

# Using cookbooks as historical sources: obstacles and challenges

Nathalie Parys PhD Candidate, FOST  
*Eating Words: Text, Image, Food*  
Cambridge, Centre for Material Texts



Vrije Universiteit Brussel

# Content

1. Accountability
2. Defining and categorising
3. Finding and selecting
4. Things to take into account
5. Processing

# 1. Accountability

## ➤ 1970s-1980s: Cultural Turn

### ➤ 1977

➤ Conference on ethnological food research

➤ Alain Girard : *le livre de cuisine encore peu sollicité, est une source possible pour une histoire de l'alimentation*

# 1. Accountability

- 1980s-1990s:
  - Medievalists (Lambert, Laurioux)
  - Early modern Europe (Flandrin, Hyman & Hyman)
  - European centered

# 1. Accountability

- Late 1990s-2000s
  - Various aspects of discourse
  - Attention to non-European cookbooks
  - 19<sup>th</sup>-&20<sup>th</sup>-centuries

# 1. Accountability

- Current research:
  - Construction of cuisine in French, Belgian and Dutch 19<sup>th</sup>-century cookbooks

# 1. Accountability

- Little attention to the practical implementation of cookbooks in research

## 2. Defining and categorising 'the cookbook'

- Definition determined by research topic and question
- Books solely containing information on food and food preparation

## 2. Defining and categorising 'the cookbook'

- Global image of cuisine
- Specialized cookbooks
  - Theme
  - Region
  - Social grouping

# 3. Finding and selecting

- Bibliographies for 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>-c.
- Low Countries
  - *Bibliotheca Gastronomica*
- France
  - *Bibliographie Gastronomique* (Vicaire)
- Other

# 3. Finding and selecting

- Selection determined by research question
  - Selection by title
  - Longitudinal study
  - Cross section
  - Combination

## 4. Things to take into account

- Historical reality vs. discourse
- Implied audience
- Authorship

# 5. Processing

- Content analysis
  - Research question
  - Quantitative
  - Qualitative

# 5. Processing

## ➤ Quantitative

- Descriptive analysis
- To delineate patterns
- Statistical overview of the presence of certain characteristics

# 5. Processing

## ➤ Qualitative

- Interpretative analysis
- Questions on imaging
- Presence of underlying meanings (norms, values)

# 5. Processing

## ➤ Applied to:

### ➤ Recipe categories

➤ Soups, sauces, meats, vegetables, sweets,...

### ➤ Recipe titles

➤ Geographical connotations (regional, national, international)

➤ Attributions on health, frugality, novelty,...

### ➤ Comments

➤ On cost, difficulty, variation, serving,...

## 6. Concluding remarks

- Cookbooks defined as solely containing information in food and food preparation
- Category based on class

## 6. Concluding remarks

- Historic reality vs discourse
- Qualitative and quantitative content analysis



Thank you for your attention!