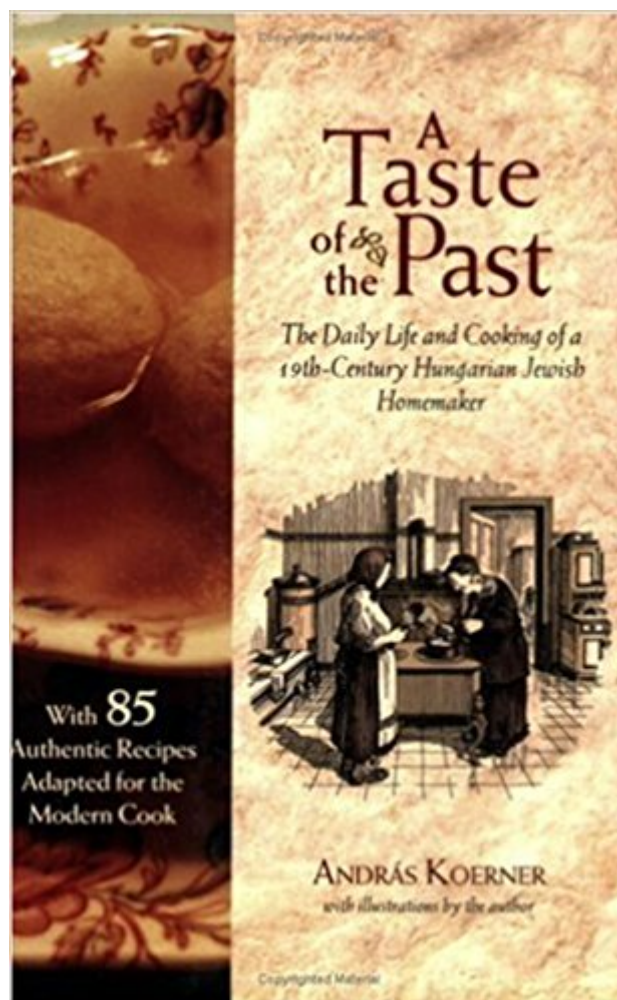




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A Taste Of The Past: The Daily Life And Cooking Of A Nineteenth-Century Hungarian-Jewish Homemaker



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Synopsis

A Taste of the Past is an entertaining reconstruction of the daily life and household of Therese (Riza) Baruch (1851–1938), the great-grandmother of the author, Andr  f  s Koerner. Based on an unusually complete cache of letters, recipes, personal artifacts, and eyewitness testimony, Koerner describes in loving detail the domestic life of a nineteenth-century Hungarian Jewish woman, with special emphasis on the meals she served her family. Based on Riza's letters, part one offers an imaginative sketch of growing up in a religious middle-class family in the 1860s and 70s in an industrial town in western Hungary. Part one also describes Riza's reactions to the dilemmas posed by the early signs of Jewish assimilation. In part two, the heart of the book, Riza has married, moved to a smaller town near the Austrian border, and become the central figure of a large household. Koerner recreates a typical day in the life of Riza and her family, peppering his narrative with recipes of the food she served for breakfast, mid-morning snack, lunch, afternoon coffee-and-cake, and the much more modest evening meal. Riza's family was religious, and Koerner also describes the special foods (pike in sour aspic, cholent, apple-matzo kugel, and much more) she served to celebrate the Sabbath and the six major Jewish holidays. Short introductions to the recipes describe the evolution of the dishes through the centuries, their role in Jewish culture, and how cultural influences and religious traditions shaped Riza's cooking. More than 125 evocative pen-and-ink illustrations bring Riza's story and her food to life. A Taste of the Past offers an enchanting look at Jewish daily life in western Hungary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a time when middle-class Jews were increasingly assimilated into mainstream Hungarian life and culture. Such small-town Jewish life had completely disappeared due to the Holocaust. Koerner's book revives this lost world and invites the reader to be a guest in Riza's house to watch her caring for her family, shopping, cooking, and preparing for the holidays. By offering easy-to-follow updated versions of her recipes, the book also allows readers to savor Riza's dishes and desserts in their own kitchens, thus completing this experience of a visit to the past.

Book Information

Paperback: 444 pages

Publisher: UPNE; New Ed edition (August 31, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 158465595X

ISBN-13: 978-1584655954

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.2 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,936,104 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Regional & International > European > Hungarian](#) #381 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Special Diet > Kosher](#) #6385 in [Books > History > World > Jewish](#)

Customer Reviews

A Taste of the Past serves as both historical record and cookbook. Koerner tells the story of his great-grandmother, a Jewish woman growing up in a nineteenth-century Hungarian town and assimilating into the dominant gentile culture. She left behind a trunkful of recipes, and from these, Koerner has reconstructed a culinary tradition, updating the recipes to make them reproducible in a modern kitchen. Recalling (but not replicating) traditional Ashkenazic cuisine, these recipes exhibit distinctive spicing and Hungarian influences. Those looking for new desserts would do well to prepare Koerner's unique recipe crossing noodle kugel with bread pudding. Line drawings bring the text to life, and these recipes bring fulfillment to the curious cook seeking a challenge. Mark Knoblauch

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“A Taste of the Past serves as both historical record and cookbook . . . Koerner has reconstructed a culinary tradition, updating the recipes to make them reproducible in a modern kitchen. Recalling (but not replicating) traditional Ashkenazic cuisine, these recipes exhibit distinctive spicing and Hungarian influences. Those looking for new desserts would do well to prepare Koerner's unique recipe crossing noodle kugel with bread pudding. Line drawings bring the text to life, and these recipes bring fulfillment to the curious cook seeking a challenge.”

•Booklist

“More than a cookbook, the book is a portrait of a life and a world that no longer exists.”

•The Jewish Week

“What is left of Jewish Moson is memories: family stories, photographs, letters, recipes and now, for the rest of us, Koerner's A Taste of the Past. It is a careful and loving re-creation of a world that met an unhappy death, and for a cookbook; or any other type of book; there is not much finer purpose than that.”

•The Forward

“The evocative drawings, the decorative initials, and a typeface designed in 1650 by a Hungarian, together make up an aesthetically exclusive book which is a pleasure to open, read, and perhaps, taste from.”

•The Budapest Sun

Interesting story and view of life that has long been lost. The recipes are similar to those I remember my mother making.

Still reading book.

We live in a world of "instant" everything. Patience is short, precision rarely exists and politeness is almost extinct. "A Taste of the Past..." reminds us of a time when God, family, great food and real life communication were some of the greatest joys in life. Reading this book and trying some of these recipes has injected a brief respite into my far too fast life.

This is a very sweet book that will appeal to genealogy fans, budding historians with an interest in daily social life, and anyone interested in reading about other people's heritage discoveries and stories. It really gives a strong idea of what daily life must have been like for the thousands of Hungarian Jews in the nineteenth century, a world wiped out in Hungary, never to return. It is also quite sad to see how assimilation affected this family. Yet, for anyone Jewish, Riza Neni's story and daily life will resonate with all of us. For no matter where our great grandparents lived, they probably went about their daily lives in much the same way, tackling many of the same problems, and sharing in many of the same joys. This book is a history of the average Jew, and for that it is worthwhile to have on your shelf. And the sketches of authentic daily Jewish life are cute and enhance the look of the text. Food is a central theme to this book, as the title suggests, and it is quite interesting that the author has included some updated recipes in the second half of the book. For those with an interest in food and history, this part in particular is sure to please.

"A Taste of the Past" is just that for me. I was over 30 when I learned that my mom's dad was Jewish, not merely Hungarian. After my mom's death, I began to study about Jewish family life. My mom and her dad had visited their family in Hungary in 1907, 1915 and 1922, but my mom spoke little of that. I visited his birthplace (near Kosice, Slovakia - formerly Hungary) in 1996. I joined on-line Jewish genealogical websites. I found two aging Jewish relatives in Cleveland. "A Taste of the Past" has opened for me rich insight into Jewish family life in Hungary in the late 19th century and 20th century. I am no cook, so the food recipes are beyond me - except that my imagination allows me to savor them! The author is a man of great generosity of spirit, that imbues every page of "A Taste of the Past"! Am I ever in his debt!

This lovely book brings a slice of Hungarian Jewish culture to life in a uniquely three-dimensional way - the sights, the tastes, the details of everyday life. I found the recipes easy to follow and the pictures charming. The author's great-grandmother whom he profiles here is a refreshingly complex character - her views about such things as religion and national identity change over time, along with historical changes, and some of these shifts are even reflected in her food! For example, this is one Hungarian cookbook that is light on the paprika - apparently ginger was the spice of choice in the 19th century. Who knew?

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The book really brings to life a community that was wiped out by the Holocaust. The description of life in the small city in Hungary is vivid and the amazing illustrations are a great complement. The easy-to-follow recipes round out the experience.

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