

STUDY ON BANAT'S TRADITIONAL GASTRONOMY

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The cuisine from Banat is characterized by tasty, fat and nourishing meals. "Ciorba" is soured with lemon, supplemented with cream and seasoned with tarragon. Soups are cooked with home-made noodles, and with "rantas", as well. Home-made noodles are much used for snacks, meals and also for sweets. With home-made noodles, we may cook the well-known "iofca" with cabbage, nuts, milk, poppy; there is also the goulash, which is cooked in most kitchens from Banat. There are some specific dishes in Banat's area that are prepared during the Christian holidays, Christmas and Easter. Most of these dishes are borrowed from other folks who live even today in the Banat's multicultural and historical area.

Key words: gastronomy, traditional cuisine, Banat cuisine, Easter holidays, Christmas holiday

Romanian cuisine can be defined as integer, but if we analyze food structure in terms of varieties, method of cooking, seasoning, and in terms of structure and association between various raw matters, then we observe that there are regional particularities, too.

Romanian cuisine, on the whole, is known due to meals like: *piftia* (aspic), *ciorba de potroace* (giblets soup), *ciorba de burta* (belly soup), *saramura de peste cu mamaliga* (fish souse with polenta), *sarmale cu mamaliga* (forcemeat roll of cabbage with polenta), *tocana* (pottage), peppers or tomatoes filled with meat or rice, fresh and smoked sausages, *mititei*, *tochitura*, barbecues with vegetables, pickles of various vegetables and fruit; then sweets: pies, *cozonac* (cake), *papanasi*, *coltunasi*, *baclavale*, pancakes, puddings etc.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

History made the Banat Region be a mosaic of different cultures, given by the successive occupations of the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The communities of Romanian, Germans, Hungarians, Serbians, Croatians, Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Jews and Romani make the Banat Region

a region of European cultures, considered a Small Europe, a model of peaceful cohabitation.

The richness of the natural, architectural and cultural patrimony is given by the identity of the fauna and flora present in the national parks, natural parks and reservations, the large network of rivers, natural lakes and storage lakes, by the presence of the river Danube and of the microdelta Balta Nera, by the architecture of some patrimony buildings, specific to various architectural styles, and not at least by the ethnography and folklore maintained original in this region [3, 4].

Gastronomy is much diversified and representative for this Euro-region. The association between different traditional cuisines specific to the populations cohabiting for hundreds of years in this region made the Banat cuisine be one of the most diversified cuisines in the world [6].

In this study, we make a brief presentation of the culinary customs and traditions met in the multicultural area of the historical Banat, with focus on the period called „Passion Week”, and Christmas holiday. During these periods, people have meals that are different from the other periods of the calendar year.

Consulting a vast bibliography and according to field studies, this work presents a series of customs and traditions specific to Banat's cuisine, which has many German, Hungarian, Serbian, Slovakian, etc. influences, aspects that are occasioned by the period of Easter holidays, especially Maundy Thursday from Passion Week and period of Christmas holiday.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The cuisine from Banat is characterized by tasty, fat and nourishing meals. *Ciorba* is soured with lemon, supplemented with cream and seasoned with tarragon. Soups are cooked with home-made noodles, and with *rântaș*, as well. Home-made noodles are much used for snacks, meals and also for sweets. With home-made noodles, we may cook the well-known *iofca* with cabbage, nuts, milk, poppy; there is also the goulash, which is cooked in most kitchens from Banat.

Meals are characterized by dressings with *rantas* obtained from mouldy flour „quenched” with bone soup or vegetable soup, and then enriched with cream. People use to have much *papricas* with *galuste* made of flour and eggs, boiled in water and salt.

Sarmale in Banat are made of meat chopped with the chopper; they are big, do not have the nicety of the Moldavian ones, but are tasty.

There is, in Banat, a meal called „Varga Beles”, which is a pudding made of home-made noodles with sweet cheese and raisins, enwrapped in pie pastry and baked (in oven). The *pogacele* obtained of pastry and pork-scraps, which are served with *tuica*, are also well-known.

Pork, veal, and chicken are much used in cooking, and less the fish. Among the traditional meals from this area, we mention: *zacusca*, calf soup, *sarmale*, filled onion, Banat meal with pork, puddings. These meals make evident the characteristics of Banat cuisine [1, 4, 6].

The Passion Week from Easter Lent is strictly respected in Banat; people eat meagre along this week, and on Wednesday and Friday they are in „black” lent. During this week, people go to the church every evening.

On Maundy Thursday - „*dead come every year to their old homes, where they stay until the Saturday before Rusalii*”. According to folk belief, this day is the day when women finish work in the house.

People give alms for the dead men, the waters are unharnessed for them, cups are prepared to be filled with water; a flower, a candle and a candy are bound to the cup ear, and a *colac* (ring biscuit) will be put near each cup. Then, a bucket will be filled with water; a candle, flowers and candies will be bound to this bucket ear, too.

The bucket will be taken and, with a cup, people will pour water, for three times, on the root of a tree: for those who died in accidents, for wild animals (*joavini*) and for the dead men in the house without names and with names; the name of the dead man (*Doamne primeste lu' Patru*) will be pronounced as many times as dead men are. Then, the cups together with the ring biscuit will be incensed (a spoon will be filled with embers and incense, then it will be moved above the cups and ring biscuits for three times and the dead men names will be said) and then given to children, neighbours, relatives.

On Maundy Thursday, the eggs will be stained. In Banat, eggs are stained with onion peeling. The onion peeling is washed and then introduced in a pot with boiling water; the eggs will be added, and after they boil they will be taken out, greased with bacon and put in a basket, in order to be taken to the church and sanctified.

This day, women cook „*prescura*” (bread) for Easter and take it in new dishes to the church, where they leave it until the Easter Day. The woman who made the *prescura* for Easter is a widow or older and fasted the entire lent.

From Maundy Thursday and until the Easter Day, the church bells will not toll, only the „*toaca*” (wooden plate) will be beaten.

The food, this day, is meagre and eaten only once. As we specified, people do not eat from morning and until lunchtime (they *fast*), and after lunch they can have: „*mancare scazuta de varza murata - curechi acru*” (a meal with sauerkraut), with „*fasole batuta*” (bean) („*pasula slaita cu ceapa fripta cu piparca*”); the onion is fried in vegetable oil, in which sweet pepper paprika was added) or tomato soup with rice („*zama de paradaisa*”).

The tomato soup and „*fasole bătută*” are specific in Banat, served in the same time (a plate with the soup and another one with the bean); they are eaten with the spoon, by alternating one spoon of soup with one spoon of bean. Instead of the afters, people have bread and marmalade (with „*petmez*”), bread drenched in water with sugar („*tucor*,,”), dry fruit stew („*poame*,,”) with bread or „*chisalita*” (a soupy plum jam boiled with a little sugar).

Older women fast all day long, only in the evening they eat bread drenched in pumpkin oil with salt (the pumpkin oil is obtained with the squeezer and it is very dark green in colour).

In the evening, people go to the church, because the priest reads 12 liturgies (Gospels). During this evening, 12 candles will be inflamed, one for each liturgy.

The candles are brought from homes, and they are inflamed to make the wishes true [2, 3, 5, 6].

Holidays like Birth of Jesus Christ, Christmas, represent for the Romanian people a great opportunity for joy. After the post of Christmas, it is allowed to eat sweets, therefore it brings a lot of habits and a medley of dishes from pork and sweets for holidays.

Slaughtering the pig is a custom done on Ignat. There are many dishes prepared of pork for the Christmas Feast like bacon, sausages, drums, rolls, roast pork, soup bones.

Sweets made for holidays or sweets served to the guests and to the children that go from house to house and sing are: cake, pie and paste.

Bacon is one of the traditional culinary preparations, obtained by Romanian household through processing pig fat. Pieces of fat are cut slices, placed in brine (brine resulting from friction and burial fat with plenty of salt and in some areas to add bits of garlic) and let it soak for 2-3 weeks. Then remove the bacon and scrape excessive salt and preferentially add hot or sweet paprika and put it in a smokehouse 2-3 days.

„*Caltabosii*” called in some areas and „*calbaji*”, are sausages made from pig offal cooked and grind on the day of sacrificing pig. Is consumed fresh or smoked. If in the composition we add blood (collected in cutting pork, allowed to clot, boiled and grind) we obtain the so-called „*sangerete*”.

Forcemeat roll of cabbage („*sarmale*” in Romanian) is a word used to describe a culinary preparation of minced meat (pork but also beef, lamb, poultry), mixed with rice and other ingredients and cover of cabbage or beef in the form of rolls. It is served usually with polenta and sour cream.

Forcemeat roll of cabbage can be made for outpost, replacing meat in the stuffing with mushrooms, soy, minced vegetables, maize passed, or even pieces of bread (your choice or in various combinations to taste). Cabbage used in its preparation can be fresh or sour (obtained quickly and maintained over the winter). Forcemeat roll of cabbage may be prepared with leaves of coltsfoot, garden sorrel, spinach or (in some areas) horseradish. At lunch, forcemeat roll of cabbage for outpost are served with tomato, green onion and dry onion salad.

Traditional, in the Banat, when Christmas Eve, we prepare these dishes: ragout of beans, „*ludaie*” (roasted pumpkin) and cakes with soft cow cheese. Cakes are made from hemp seed, crushed in a timber mill by an elderly woman. On this day, they make knot-shape bread and „*sernarita*” (baked corn). In the baked corn, at one end we put a coin or a thread of basil. Anyone who finds the coin or basil, will be lucky for the rest of the year.

Also, on Christmas Eve, women use to bake a round bread called „*purcarita*”. They put on it small pieces of dough, called „*bus*”. They put as many „*bus*” on bread as many animals they have in the household. After baking it, put „*purcarita*” on some straw on the table next to the knot-shape bread and next to a plate of dish for Santa Clause who ia awaited that very night. Near the plate we put a bottle of sanctified water with a twig of apple.

On Christmas day, we put on „*purcarita*” very small amounts of several dishes made that day. It is a habit to share alms, here we refer to sausages and knot-shaped bread. Sausages and knot-shaped bread are made especially for this purpose, put on the table and incensed by the oldest woman from the house [2,3,5,6].

CONCLUSIONS

Romanian cuisine has managed along time to maintain its tradition; cooks knew how to transmit to their followers the taste of the traditional meals, and improved and refined the recipes, generating a real Romanian culinary art.

Banat’s cuisine is strongly influenced, like the cuisine from Transilvania, by the Austro-Hungarian cuisine. The meals cooked in Banat are made of pork, especially with vegetables fried and braised in fat or oil, with flour sauces („*rantas*”), seasoned with pepper, thyme, paprika and caraway.

Each historical region has its specific gastronomy, which has been maintained, completed and enriched in terms of variety and quality through borrowing from the traditions of the other people it contacted or cohabited with.

The Maundy Thursday from the Easter Lent is, first of all, an occasion for soul purification, and the meagre that accompanies it complete the spiritual connotation of this day.

In the Banat, when Christmas Eve, we prepare these dishes: ragout of beans, „*ludaie*” (roasted pumpkin) and cakes with soft cow cheese. On this day, they make knot-shape bread and „*semarita*” (baked corn).

In Banat area there is a habit of cooking pork, cow, poultry and not too much fish. Among the traditional dishes from this area we point out: “*zacusca*”, veal soup, beet soup, forcemeat roll of cabbage, filled onion, traditional Banat meal made of pork, puddings. These meals evidence characteristics of Banat region kitchen. The same dishes we can find in other areas but each area has something specific both in terms of dosing raw materials, the technology used and seasoning as well. All these lead to that specific dish from that area.

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