

*A L'Américaine or à L'Armoricaine? A New World Dish in French Regional Cookery and Haute Cuisine*

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Whether one prefers *américaine* or *armoricaine* is immaterial: both names are inappropriate and lack historical basis or even plausibility.

– Alan Davidson<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** The name of *homard à l'américaine* (alternatively *à l'armoricaine*) is puzzling: its ingredients evoke neither the United States nor Brittany. The origin of the dish is likewise obscure, with Escoffier and other nineteenth-century chefs laying claim to its invention. I demonstrate here that the dish arose in the eighteenth century in the creole context of France's Saint-Domingue colony (modern Haiti), crucially incorporating an Arawakan sauce based on the tomalley of crustaceans. *Américaine* thus refers to the crown jewel of France's colonies at the time, Saint-Domingue. After the Haitian Revolution (1790), the ousted 'Americans' brought this creole dish to France, especially to Bordeaux and other port cities, including in Brittany. The semantic shift of *Américain* to specifically 'U.S.' and later distaste for the horrors of slavery in Saint-Domingue conspired to produce cultural amnesia regarding the true origin of the dish, allowing its commercial appropriation by the celebrity chefs of the time.

The focus of this paper is the origins of a very famous French dish and its two names, *homard à l'américaine* and *homard à l'armoricaine*. This dish has long been very much a part of the repertoire of French *haute cuisine*, which is esteemed and enjoyed throughout the world and it is therefore unsurprising that it has been associated with famous French chefs and restaurants. Among food writers, including some of the most highly regarded, the question of the origins of the dish remains not totally settled but there is clearly a consensus that, though the dish may have some traditional forebears in France's regional cuisines, it really needs to be attributed to one or another professional chef. Regarding the names of the dish, there is also consensus, at least insofar as virtually all those who have written about this preparation, including the great Alan Davidson cited above, agree that the dish has nothing whatsoever to do with American cooking influences and a great many believe it has little or nothing to do with Breton or 'Armorican' tradition. As a consequence, both names are explained as being the whimsical inventions of particular famous chefs. At issue here is the matter of the power of group identity and a tension between the sense that

Frenchmen have, that lobster 'in the American style' is an egregious misnomer for a dish that in their view is quintessentially French with regard to its culinary character. *Homard à l'américaine* — or for some *à l'armoricaine* — is a dish that embodies the clash between the traditional and the commercial, the foreign and the native, and whose real history encapsulates both contact-induced and internal culinary innovation, culminating in total appropriation through collective amnesia and historical invention.

*Homard à l'américaine: Recipes and opinions on its origins*

This dish normally involves as its principal element an ingredient that is relatively expensive and, as a preparation featured often on the menus of restaurants specialising in the highly prestigious style of *haute cuisine* cookery, *homard à l'américaine* bears the cachet of extreme culinary sophistication: indeed, several recipes for this dish begin with a warning to home-cooks regarding the difficulty and complexity involved in its production.

*Essential elements and acceptable variation*

Recipes for *homard à l'américaine* also often note that there are many variants and the authors are then offering either their own version or a favourite version that they have learned. As Escoffier put it in a preserved hand-written recipe, 'There is no well-established formula for lobster cooked *à l'américaine*. The method of preparation varies from place to place, but here is the simplest one, which I think the best and particularly easy to prepare (James 2002, p. 40). Escoffier's recipe cited in James and the one cited by David (1970, p. 372, from his book *Ma cuisine*) can be summed up thusly:

1. With a knife split a live lobster in half, removing and cracking the claws and dividing the halves further into three or four pieces; reserve the liver or tomalley and roe, if present.
2. Sauté the lobster pieces in a combination of olive oil and butter and, when cooked, remove the fat.
3. To the pan with the lobster pieces, then add chopped shallot and a crushed garlic clove, cognac, white wine, tomatoes (peeled, seeded, chopped), parsley, cayenne pepper, and both *glace de viande* and *demi-glace*; cover the pan and cook the lobster in the sauce for 18 to 20 minutes.
4. Remove the lobster pieces and arrange them shell-down in a deep serving dish; with a whisk incorporate the creamy parts of the lobster (tomalley and roe) into the

sauce, cook briefly and then finish the sauce off the fire with butter, lemon juice and chopped parsley.

5. Pour the sauce over the lobster pieces and serve with rice.

There are some minor differences between the two Escoffier recipes mentioned above, including different treatments of the lobster tomalley: in the one cited by David, the soft material is simply whisked into the sauce near the end, while in the hand-written recipe, he instructs us to 'mix the green intestines that were put aside with 4 spoonfuls of butter, the juice of half a lemon, and a dash of red wine'; this mixture is clearly to be added at the very end of preparing the sauce. A third version, appearing in an English edition (Escoffier 1989, p. 321), includes some fish *fumet* in the sauce, as well as *glace de viande*.

Recipes from other chefs and food writers agree with the basics of Escoffier's method and ingredients but there are some noteworthy variations. A common extra step in preparation is in building the sauce: cognac is added first and flamed before the addition of the wine, tomatoes, etc. In a second version of *homard à l'américaine* offered by David (1970, pp. 372–373), that of Pierre Huguenin, adding and flaming of cognac occurs only at the very end, just before serving, but this recipe is in other ways an outlier from a large group of renditions more closely resembling Escoffier's, in that it includes a considerable number of less common ingredients, including a bit of cream, as well as thyme and bay leaf (these not that uncommon) but then also saffron and curry powder (these much less frequently found in this dish). It should be noted that David reports that Huguenin got his recipe from his mother and that she in turn had got it 'from its inventor, the chef Pascal at the café Brébant in 1877'.

#### *Famous chefs, duelling recipes, competing claims*

It is unclear whether the chef Pascal was claiming merely that he was the inventor of a version of *homard à l'américaine* or whether he was claiming credit more broadly for the basic notion of the dish. If the latter is true, there is textual evidence that renders his claim dubious, for Dumas (1873, pp. 634–635), in his *Grand dictionnaire* which was published posthumously in 1873 and so likely composed in the 1860s, offers a long and rather baroque recipe for a lobster dish under the selfsame name; Dumas indicates that from 'among the different methods of preparing *homard à l'américaine*' he chose the particular version of the chef Vuillemot. This chef's version differs very little from that of Escoffier and the mainstream of modern recipes with respect to ingredients but deviates in method in several ways: the lobster pieces are not sautéed before the sauce is built but rather added to a sauce without tomatoes and cooked in it. The lobster is then cooled off and the meat removed and cut up; a tomato sauce is separately prepared in the oven. The original sauce in which the lobster cooked is further prepared and reduced and then a mixture of the lobster tomalley and roe with butter is prepared. Ultimately, all these sub-preparations

(sauce from lobster cooking, tomato sauce, lobster butter, each seasoned with some 'piment d'Espagne') come together on a platter with the pieces of cooked lobster meat.

In light of Vuillemot's recipe *apud* Dumas, I think it safe to conclude that Chef Pascal's claim was more likely just for credit for his particular (and peculiar) take on a dish that was in mid-eighteenth century Paris and likely more generally in France both widely-known and quite popular, a situation which fed off and fed into a wave of culinary creativity among professional cooks: it looks very much that both recipes are — in the one case by cooking method and the other by ingredients — conscious expansions on or complications of a more basic version of *homard à l'américaine*. That the dish was very popular is clearly reflected in a backlash to its consumption in the early 1880s among Frenchmen who felt that the practice, felt to be essential for the taste of the lobster flesh, of wrenching off the claws and cutting the body up while the lobster was still alive and kicking, was excessively cruel. In a periodical of the time, the concern of '*la ligue contre le homard à l'américaine*' is mocked, summing up the group's goal: '*Plus de homard à l'américaine, puisqu'on n'obtient ce piquant manger qu'au prix des tortures infligées à un animal vivant*' (*L'Illustration* 1883, p. 179).

That there existed a version perhaps older and certainly much simpler is demonstrated by the recipe included in Gouffé's *Livre de cuisine* (1867, p. 633), the earliest one I have found in print. Here the lobster pieces are cut quite small (and the claw-meat extracted) and they are not sautéed but poached. A sauce is made with butter, shallots and white wine, to which is added *espagnole*, tomato purée and a point of cayenne pepper. The sauce is cooked, strained, then put with the lobster in a casserole, and the whole is simmered for ten minutes. Here, however, the simplicity perhaps goes too far and, despite the name Gouffé gives this recipe, it lacks several key elements of the Escoffier-mainstream's take on *à l'américaine*: there is no sautéing of the lobster in olive oil, no cognac, nor any mention of the tomalley and roe of the lobster. While this is the earliest attested recipe, it appears only a short time before other, more complex ones and cannot be granted status as the original recipe nor as one necessarily reflecting some primitive stage — it is merely one of several recipes for lobster bearing the same name but showing a considerable range of variation in cooking method and, to a lesser degree, ingredients. According to later food writers, Gouffé's version was the one served in the Parisian Restaurant Bonnefoy in the 1860s, but allegedly it was based on one made by a very young Escoffier at his first job in Paris cooking for the Petit Moulin Rouge (James 2002, p. 40).

Here we arrive again at the question of claims for the invention of *homard à l'américaine*. A widely circulated tale attributes the dish to a chef by the name of Pierre Fraisse, a native of the coastal town of Sète in Languedoc, who as chef-proprietor of the Parisian restaurant Noël Peters in the 1870s allegedly invented both the dish and its name:

‘[He concocted the dish] in desperation for some Americans who turned up late for dinner when he had little left to give them, When they asked the name of the dish, since they were Americans and he had in fact run the Café Américain in Chicago, he replied, *Homard à l'américaine*’ (James 2002, p. 40; cf. Montagné 1977, p. 562).

This anecdote rings false on several levels and is but a variant of a common culinary just-so story which one encounters with no more plausibility, for example, as an explanation of the invention of both the dish *jambalaya* and its name (Buccini 2017, p. 117). What is plausible is that Fraisse perhaps served in his restaurant an upscale version — with North Sea lobster in place of the Mediterranean *langouste* (spiny lobster) — of a dish that by all appearances is a traditional one in coastal Languedoc, *langouste à la sèteoise*, as noted by (among others) David (1970, p. 63); for this David gives a recipe (p. 377) from a certain Madame Nanette of Montpellier which, aside from the omission of the lobster tomalley and roe and the addition of aioli at the end, is essentially the same as modern mainstream recipes, as well as Escoffier’s, for *homard à l'américaine*. Reinforcing this view is the fact that just south of Sète, in the Catalan region of France, we find almost the same preparation under the local names of *civet de langouste à la catalane* (also *langouste au Banyuls*).<sup>2</sup>

Escoffier seems to have thought of himself as the father of our dish in the context of French restaurant cookery, but he perhaps acknowledged that its basis was a traditional recipe from his native region of Nice, as he called his first renditions of the dish *langouste à la niçoise* and *langouste à la provençale* (James 2002, p. 39). Whatever their individual rôles were in introducing the basic method of the dish to a wider audience, it seems as though both Escoffier and Fraisse were drawing on a classically Mediterranean French way of preparing the Midi’s native spiny lobster and applying it in Paris to large-clawed northern lobster. Most food writers in more recent times feel strongly that *homard à l'américaine* is ultimately and obviously of southern French origin on the basis of its usual inclusion of olive oil, garlic, and tomatoes but the name, unless one is willing to buy the just-so story of Fraisse and his American guests, has remained mysterious and problematic (cf. Root 1966, pp. 77–78).

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, French food writers and chefs apparently had no idea how or why the *à l'américaine* label had come to be attached to the recipe. In Gouffé, two other dishes, one with salmon and one with eel (1867, pp. 468, 634) bear that qualification, but all they have in common with our dish of main concern is the inclusion of hot pepper; Dumas (1873, p. 859) also offers one other dish *à l'américaine*, a turtle soup, and again the only clear connexion is the use of hot pepper — clearly, there was a link between ‘américain’ and piquancy but equally clearly this was not felt to be sufficient to explain

the appellations connexion to the lobster preparation. By the end of the nineteenth century, we find explicit rejection of any connexion of the dish to America, with some food writers and chefs feeling it to be purely a representative of Parisian high-end gastronomy.<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, a new name associated with very similar preparations arises, namely, *à l'armoricaine*, which is an appellation based on the Latin designation for Brittany and as such, it bespeaks a conscious and learned coinage most likely invented by a chef of Breton origin in the commercial context and based on a pre-existing *à l'américaine*. Virtually all recent food writers deride the name as absurd, given the central use in the dish of ingredients associated with Mediterranean cookery but such an objection applies only at the popular or traditional level: if the dish existed in Brittany as part of the élite and/or commercial repertoire, there is no reason to think *homard à l'américaine*, with its olive oil and tomatoes and cognac, could not have been consumed in the ‘Armorican peninsula’, where at least real lobsters were locally available.

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#### A new approach to the history of *homard à l'américaine*

Current consensus among food writers is that, insofar as *homard à l'américaine* is not wholly the product of the culinary genius of Escoffier and possibly other professional chefs working in France in the mid-nineteenth century, its origins most likely lie in the traditional cookery of the Mediterranean coast of France and, as stated by Davidson in the epigram above, both qualifications — *à l'américaine* and *à l'armoricaine* — are objectionable misnomers. It is, however, my contention that the dish, even if ultimately in part related to Provençal or Languedocian progenitors, bears the American-descriptor for excellent reasons and that the Armorican-descriptor, even though secondary, may not be quite so absurd as most think. Here is why.

#### *It depends on what the meaning of ‘American’ is*

Much to the consternation of many inhabitants of South and Central America, ‘America’ and ‘American’ in most western languages are now and long have been used as synonyms for ‘the United States’ and ‘pertaining to the US’ and this is no less the case in French than elsewhere. But it must be remembered that before a series of setbacks, starting with the Seven Years’ War and ending with the Haitian Revolution, France had extensive colonies in North America and the Caribbean. Though more specific terms could and were often used to refer to people and things associated with one or the other colony (Canada, Acadia, Louisiana, Guadeloupe, etc.), they also could be referred to as *américain*, and this seems to have been especially the case with people and things pertaining to Saint-Domingue, given that the adjective *saint-domingais* has never found much favour. This usage of *américain* seems to have begun to fall out of currency in the course of the nineteenth century, after France had lost almost all of

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its American possessions, Saint-Domingue had been transformed into Haiti, and the United States, then as now lacking a proper adjective, rose to international prominence. Increasingly, in France as elsewhere, the primary sense of *américain* came to be 'pertaining to the United States' and it is clearly that sense of the word, assumed by food writers, that clashes so awkwardly in conjunction with our famous lobster dish: of course, *homard à l'américaine* has nothing to do with anything pertaining to the United States.

*It depends on what the meaning of 'Mediterranean' is*

A clue to a relationship between the lobster dish and the French Antillean colonies has been under food writers' noses all along but remained totally ignored: one of the characteristics of this dish and relatively few others in the French cookery of the nineteenth century is its use of hot red pepper. Perhaps the fact that red pepper is found in some other similar dishes blurred the connexion; for example, in Gouffé (1867, p. 632–633) cayenne is added not only in the *à l'américaine* lobster dish but also in his recipes for *écrevisses à la bordelaise* and *homard à la bordelaise* (more on this anon). Perhaps too the fact that cayenne or more often the slightly piquant *espelette* pepper appears these days in a number of southern French dishes made its occurrence in *homard à l'américaine* seem to be a natural part of the assumed Mediterranean basis but before being gradually adopted in France, hot pepper was to Frenchmen who visited the Antillean colonies, both a very salient and characteristic element of the local cuisines.

Similarly, tomatoes had, to be sure, made their way into the cooking of both south-western (Languedoc, Aquitaine) and south-eastern (Provence) France via Spain and Italy long before the nineteenth century (Buccini 2006, p. 135ff.) but in the late eighteenth century and a bit beyond, tomatoes were still largely a novelty in the north of France, including in places such as Brittany and Paris, which are implicated in the rise of our 'American' dish. For those northern Frenchmen who knew of tomatoes, however, they were associated not merely with the cookery of the Mediterranean South but also with that of the Antillean or *American* islands: 'tomate... fruit de laquelle on fait fréquemment usage dans les alimens aux îles de l'Amérique et dans les parties méridionales de l'Europe' (*Nouveau dict.* 1804, p. 215).

*La cuisine des Américains de Saint-Domingue*

Bearing in mind the older, broader meaning of the word *américain* in French, the use of cayenne and tomato in a dish harmonises perfectly with the appellation *à l'américaine* but renders the connexion almost trivial — the dish could still be seen as an invention of some chef in France who added the two 'American' ingredients and named his dish on account of them. There are, however, good reasons to believe the history of *homard* (or *langouste*) *à l'américaine* has a more intimate connexion to the cuisine of Saint-

Domingue, the lost crown jewel of France's empire and major engine of her economy.

*What we know about the cuisine of Saint-Domingue*

Saint-Domingue was in some ways paradise for many of its French colonists and in all ways hell for its vastly more numerous enslaved Africans and their offspring. Slave labour was the source of enormous profits accrued through the production and trade of indigo, coffee, and especially sugar cane, so much so that more than elsewhere slaves were an expendable commodity or business expense for plantation owners; they subsisted off native and African vegetable foodstuffs which they had to grow themselves, supplemented with meagre amounts of protein from salted meat and fish imported from Europe or North America and whatever wild foods they could forage for on their own time (Buccini 2016, with further references). Slaves were traded from Africa to the Caribbean, sugar and other tropical products produced by the slaves were sent to metropolitan France, and necessary provisions were sent from Europe to the island colonies, rendering much of the white population of the islands and a good many merchants and other businessmen in France, especially in and around the port cities involved in the trade, extremely wealthy (e.g. De Cauna 2003, p. 11ff.).

Consequently, among the provisions sent to the colonies were substantial amounts of foodstuffs that the rich *Américains* required to live well: wheat could not be grown in the islands, and so for bread and pastries, flour had to be imported, as was dry pasta; wine and spirits other than local rum-like products could not be produced in the islands and these too were imported from France in surprising quantities. Even cooking fats and in particular two favourites in different parts of France, butter and olive oil, were exported for the enjoyment of the colonial élite and judging from the amount of oil exported to the islands just from the port of Marseille, it seems likely that it was in common use. Other imported comestibles mentioned in period documents include rice, which was grown in only limited quantities in Saint-Domingue, *jambon de Bayonne*, and even table olives.<sup>4</sup>

The Antillean colonials, despite substantial imports of foodstuffs from abroad, could not and surely did not want to try simply to recreate the cuisines they knew back in the regions of France whence they or their parents came. Though no specifically culinary text survives or perhaps ever existed detailing the cuisine of Saint-Domingue or the other French islands, observations in documents of the period make it abundantly clear that the white élite happily consumed local starchy foods, vegetables, fruits, and naturally also the local fauna of land, air, and water. Relevant here is the availability of lobster-like crustaceans. Of course, genuine North Atlantic lobsters are not available in the Caribbean, being cold-water creatures whose range extends only down to North Carolina but nonetheless multiple colonial-period sources comment on

the abundance of *homars* [sic] in the waters off Saint-Domingue, referring to a species of crustacean that is not a true lobster but which, like lobsters, has for its first two appendages very large legs ending in bulbous formations, more club-like than claw-like. These animals are reported to be edible but best when caught young, as the meat of mature specimens was deemed stringy. Apparently much more delectable were the local spiny lobsters, also present in abundance, and in addition the lobster-like freshwater crayfish (*écrevisses*) were particularly large, tasty, and readily available from the main rivers of Saint-Domingue.

*Could a cook in Saint-Domingue have made lobster à l'américaine?*

The simple answer to this question is 'yes', qualified only with the comments that it would have had to have been a cook belonging to an élite household, either white or 'of colour' (i.e. of mixed race) and that the crustaceans employed would have had to have been not true lobsters but rather either the Caribbean spiny lobsters, much like the Mediterranean's *langoustes*, or the very large crayfish, resembling the *écrevisses* that were a staple in the cookery of south-western France. As we have noted above, two of the characteristic ingredients of the dish, hot pepper and tomatoes, were not only commonly used in island cookery, but from a metropolitan perspective were typical ingredients there. The other characteristic ingredients of the Escoffier and mainstream recipes — olive oil, cognac, white wine — were all, thanks to imports from the metropole, readily available to the rich inhabitants of Saint-Domingue, as were the more pedestrian elements such as onion, shallot, and garlic.

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**Some hot tomalley: They eat it as one eats mustard on meat**

While it is important to establish that cooks in Saint-Domingue would have had at their disposal all the essential ingredients to compose *homard à l'américaine*, the case for Antillean origins of this dish would be strengthened if there were some further aspect of its preparation that pointed in that direction.

*'Les Caraïbes ne vivrent presque d'autres chose'*

Early European recipes for lobster and similar crustaceans (Apicius, Scappi, La Varenne, etc.) seem to lack any particular instructions for treating the liver and roe, though these parts were surely eaten and enjoyed along with the meat after boiling or roasting the animal. It is, perhaps, for this reason that early European travellers to the Caribbean were very much struck with a culinary practice central to the cookery of the indigenous peoples of the region (e.g. the Taïno of Saint-Domingue): in preparing crabs (and likely other crustaceans), the Indians routinely removed the liver, roe, and any fat attached to the shell and from these prepared a sauce with which to dress the animals' meat. These Europeans were not only struck by this practice but found the preparation delicious and,

apparently having no term in their own language to refer to the liver and fat of crustaceans, Spaniards, Englishmen, and Frenchmen all borrowed into their tongues a word used to refer to the sauce in the Arawak dialects spoken across the Greater Antilles; in French, the older form of the word was *taumalin* or *taumaly* and in English it is 'tomalley'.<sup>5</sup>

*'C'est la saulce avec laquelle on les mange'*

In all the French Antillean colonies the indigenous practice of eating crabs, especially land crabs, was taken up by both the Europeans and the African slaves (who otherwise received little protein in their diets). Though precisely how the Indians originally prepared their sauce is not known, already in 1667 we can see that it had evolved to include an ingredient brought to the Antilles by the Europeans, namely, the orange; Rochefort, discussing how crabs were eaten in Saint-Domingue (pp. 521–522):

La maniere plus ordinaire de les apprêter, est toute la même que celle des Écrevisses en France: Mais ceus qui sont les plus délicats, & qui veulent employer le tems qui est requis, pour les rendre de meilleur goût, prennent la péne après les avoir fait bouïllir, d'éplucher tout ce qu'il y a de bons dans les pattes, et de tirer une certaine substance huileuse, qui est dans le corps, laquelle on nomme *Taumaly*, & de fricasser tout cela avec les œufs des femelles, y mêlant un bien peu de poyure de país, & du suc d'orange. Il faut avouer que ce ragoût est l'un des plus excellens, que l'on serve aus Antilles.

This passage is enlightening on multiple accounts. First, Rochefort says the treatment of the crabs is like that of crayfish in France *but*, in contrast to that treatment, in the Antilles one takes the effort to pluck out the meat from the legs and remove the 'oily substance', the tomalley, to make a sauce, combining it with the roe, a good bit of the local hot pepper and some orange juice — this sauce is a post-contact colonial creation. Another version of this sauce for crabs is described by Labat (1724, pp. 49–50): the 'taumalin' is mixed with the fat and the roe, a little water is added as well as some lemon [*citron*] juice, salt and hot pepper; while the crab bodies are boiling, one cooks and stirs the sauce, 'and when all is cooked, one eats the flesh of the crabs saucing them with the tomalley as one eats meat with mustard'.

Key elements of the Antillean sauce for crabs — tomalley, roe, fat, lemon juice, salt and hot pepper — seem all to be echoed in the piquant sauce of *homard à l'américaine*, which is finished with the tomalley and roe, butter, and lemon juice. Another Franco-Antillean dish for crabs described by Labat (p. 50) shows more significant blending of French cookery with the indigenous crab sauce, including the use of a butter-based roux, sautéed onion, parsley and other herbs, thickening with egg yolk, and seasoning with nutmeg and citrus juice and peel — according to Labat, 'c'est un très-bon manger'.<sup>6</sup>

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Though our direct evidence is limited, it is clear that in the island colonies, the French rapidly developed a distinctive 'creole' cuisine, drawing on their own culinary background but very much open to indigenous ingredients and preparations such as the use of tomalley in sauces.

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#### *Rencontres du troisième type: Culinary diffusion from Saint-Domingue to France*

If we are to believe that *homard à l'américaine* were either the invention of some individual chef in France or such a chef's take on a traditional Mediterranean recipe for *langoustes* with no influence from across the Atlantic, we would also have to believe that his use of cayenne (and tomatoes), in conjunction with the use of the tomalley and roe with fat and lemon juice as a key part of the sauce *and* the decision to call the dish *à l'américaine* were all just a matter of culinary genius and coincidence: that's hard to believe. Yet, if the association of this dish and its name reflects genuine origins in the French Antilles, we must demonstrate a plausible path of cultural communication: this is not only possible but, once done, a number of issues surrounding both the dish and its name are resolved.

#### *Commercial and social ties between Saint-Domingue and the metropole*

In our discussion of chefs and recipes above in section 2, versions of *Homard à l'américaine* were found to be in one way or another linked with a number of places in France: Paris, Nice, Sète, and Brittany, recipes which all bear a certain constellation of culinary properties as well as association with the 'American-style' appellation or, in one case, a clear derivative thereof (*américaine* > *armoricaine*). A further dish which deserves to be considered with this group is *homard à la bordelaise*, in the style of Bordeaux. My inclination to include this dish here on both culinary and historical grounds is supported by David (1970, p. 376) on purely culinary grounds ('suspiciously like our friend the *américaine*'); for Escoffier, the method for the two dishes is practically identical and the American-elements (cayenne, tomatoes, tomalley and roe and lemon juice to finish the sauce) are all present in the *borlaise* (1989, p. 322).

Saint-Domingue was a highly profitable business venture from the second half of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, when the African slaves' revolt ended French rule and forced the whites and many of the affluent *gens de couleur* to flee. During the colonial period, the lure of riches attracted settlers from all over France and beyond but it was naturally people – businessmen, artisans, peasants, and many soldiers and sailors — from the port cities and their surrounding regions that were most strongly represented in the colony's white population. The most important of the ports involved in the Antillean trade was Bordeaux in Aquitaine; according to De Cauna, the next most prominent ports in this regard were: Nantes, Le Havre, Marseille, La Rochelle,

Dunkerque, Saint-Malo, Bayonne and Honfleur (2003, p. 12). At the time, Nantes, like Saint-Malo, was part of Brittany; Bordeaux and Bayonne were in Aquitaine, and Le Havre and Honfleur in Normandy. Studies of the regional origins of the French in Saint-Domingue show unsurprisingly that a very large proportion were from south-western France (ca. 40%), from La Rochelle down to Bayonne, with smaller but significant contingents from Brittany and Normandy in the north-west and Provence, whose share of settlers increased considerably with the growing rôle of Marseille in the Antillean trade during the second half of the eighteenth century (Houdaille 1973, pp. 863–864). It must also be noted that Languedoc contributed fewer colonists but its one noteworthy port, the recently created Sète, was strongly engaged in the Antillean trade (Dermigny 1954).

#### *Close encounters*

The opportunities for intimate social contacts between the colonials and the metropolitans were ample: merchants and sailors involved in trade regularly had extended layovers in the ports they visited. In addition, there were many Frenchmen who, having spent a good part of their life in the colonies and earning a small or even large fortune there, returned to France to live out their days in comfort either in their family's home region or in Paris, as portrayed in a short story informed by first-hand experience by Tujague (2003, p. 9ff.).

Such contacts obtained between all of the French colonies and the Metropole but we have good reason to believe that the strongest cultural influences back to France emanated from Saint-Domingue: the Haitian Revolution, which occurred in stages starting in 1791 and ending in 1804, produced multiple waves of refugees of whites and élite *gens de couleur* (in some cases with their slaves) and culminated in the virtual complete elimination of the French population. Of those who survived through flight, a great many settled elsewhere in the Caribbean or in the United States while some returned to France. Gradually in the early decades of the nineteenth century, some of those who had settled elsewhere in the Americas gave up hope of ever being able to return to their lands in Saint-Domingue/Haiti and also returned to France (Brisseau 2012, p. 245ff.). When these Frenchmen returned to France, they were known as 'Américains'.<sup>7</sup>

It seems more than likely that the association of *homard à l'américaine* and other, almost identical dishes under other names with multiple regions of France is tied to these contacts between the Antilles and France's ports and perhaps especially with the arrival of a significant number of refugees from Saint-Domingue in the early nineteenth century. That a version of this dish is found in Bordeaux, the chief port in the Antillean trade and home to many erstwhile colonists, makes perfect sense. Likewise, the seemingly bizarre association of a Mediterranean-like dish with Brittany also becomes perfectly understandable if we

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recognise its Antillean nature and accept the likelihood that it was brought there by well-off Bretons who had known the dish in Saint-Domingue and returned with knowledge of and nostalgia for it when back in their familial homes in France. Particularly striking is the fact that a version of *homard à l'américaine* appears in Languedoc's port of Sète with its history of involvement in the Antillean trade; without doubt, some Sètois had spent time on Saint-Domingue and returned with some imported culinary knowledge.

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### Collective amnesia and culinary appropriation

In recent decades the issue of cultural appropriation has come up with ever greater frequency and culinary elements have entered the discussion. Generally, people are inclined to decry a transfer of some cultural element from one group to another as appropriation only where there is a power differential, a dominant cultural group laying hands on or claim to something which arose in the culture of a less-powerful or marginalised group. In the peculiar history of *homard à l'américaine* we can see multiple instances of appropriation. In the first case, one could — following current practice — claim that white colonists in the Caribbean appropriated from the indigenous peoples. Such a claim is not unreasonable, though I myself am inclined to see the taking up of certain aspects of Arawak foodways as an inevitable form of cultural borrowing motivated by a need to survive and a desire to eat well. Insofar as that is appropriation, I would call that an instance of natural appropriation. This contrasts with the sort of appropriation we see in a mercantile setting, for example, when some American or English chef pretends to be an expert on the cuisine of some other people for the purpose of selling cookbooks or getting a lucrative deal for television cooking shows. One must wonder whether the competing claims of being the inventor of *homard à l'américaine* by multiple professional cooks in the restaurant scene of Paris in the mid-nineteenth century should be regarded as instances of what I would call 'commercial appropriation'.

Be that as it may, it is remarkable that in the span of just a few decades, from France's loss of Saint-Domingue to the time of the young Escoffier and Fraisse and Dumas (grandson of an *homme de couleur* from Saint-Domingue), the origins of the dish were so thoroughly forgotten, at least in the Parisian cooking scene. It seems that there are three factors that came together to make this loss of memory possible. First, there is the process of cultural borrowing, of natural appropriation. After returning colonists and refugees introduced the dish in various parts of France, the name lived on to a degree but it seems perhaps that the dish became so popular in some places that it came to be thought of simply as a local dish, *à la bordelaise* or *à la sètoise*. Second, at the same time there was a shift in the primary sense of the French word *américain* from 'pertaining to the Americas and especially the

Antilles' to 'pertaining to the United States'. Finally, over the course of the nineteenth century, France gradually became more aware of and disgusted by its rôle in the Atlantic slave economy, in which Saint-Domingue was the most profitable and cruellest of colonies. It seems that with new and different colonial problems arising elsewhere (Africa, Indo-China), a sort of collective amnesia pushed Saint-Domingue, its brutal history, and *les Américains* into oblivion (cf. Garraway 2005, p. 3ff.).

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### Conclusion

*Homard à l'américaine* is then an absolutely appropriate name for a dish that took on its essential form in the kitchens of *les Américains* of Saint-Domingue, an exemplary case of 'Creole cookery' in that it brings together a Taïno Indian sauce for crustaceans, elaborated with an Atlantic World use of a tomato sauce (going back ultimately to culinary knowledge learned from Mexico's Nahuatl by the Spanish) and further incorporating southern French techniques of sautéing in olive oil and scenting dishes with wine and cognac. In Brittany, Bordeaux, coastal Languedoc and probably also coastal Provence, after a century or more of contacts with the Antilles and the repatriation of many ex-colonials, the dish was taken up and over time came to be seen as a genuinely local one, with new appellations sometimes replacing the old *à l'américaine*. The great professional chefs of mid to late-nineteenth century France, working in kitchens feeding France's élite, perhaps consciously exploited the fact that the old name of the dish no longer made sense to the average Frenchman and, refining the dish by method and additional secondary ingredients according to their individual culinary tastes, felt emboldened in at least some cases to appropriate the whole as their invention. By the second half of the nineteenth century, there were of course few of Saint-Domingue's *Américains* — nor any Taïno — still alive to raise an objection.

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### About the author

Anthony F. Buccini was born in Jersey City, N.J. and received his B.A. from Columbia University and his Ph.D. in Germanic Linguistics from Cornell University; he formerly taught in the departments of Germanic Languages and Literatures and Linguistics of the University of Chicago. His research and publications have focussed on the Germanic, Romance and Celtic languages, pidgin and creole studies, historical linguistics, dialectology and language contact. In addition, he has long been active in the field of food history with his publications focussing primarily on problems in the development of Mediterranean and Atlantic World cuisines viewed in their broader socio-historical contexts and often employing linguistic methodology. In 2005, Buccini was awarded the Sophie Coe Prize in Food History.

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## Notes

1. Davidson 2002, p. 177. Many thanks to Amy Dahlstrom and Ernest Buccini Jr. for comments and criticism. All usual disclaimers apply.
  2. Many modern recipes for the Catalan dish do not include use of the tomalley/roe, though some do and their inclusion is surely the older practice: the use of the name *civet* here (basic sense, a stew of game with onions and a sauce enriched with the blood and liver of the animal) is surely a reference to the use of the tomalley/roe to enrich the sauce.
  3. E.g. Suzanne 1894, p. 81: 'Le homard à l'américaine n'est pas, comme on pourrait le supposer, une importation du nouveau monde... La recette est au contraire essentiellement parisienne, et ce mets fit la vogue du restaurant Peters, qui le mit à la mode vers la fin du règne de Napoléon III'.
  4. Regarding olive oil just from Marseille, see the statistics in Boulanger 1996, annexe 3. For a list of major products from France to the Antilles, see *Dict. universel* 1805, p. 531. Detailed lists of food shipments to Saint-Domingue from Sète are given in Dermigny 1954, pp. 50, 54.
  5. The Arawak word *tomáli* is perhaps first recorded in Breton's dictionary of 1665 (first edition 1658), where it appears in various forms. Its precise meaning is not wholly clear from this text but on p. 467 Breton, in explaining the forms *tóma nitomáliem*, writes: 'sause, ma sause... elle s'appelle ainsi, parce que les femmes pour l'ordinaire la font avec du tomali de crabe qui est huileux'.
  6. This dish, presumably from Saint-Domingue, is more elaborate than but clearly related to the modern dishes *matoutou* (Martinique) and *matété* (Guadeloupe).
  7. De Cauna 1998, p. 11: 'Il n'est pas rare de voir dans les dépôts d'archives du Sud-Ouest de la France des actes notariés, des papiers de familles ou même des pièces administrative d'Ancien Régime portant la surprenante mention «Américain» à la suite d'un nom aux consonances bien locales. L'image même du riche Américain «de retour des Iles» s'est généralement conservée dans les mentalités collective, et plus précisément dans les souvenirs de certaines familles...'
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