in our beautiful France to be able to eat delicious food." Quoted in Ferguson (2003: 42).
16. ". . . mais émancipée et libre, avec des droits égaux et des prétentions aussi légitimes."
17. Littré dates the first use of éclair for an elongated pastry to 1864, so called because it is eaten quickly, like a flash of lightning; this is the most widely accepted etymology of the term.
18. "Ils ne sont jamais entamés, en raison de leur composition qui ne permet pas de les distribuer aisément."
19. "Ils ne peuvent être servis qu'à titre de pièces ornementales."
20. "Elles perdent par ce fait, le titre des pièces mangeables, et ne peuvent être comprises que dans cette catégorie des pièces qui ne mangent pas."
21. Maxime Duminil, n.d., "A Brief History of Refrigeration," Institut International du Froid, www.iifir.org. Other technological advances in pastry-making, both in equipment and technique, merit further exploration but are outside the scope of this article.
22. "La cuisine 'bourgeoise' va de l'avant, s'affirme contre les modes nobiliaires tout en les récupérant. Cuisine de compromis, moins coûteuse: une mythique 'simplicité de nos pères' est l'alibi d'une capacité financière limitée."
23. See Karin Becker, "Le sucre et les sucreries dans le roman français du XIXe siècle," in *Du sucre: Le sucre dans la littérature* (Biarritz: Atlantica, 2007), 103–16.
24. In these early references, *biscuit* and *gâteau* de Savoie are used interchangeably; contemporary scholars hold that *biscuit de Savoie* is a more recent term for the dessert, replacing *gâteau* but with no difference in the recipe. When used as a term for cake, *biscuit* is singular.
25. The earliest reference I found appears in Etienne de Jouy, *L'hermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin* (1812; reprint, Paris: Pillet, 1817: 265).
26. "Certainement le plus beau gâteau de Savoie qu'on ait jamais fait en pierre."
27. "Un style supérieurement compliqué, à rendre fou un architecte classique, quelque chose de fantastique et de joli cependant."
28. "Il y avait un gâteau de Savoie, en forme de temple, avec un dôme à côtes de melon; et, sur le dôme, se trouvait plantée une rose artificielle, près de laquelle se balançait un papillon en papier d'argent, au bout d'un fil de fer."
29. See Sharon Hudgins, "Alsatian Kugelhupf: A Cake for All Seasons," *Gastronomica* 10(4): 62–66. In a deliberate show of nationalism, the foreign character of the dessert is retained in Carême's *Le pâtissier royal parisien* in which the cake is called "baba polonais" and is followed by a recipe for "kouglof à l'allemande." Gouffé (1873: 40) makes a similar distinction between French and foreign babas in *Le livre de pâtisserie*, noting that the "baba polonais" is different from the "baba moderne" because the latter contains less butter, but also because "in the past one had the good taste to serve Polish baba with sweet wines," not as a sweet pastry to be eaten on its own.
30. The pastry chef Sthorer created a Parisian following for baba with a perfumed sugar syrup at his shop on the rue Montorgueil in the eighteenth century (Poulain and Neirinck 2004: 158).
31. In Carême's *L'art de la cuisine* 808 of 1347 recipes (60 percent) are named for a well-known figure, compared to 10 percent of Massialot's recipes in *Le cuisinier royal et bourgeois* and 14.5 percent of Menon's *La cuisinière bourgeoise* (Poulain and Neirinck 2004: 67).
32. Confrérie des Lichonneux de Tarte Tatin, "Histoire des Lichonneux," *Lichonneux de Tarte Tatin*, www.lichonneux-de-tarte-tatin.over-blog.com.
33. The competition is featured in the documentary film *Kings of Pastry* (dirs. Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker, 2009).

REFERENCES

- Adams, Stephen. 2007. "Sèvres Porcelain and the Articulation of Imperial Identity in Napoleonic France." *Journal of Design History* 20(3): 183–204.
- Albala, Ken. 2007. *The Banquet: Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Barbier, Nina, and Emmanuel Perret, 1997. *Petit traité d'ethno-pâtisserie*. Paris: JC Lattès.
- Briet, Marie-Odile. 2010. "Trop chou!" *L'Express* 3073, May 26.
- Carême, Marie-Antonin. 1815. *Le pâtissier pittoresque*. Paris: Firmin Didot.
- . 1815. *Le pâtissier royal parisien*. Reprint, London: Mason, 1834.

- . 1828. *Le cuisinier parisien*. Paris: Bossange.
- Casteau, Lancelot de. 1604. *Ouverture de cuisine*. Liège, n.p.
- Davis, Jennifer J. 2011. "To Make a Revolutionary Cuisine: Gender and Politics in French Kitchens, 1789–1815." *Gender and History* 23(2): 301–20.
- Day, Ivan. 1999. "Sculpture for the Eighteenth-Century Garden Dessert." In *Food in the Arts: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, 1998*, ed. Harlan Walker. Devon, UK: Prospect.
- Diderot, Denis, and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, eds. 1751–1772. *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.* ed. Robert Morrissey. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2013 Edition).
- Dubois, Urbain. 1883. *Grand livre des pâtisseries et des confiseurs*, 2 vols. Paris: Dentu.
- L'Ecole parfaite des officiers de bouche*. 1713. 9th ed. Paris: Ribou.
- Emy. 1768. *L'art de bien faire les glaces d'office*. Paris: Le Clerc.
- Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. 2003. "Writing Out of the Kitchen: Carême and the Invention of French Cuisine." *Gastronomica* 3(3): 40–51.
- . 2004. *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Festraëts, Marion. 2008. "Les cuisines de l'Élysée: Calmes plats." *L'Express*, 2979.7.
- Fischler, Claude. 1989. *L'omnivore*, 2nd ed. Paris: Odile Jacob.
- Flandrin, Jean-Louis. 2000. "The Early Modern Period." In *Food: A Culinary History*, ed. Albert Sonnenfeld. New York: Penguin.
- . 2007. *Arranging the Meal: A History of Table Service in France*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Flaubert, Gustave. 1857. *Madame Bovary*. Reprint, Paris: Belles Lettres, 1945.
- Gilliers, Joseph. 1751. *Le cannaméliste français*. Nancy: Chez l'auteur.
- Girard, Alain. 1977. "Le triomphe de 'La cuisinière bourgeoise': Livres culinaires, cuisine et société en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles." *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 24(4): 497–523.
- Gouffé, Jules. 1873. *Le livre de pâtisserie*. Paris: Hachette.
- Haden, Roger. 2006. "History in the Baking: Authenticity and the Legacy of the Scotch Oven." In *Authenticity in the Kitchen: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2005*, ed. Richard Hosking. Blackawton, UK: Prospect.
- Haute Cuisine (Les Saveurs du palais)*. 2012. Dir., Christian Vincent.
- Hugo, Victor. 1832. *Notre Dame de Paris*. Reprint, Paris: Garnier, 1959.
- Huysmans, J.-K. 1879. *Les soeurs Vatar*. Reprint, Paris: Cres, 1928.
- Hyman, Mary. 1992. "Les 'menues choses qui ne sont de nécessité': Les confitures et la table." In *Du manuscrit à la table: Essais sur la cuisine au Moyen Âge*, ed. Carole Lambert. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Hyman, Philip, and Mary Hyman. 2000. "Printing the Kitchen: French Cookbooks 1480–1800." In *Food: A Culinary History*, ed. Albert Sonnenfeld. New York: Penguin.
- Jarrin, William (Guglielmo). 1820. *The Italian Confectioner*. London: John Harding.
- LSR. 1674. *L'art de bien traiter*. Paris: Jean Du Puis.
- La Chapelle, Vincent. 1742. *Le cuisinier moderne*, 2nd ed. La Haye: Chez l'auteur.
- La Varenne, François. 1659. *Le cuisinier français*. 8th ed. Paris: n.p.
- . 1653. *Le pâtissier français*. Paris: Jean Gaillard.
- Larousse gastronomique*. 2000. Paris: Larousse.
- Leschziner, Vanina. 2006. "Epistemic Foundations of Cuisine: A Socio-Cognitive Study of the Configuration of Cuisine in Historical Perspective." *Theory and Society* 35(4): 421–43.
- Marin, François. 1739. *Les dons de Comus*. Paris: Pierre David.
- Massialot, François. 1691. *Le cuisinier royal et bourgeois*. Reprint, Paris: Claude Prudhomme, 1705.
- . 1698. *Nouvelle instruction pour les confitures*. Paris: De Sercy.
- Maupassant, Guy de. 1880. "Les dimanches d'un bourgeois de Paris." In *Contes et nouvelles*. Reprint, Paris: A. Michel, 1960.
- Mennell, Stephen, ed. 1981. *Lettre d'un pâtissier anglais et autres contributions à une polémique gastronomique du XVIIIe siècle*. Exeter: University of Exeter.
- . 1996. *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Menon. 1742. *La nouvelle cuisine: Continuation au Nouveau traité de la cuisine*. Paris: J. Saugrain.
- . 1750. *La science du maître d'hôtel confiseur*. Paris: Paulus du Mesnil.
- Michot, Alexandra. 2006. "La pâtisserie se donne en spectacle." *Le Figaro*, June 5.
- Mercier, Louis-Sébastien. 1783. *Tableau de Paris*, vol. 5. Amsterdam: n.p.
- Mintz, Sidney. 1985. *Sweetness and Power*. New York: Penguin.
- Poulain, Jean-Pierre. 2002. *Sociologies de l'alimentation*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Poulain, Jean-Pierre, and Edmond Neirinck. 2004. *Histoire de la cuisine et des cuisiniers*, 5th ed. Paris: Jacques Lanore.
- Proust, Marcel. 1918. *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*. Reprint, Paris: Gallimard, 1962.
- . 1922. *La prisonnière*. Reprint, Paris: Gallimard, 1961.
- Rao, Hayagreeva, Philippe Monin, and Rodolphe Durand. 2003. "Institutional Change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle Cuisine as an Identity Movement in French Gastronomy." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(4): 795–843.
- Scully, Terence. 1995. *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press.
- Scully, D. Eleanor, Terence Scully, and J. David Scully. 2002. *Early French Cookery: Sources, History, Original Recipes and Modern Adaptations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Sender, S. G., and Marcel Derrien. 2003. *La grande histoire de la pâtisserie-confiserie française*. Geneva: Minerva.
- Sévigné, Marie-Rabutin de Chantal de. 1978. "Dimanche 26 avril 1671." In *Correspondance T. 1*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Spang, Rebecca. 2000. *The Invention of the Restaurant*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Spang, Rebecca, and Colin Jones. 1999. "Sans-culottes, sans café, sans tabac: Shifting Realms of Necessity and Luxury in Eighteenth-C France." In *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650–1850*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Wells, Patricia. 1985. "Fare of the Country: As French as Tarte Tatin." *New York Times*, March 24.
- Wheaton, Barbara. 1996. *Savoring the Past*. New York: Touchstone.
- Zola, Emile. 1873. *Le ventre de Paris*. Reprint, Paris: Gallimard, 1963.
- . 1877. *L'assommoir*. Reprint, Paris: Gallimard, 1961.