

Magdalena Dobromila Rettigová and her legacy

Every country has its **culinary tradition** and typical cuisine. Family and national recipes are passed on from generation to generation similarly as folklore stories. These recipes contribute largely to the national identity and are treasured accordingly. As well as folklore tales have their collectors, so do **traditional recipes**; and as well as collectors of tales, the gatherers of traditional recipes also publish their work from time to time.

Woman of many sides

Magdalena Dobromila Rettigová lived between 1785 and 1845.  She was a Czech revivalist and **author of cookbooks**, poems, plays and short prose. Magdalena, by maiden name Artmannová, married a Czech lawyer, patriot and writer J. A. Rettig. She was brought up in German environment and her first writings were also in German. Under the influence of her husband and Czech writing society, she started to write in Czech and her “silly verses and weepy stories” were gaining in popularity.

Rettigová was historically the first woman to show **great interested in women**, in regards to their position in society. However, she did not struggle for equality of women but endorsed their feminine qualities. She started to teach young women **how to cook or sew** and she showed them the manners and rules of dining and conduct. Her activities resulted in publishing the first literature on cookery. The most significant book Rettigová wrote is undoubtedly her **Home Cookbook** from 1826. This was not only a collection of traditional recipes for meals prepared with local crops and meat from locally bred domestic animals such as pork and beef. It contained also a code telling women how to be good

housewives to deserve respect for their femininity.

The focus of this enlightened woman was put also on sharing her knowledge with others. She was trying to propagate education and patriotic sentiment among other women. She was lending books to these women and then openly discussed their content and the women's opinions.

Unhealthy yet tasty tradition

“A Household Cookery Book or A Treatise on Meat and Fasting Dishes for Bohemian and Moravian Lasses” by the first Czech propagator of cookery became a **true bestseller in the 19th century** and was published in many editions. The latest editions come from the beginning of the 20th century. Although the meals prepared by the recipes in this book are often quite unhealthy and expensive – mainly when you really want to make them properly using quality ingredients, there are many salads and around fifty other vegetable recipes. The book could serve to anyone, it contains meaty meals which can be really quite expensive and not exactly healthy – her family could afford various ingredients, but also meals affordable for the less wealthy and the poor, because the land had gone through an after-war crisis and not everywhere were many types of food affordable or at hand.

Healthy or not healthy, **Czech cuisine** is definitely tasty and rich. M. D. Rettigová managed to collect the best and most **traditional recipes**. She put together the most practical and useful advice not only on how to prepare each of the meals properly and dutifully, she also provided countless practical **advices for women** on how to take care of their kitchen and, more importantly, of themselves.