

NOTE

Margaret Murray's Meat Curry

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In 1937 in Jerash, Transjordan, Margaret Murray gave Gerald Lankester Harding recipes for meat curry and dahl. This article briefly traces each archaeologist's personal and professional trajectory as they moved between Britain and various imperial outposts, and situates the recipes within the complex contexts of their histories. The recipes, staples of Anglo-Indian cuisine, take on new meaning as symbols of the hybridity of archaeological identity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Introduction

This is a story of archaeology and empire and food. On a folded piece of paper tucked inside a black-covered volume of recipes belonging to the archaeologist Gerald Lankester Harding are handwritten recipes for 'Meat Curry' and 'Dhall'. At the bottom of the page are the words: 'Written for me at Jerash in 1937 by M. A. Murray' (Murray, 1937). This article will analyse the writer, the recipient and the recipes to explore identity and transformation in the history of archaeology.

Scholars are pulling apart the overarching narrative of imperial domination to analyse the experiences and histories of those who for a generation or generations lived within and between British colonial/imperial contexts (e. g. Lambert & Lester, 2006; Jasanoff, 2006). These histories present the British imperial experience as one of interconnectivity and overlapping financial, political, social and cultural networks. The bulk of the experiences they analyse are those of the colonial administrator, the planter, the merchant, the soldier, the missionary, the wife. The history presented here will focus on the archaeologist. Specifically, it presents the recipes as emblematic of the experiences of Margaret Alice Murray and Gerald Lankester Harding, who were British but grew up outside of Britain. They knew, intimately, a different culture, language and food.

This paper highlights Murray and Harding's backgrounds - ones in which curry was prevalent - and examines the foreign contexts in which they worked to analyse the recipes' evolution and transmission. The movement of both archaeologists and these recipes feeds into an increasing interest in food as a mode of exploring connections between cultures (e. g. Collingham, 2006; Leong-Salobir, 2011) and as a symbol of transnational identity (e. g. Sellick, 2010: 9–17).¹



Fig. 1: Margaret Murray. Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL.

Introducing Margaret Murray and Gerald Lankester Harding

Margaret Alice Murray (**Fig. 1**) is one of Britain's most famous Egyptologists. She was appointed Assistant Professor of Egyptology at University College London (UCL) in 1924 having studied and taught there for over twenty years and publishing widely on Egyptology and the history of witchcraft.² Born in Calcutta, India in 1863, she grew up in an Anglo-Indian household, with numerous servants.³ According to her well-known autobiography, *My First Hundred Years*, her Murray ancestors had lived

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in India for many decades, first working in the East India Company and then as businessmen of the middling sort (see Murray, 1963: 11–30).

Murray's childhood was spent in a post-Mutiny India where the number of British women travelling to the country was steadily increasing and society in the Raj was becoming more racially and socially divided (Collingham, 2006: 159; Roy, 2010: 68). As shown through food history, British culture in India under the pre-Mutiny East India Company regime was characterised by a blending of cultures. This blending included long-term relationships between East India Company officers and Indian women and the consumption of foods like curry - an evolving Anglo-Indian cuisine - that emerged from this mixed society (Collingham, 2006: Ch 5). By the end of the 1857 Mutiny, as the British Raj was firmly established, these relationships had been phased out, and with them the consumption of Anglo-Indian cuisine at formal elite tables, although eating such food was still a part of non-elite households and informal meals (Collingham, 2006: 157–159; Gilmour 10–14; Leong-Salobir, 2011: 44–48, 52–53; Roy, 2010: 67–68).

As Sheppard notes, Murray's India experience made a lasting impression on her psyche, evident in the significant coverage in her autobiography of her family history there (2013: 2). In writing of her early life, Murray specifically mentioned Teeloo, the 'Malay cook' of her comfortable, middle-class household in Calcutta, who provided the family with curries 'unsurpassed' in their excellence, with special recipes particularly for the young Margaret and her sister. He clearly made an impact on her, but her description of him would be considered racist today: '...I remember his smiling monkey-face when he asked me, "Did the baba like today's curry?"' (Murray, 1963: 32). The short anecdote captures both her lifelong appreciation of curry and her attitude towards non-European servants, moulded in the 19th century Anglo-Indian society in which she matured (see Sheppard, 2013: 12–14).

Murray left India permanently in 1887. In what she described as her 'third attempt' at a career (1963: 85), in 1894 she became one of Flinders Petrie's first students in his role as Edwards Professor of Egyptology at UCL. Although she was mainly based in England, she supervised excavations at Abydos, Egypt in the 1902/1903 season, and the following year worked as a copyist at Saqqara. Murray also worked in excavations on Malta in the early 1920s and Minorca in the early 1930s (Murray, 1963: 207; Sheppard, 2013: 55–80).

It was in the mid-1930s that Margaret Murray travelled to Palestine and Transjordan to undertake excavations with Petrie at Tell Ajjul and, later, at the famous Nabataean city of Petra (Murray, 1963: 207–208; Sheppard, 2013: 224–226). Palestine, and Transjordan (which was then under the rule of Emir Abdullah), were both administered through Mandates given to Britain by the League of Nations after the First World War. A 'British Resident' and other British officials were mainly though not exclusively based in Transjordan's administrative capital, Amman (Luke and Keith-Roach, 1930: 421; Thornton, 2013). Gerald

Lankester Harding became one of these British officials, working for the Transjordan Department of Antiquities as its Chief Curator (**Fig. 2**).

In 1937, the year he received the curry and dhal recipes, Harding was only a year into the post, having taken over in 1936 from the architect-archaeologist George Horsfield (Anon., n. d.: 10; Thornton, 2009). Unlike Murray, who lived in Britain for most of her adult life, Harding spent most of his life outside of England. He was born in 1901 in Tientsin (Tianjin), China, to an English broker and his wife (Hopkins, 1901). At the turn of the 20th century, Tientsin was a port and railway junction close to China's capital, Peking (now Beijing), with considerable Western commercial activity and swathes of land given over to foreign-held 'concessions' where Westerners lived and worked (see Astor House Hotel, 1907; Drake, 1900; Whitaker, 1899 [1999]: 545–546).⁴ Harding spent his childhood in Singapore, and it was there that he was probably first exposed to Anglo-Indian cuisine. A British colonial possession since 1824, Anglo-Indian curry travelled to Singapore with the British and was consumed on a daily basis (Leong-Salobir, 2011: 50–51; Whitaker, 1899 [1999]: 478).⁵

Harding moved to England in 1913 and acquired training in business from Clark's College, London (Starkey, 1936b). He later took evening classes with Margaret Murray at UCL alongside his daytime employment, and Murray is largely credited with encouraging Harding to pursue archaeology (pers. comm. M. A. C. Macdonald; Tufnell, 1980; Winnett, 1980). Aged 25, he embarked on what became a lifelong career in archaeology. In 1926 he joined Flinders Petrie as a student of the British School of Archaeology in Egypt, then 'over the border' in Palestine (see Drower, 1985: 348). After working with Petrie at Tell Jemmeh, Tell Fara and Tell Ajjul, Harding and two other Petrie students, James Leslie Starkey and Olga Tufnell, began excavations at Tell ed Duweir, Palestine with funding from Charles Marston and Henry Wellcome.⁶

There is some evidence amongst Harding's papers that when George Horsfield retired from the Department of Antiquities in 1936, he personally recruited Harding to be his successor (Anon., n. d.: 10; Wauchope, 1936). By that point Harding had been excavating in the Middle East for ten years. His archive reflects the fact that he was known amongst the archaeological and political community for his interest in the customs of the Bedouin workforce and the Arabic language - qualities later noted in obituaries of him (Anon., n. d.; Starkey, 1936a; Tufnell 1980; Winnett, 1980). An anonymous unpublished biography of Harding in his archive adds insight into the nature of his working relationship with the Bedouin employed on the excavations in which he took part. Harding's room on site became an informal classroom, described as 'an open house to the chaps every evening'. In these evening sessions he taught some of the Bedouin to read hieroglyphic inscriptions (Anon., n. d.: 6).

With his new post, which he held for twenty years, Harding acquired a new British-Transjordanian identity. For the first few years at least he resided in Jerash, a small village north of Amman where numerous Circassian



Fig. 2: Harding's Transjordan identity card from the late 1940s, with his occupation listed as 'Chief Curator of Antiquities'. Courtesy of M. C. A. Macdonald.

families had settled in the 19th century (Anon., n. d.: 10; Luke and Keith Roach, 1930: 402–403). A former city of the Roman Decapolis, Jerash had stunning extant remains; in the interwar period it was an active archaeological site and promoted by the British Mandate government as a burgeoning tourist attraction (Horsfield, 1933; Kraeling, 1938; Thornton, 2013).

A Hybrid Cuisine⁷

'Meat Curry

Cut the cooked meat into small cubes. If vegetables are used, cut them also into small pieces.

Cut up some onions + fry them into oil, butter, or dripping, until they are a golden brown.

Mix two tablespoonfuls of curry-powder very smoothly with milk (halib or leben); add to the mixture a little salt, + if desired cardamoms, green ginger sliced, chilis [sic] sliced, peppercorns, or other warm spices. Pour the mixture into the boiling fat in which the onions are, + stir hard as it is apt to burn. When the mixture assumes a curdled appearance, take the pan off the fire, + put in the meat, taking care that each piece is covered with the mixture. Put the pan on a slow fire + let

the curry simmer (not boil) for half-an-hour. Take the pan off + let the curry go cold. When wanted, make the curry hot. If the curry appears too dry, add more fat. On no account use water.

Dhall

Use Egyptian lentils. Cook the lentils till they are like a thick porridge. In another pan fry an onion or a clove of garlic in fat until black. Take the black onion (or garlic) out, pour the boiling lentils into the boiling fat, stir well, + serve. To be eaten with rice.' (Murray, 1937)

It was in Jerash that Margaret Murray wrote down the recipes featured here and gave them to Harding (Fig. 3). On the face of it, the recipes are a simple reflection of Murray's childhood in India – both curry and dhal being mainstays of Anglo-Indian cuisine (Collingham, 2006: 115–121; *Thirty Five Years' Resident, 1880*).⁸ Reading them more closely, however, it appears that Murray adapted them to suit a Middle Eastern context. In the case of the curry, this adaptation is evident in her specification for the use of 'halib or leben' milk. Popular British and Anglo-Indian curry recipes of the 19th century recommended adding milk or stock to curry seasonings (Collingham, 2006: 140–147; Leong-Salobir 2011:

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Fig. 3: Murray's curry and dhall recipes, courtesy of M. C. A. Macdonald.

50–51; Sen, 2009: 10), but leben milk is used frequently in Middle Eastern cuisine. The British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard described leben as the dried curds of sheep's milk, which is '...thick and acid, but very agreeable and grateful to the taste in a hot climate' (1859: 247).⁹ In addition, the recipe contains another reference to Murray's Anglo-Indian roots and the middle-class Victorian approach to thrifty food habits in the use of leftovers (see Collingham, 2006: 138; Leong-Salobir, 2011: 48–50). It is clear from Murray's recipe that the meat used is already cooked, and the curry, once made, can be reheated and eaten again at another time - a useful feature for a busy archaeologist on a tight budget.

As with Murray's curry, her 'dhall' also reflects her experience in the Middle East, in this case specifically Egypt.¹⁰ The turn of the century edition of *Hobson-Jobson*, a dictionary of Anglo-Indian terms, defined dhall as 'a kind of pulse used by natives as a kind of porridge, and by Europeans as an ingredient in kedgerie. It is best represented in England by what are called "split pease [sic]"' (Crooke, 1903: 312).¹¹ Murray, however, recommends using Egyptian lentils, perhaps a homage to her days on site at Abydos and Saqqara. It highlights her familiarity with Egyptian fare, while indicating that Egyptian lentils were available in 1930s Transjordan. Interestingly, Murray's dhall is clearly more aligned to the 'native' use of dhall outlined in *Hobson-Jobson* than the European one. Her recipe therefore can be read as a fusion of the informal meals of her childhood and those of her excavation experience - Egyptian lentil soup was a feature of the dig life in Abydos in which Murray took part (see Rawnsley & Rawnsley, 1904: 23).¹² This amalgamation of food cultures in archaeological contexts continues today - at Hierakonpolis, for example, the international team of archaeologists enjoys Egyptian lentil soup on a regular basis (*Nekhen News*, 2003).

One other document in Harding's archive relates specifically to curry - two pages of typed text. One, titled 'Curry Ingredients', contains a list of botanical names for herbs used in curry, along with their equivalents in 'Indian', English, Iraqi Arabic and Lebanese Arabic. The other is a recipe for 'Sarajini Mudani Curry Powder' (Harding n. d.). Harding was engaged in collecting plants for Kew Gardens during his time in Transjordan, and perhaps the list of ingredients reflects this activity (Anon., n. d.: 15). It also reflects his engagement with the variations of language and a penchant for cataloguing these details. His interest in curry was a long-standing affair; his executor notes that between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, while resident in Lebanon, Harding lived 'almost exclusively' on curries made with curry powder that he ground himself (pers. comm. M. C. A. Macdonald).

Conclusion

This short analysis points to larger questions relevant to the history of archaeology and to concepts of national and international identity. How should historians identify archaeologists who lived and worked outside their land of origin, and how did they identify themselves? Did they become more British? Or, as this analysis suggests,

can they be said to have a hybrid identity, exemplified in a hybrid cuisine? In the case of Murray and Harding - whose Britishness was already hybrid - these are rich, multi-layered questions.

Leong-Salobir (2011: Ch 1, 2) presents the history of curry as a commodity adapted by both colonisers and colonised to serve a variety of purposes. The recipes included here complement this transformation, which encapsulates Hannerz's concept of 'creolisation' in culture - drawing together disparate cultures (1987: 551–552). In this case curry and dhall are associated with multiple sites in multiple contexts - Indian, Egyptian, Transjordanian, British, Lebanese - and across two centuries. These two archaeologists, with two distinct yet similar transnational backgrounds, showcase the archaeological experience abroad as a cultural melting pot. Perhaps the relationship between Murray and Harding, the teacher and the student, was sustained in part through the similarity of their childhood experiences in colonial environments and solidified through shared professional experience within the British imperial zone. These recipes are contained on a single sheet of paper, but deconstructing the lives of the recipe-writer and recipient reveals a complex history of imperialism and archaeology, one that straddles regions, cultures and cuisines.

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Notes

- ¹ Hannerz (1996: 6) discusses the value of considering issues relating to 'cross[ing] state boundaries' as 'transnational'.
- ² Sheppard has recently published a book-length biography of Murray (2013). Whitehouse (2013) briefly discusses Murray's work at UCL and her archaeological legacy.
- ³ In the 19th century, the term 'Anglo-Indian' referred to individuals of British descent living in India (see Gilmore 2005: 10–11); the term 'British Indian' is also used (e. g. Sheppard 2013: 5). Collingham (2006: 110–111) describes the Anglo-Indian society that emerged in the late 18th and early 20th century as 'hybrid'.
- ⁴ In the year of Harding's birth, the 'Boxer Rising' against foreign influence in China was still active. Tientsin had been a base for the British and other foreign troops as they pushed toward Peking (Brown 1902; Ebrey 2010: 254–255; Fenby 2009: 90). Harding later donated a set of cards and two Chinese 'coolie' hats and jackets from the Rising to Henry Wellcome for the Wellcome

Museum's collection of historic ethnographic material (Wellcome, 1934).

⁵ Collingham (2006: 118–125, 146–147) and Leong-Salobir (2011: 57–59) discuss the routes through which an Anglo-Indian culinary tradition spread throughout India and beyond within the British empire via British immigrants and settlers.

⁶ As members of the Wellcome Archaeological Expedition to the Near East, as it was called, in the mid 1930s they were a part of the discovery of fragments of pottery with ink inscriptions identifying Tell ed-Duweir to be the Biblical city of Lachish. These 'Lachish Letters' yielded an important corps of material with ancient Hebrew text (Anon., n. d.: 8; Torczyner et al 1938). Macdonald (1979) noted that Harding, who was responsible for the detailed hand copies of the Hebrew texts published in the first volume of the Lachish publication, could see in the original pottery details that others could only view with infra-red light.

⁷ Leong-Salobir (2011: Ch 1) discusses colonial British cookery, especially in Southeast Asia, as fundamentally 'hybrid'.

⁸ Scholarship on Anglo-Indian curry often mentions Colonel Wyvern (Arthur Kenney Herbert), a British officer in India renowned for his coverage of Anglo-Indian cuisine. As Leong-Salobir (2011: 52) notes, Wyvern's book *Culinary Jottings* (1885) contains two chapters specifically on curry.

⁹ This observation was recorded during Layard's explorations through Nineveh, Iraq.

¹⁰ Murray's spelling 'dhall' as opposed to dhal is the same as is given in *Hobson-Jobson* (Crooke, 1903: 312).

¹¹ *Hobson-Jobson* does not identify a specific pulse or bean for dhall, but rather lists a number of different varieties, stating '...in its original sense *dal* is not the name of a particular pea, but the generic name of pulses prepared for use by being broken in a handmill' (Crooke, 1903: 312). Kedegree, consumed for breakfast, is defined as 'a mess of rice, cooked with butter and *dal*, and flavoured with a little spice, shred onion and the like' (Crooke, 1903: 476). Recipes for myriad 'dals' and curries specially written for 'the Indian kitchen' can also be found in *A Thirty-Five Years' Resident* (1880).

¹² Interestingly, Petrie continued to incorporate lentil soup in his excavations in Palestine, despite his blanket ban on Arab food. His cook, Mohammed Osman al Kreti, had been cooking for Petrie since the 1890s (Drower, 1985: 384).

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