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TRADITIO ET EXCELLENTIA

TRANSYLVANIAN GASTRONOMY IN THE 16TH – 19TH CENTURIES

SUMMARY

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The study of premodern Transylvanian gastronomy (16th–19th centuries) starts from the premise that food represents both an essential identity element and a vector of intercultural exchanges. The dishes, the preferred ingredients, the cooking techniques, and the norms around the meal reflect belonging to a certain social group or community, preserving inherited traditions, but also integrating external influences. The investigation of the culinary practices of Transylvanian past thus becomes a valuable endeavour of recovering identity and collective memory, offering new perspectives on the social and cultural history of the region. The context of premodern Transylvania is especially fertile for such research thanks to the ethnic, confessional, and cultural diversity that has defined the region over the centuries, creating a unique multicultural mosaic

In Romanian and Central-European historiography, premodern gastronomy of Transylvania was an insufficiently explored subject. Up to the present there were missing comprehensive syntheses dedicated to this space, existing only partial studies and sporadic research on food. In particular, the analysis of historical culinary techniques and of the concrete way in which food was cooked and preserved was almost absent, constituting an important gap in the specialized literature. This historiographical void, together with the potential of the theme to offer new perspectives (by correlating gastronomy with social, identity, and economic aspects), motivated the initiation of the present research. In addition, considering the multicultural character of Transylvania, the study of its historical gastronomy promises to highlight both the common elements and the specific differences among the cohabiting communities, contributing to a better understanding of the interethnic and interconfessional relations of the epoch.

To respond to these motivations, in the **Introduction** of the thesis the research questions and the main objectives of the scientific approach were clearly formulated. They focused on the ample reconstruction of food practices in premodern Transylvania – from the structure of daily and festive meals to the ingredients used, preparation techniques, and preservation methods – as well as on identifying the social, ethnic, and religious differences reflected in culinary customs. Likewise, the research aimed to examine external influences (Ottoman, Austrian, German, French) on local cuisine, the way of their adaptation to the Transylvanian taste and context, and to critically analyse the relevant historical documentary sources (especially the recipe manuscripts). Important objectives also targeted the contextualization of these culinary manuscripts (such as those of Zsuzsanna Apor and of István Nánási) as documents of taste and premodern everyday life, as well as the evaluation of the possibility of defining a Transylvanian gastronomic identity as a dynamic synthesis of multiple cultural, social, and religious influences coexisting in the region.

The research combined traditional historiographic methods (criticism and interpretation of primary and secondary sources) with perspectives from food anthropology and from the history of culinary technologies. Various sources were examined: unpublished culinary manuscripts, printed cookbooks, chronicles, journals, economic registers, correspondence, administrative documents, and even reports from witchcraft trials, in order to cover as completely as possible, the gastronomic universe of the epoch. Special attention was given to the philological analysis of recipe manuscripts: these were transcribed (the original text, in old Hungarian, being difficult to access) and then translated into Romanian, an operation followed by the interpretation of archaic culinary terminology and the establishment of the historical context of each document. Source criticism included identifying the authors or compilers, dating and purpose of the manuscripts, evaluating the target audience, and the degree of originality or compilation of the included recipes.

The working methodology was one integrated and innovative: classical historical research (based on archives and libraries) was enriched by anthropological perspectives (regarding food as identity and social marker) and by elements of the history of science and technology.

Two particularly important manuscript documents were critically analysed in the present thesis; they are constituting the documentary nucleus of the research: the recipe collection of Countess Zsuzsanna Apor (1727) and the manuscript cookbook of István Nánási (1771). These offer a direct window towards the cuisine of the epoch, containing authentic recipes, menus, and culinary instructions from the 18th century (respectively the beginning of the modern epoch).

One chapter of the thesis is dedicated to the detailed analysis of the **recipe book belonging to Countess Zsuzsanna Apor**, one of the oldest known Transylvanian culinary collections.

The manuscript contains 90 recipes, most of them focused on the preparation of jams, compotes, liqueurs, and other preserves of fruits and flowers. Practically, it is a collection of confectionery recipes and of the art of preserving sweet foods, indicating the author's interest for sugar-based preservation techniques (jams, syrups, candied fruits) and the obtaining of sweet drinks (ratafias, liqueurs from various plants and fruits) – crafts specific to the noble kitchens of that time. The analysis of the ingredients and of the procedures present in the text revealed the frequent use of exotic spices – such as cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger – alongside large amounts of sugar, indicating the refined tastes of the Transylvanian aristocracy of the epoch. The presence of these expensive and far-originating ingredients also reflects the commercial and cultural connections from which the Transylvanian elites benefited.

The chapter of the thesis dedicated to this manuscript clarified the historical and familial context of its appearance. Zsuzsanna Apor came from an influential Transylvanian noble family and, through marriage, entered the Haller family – one of the first-rank Hungarian aristocratic families. Her recipes, concentrated on the domain of confectionery, can be interpreted as an expression of the feminine role in noble households (ladies often taking care of sweets and of winter provisions) and at the same time as a reflection of the culinary tendencies from European courts (where the art of desserts knew a special development in the Baroque age). By the fact that she wrote down these recipes, Countess Apor contributed to the transmission of a set of elite gastronomic knowledge to the next generations – moreover, her work remained in the family and today constitutes a valuable document of culinary heritage.

A second major chapter analyses the culinary manuscript drawn up by **István Nánási in the year 1771**. This document proves to be an exceptional work in the Transylvanian culinary landscape of the 18th century, both through size and through approach. The author was not a professional cook or an aristocrat, but an intellectual in formation, probably secretary or tutor in the service of a noble family, familiar with the academic language of the time. This atypical profile is strongly reflected in the character and structure of his work.

The manuscript cookbook of Nánási contains no less than 601 recipes, an impressive number for the epoch. But not only the quantity distinguishes it, but also the innovative way of organization and the encyclopaedic breadth of the content. In contrast with the majority of culinary collections until then – drafted usually by ladies from high society or by cooks of courts, and organized thematically (in chapters dedicated to meat, soups, desserts, etc.) or even in a random order, Nánási's work is the first known cookbook manuscript in Hungarian language that orders its recipes alphabetically, according to their title. This systematic approach, of Enlightenment inspiration, confers to the text an almost culinary dictionary character, the author deliberately renouncing the traditional chapter structure in favour of a rigorous and easy-to-consult classification. His spirit of inventory and classification reflects the influence of the Enlightenment currents of the time and transpires from the didactic tone of the manuscript.

Moreover, Nánási's book does not limit itself to ordinary culinary recipes, but also includes household advice, technical recipes, and scientific knowledge of the epoch. The author adds, for instance, instructions about the preparation of fine liqueurs (rosolis, liqueurs) and even about making dyes or planting herbs, a sign of the polyvalent character of his work. Thus, the Nánási manuscript has an encyclopaedic approach, aiming to include "all kinds" of recipes and useful information for a noble household. This encyclopaedic character and the professional "masculine" perspective distinguish Nánási's recipe collection from that of Zsuzsanna Apor (oriented more towards sweets and the feminine domestic domain).

Nánási's manuscript was rediscovered relatively recently by historians and is preserved, together with Apor's manuscript, at the Museum of Commerce and the Hospitality Industry in Budapest.

To deepen some key aspects of Transylvanian gastronomy and to concretely illustrate the applied methodology, the thesis includes **three case studies** focused on specific themes: the use of saffron in the 16th century, the consumption of fish in noble milieus in the 16th–17th centuries, and the relationship between popular magic and kitchen utensils in premodern Transylvania. These case studies, resulting partially from published scientific articles, offer complementary perspectives and highlight the way in which the research of gastronomy can bring contributions not only to the history of food, but also to economic history or to the history of mentalities.

The first case study investigates the use of saffron in the cuisine of Transylvania in the 16th century.

The second case study focuses on fish consumption in the diet of elites in Transylvania and Royal Hungary in the 16th–17th centuries.

The third case study approaches a theme at the border between the history of gastronomy and the history of mentalities: the relationship between magical practices and the universe of household and culinary objects in premodern Transylvania.

The last section of the thesis **recapitulates the main results of the research and underlines the original contributions brought by it**. The present research aimed to investigate the gastronomy of Transylvania between the 16th and 19th centuries as a complex expression of the social, cultural, economic, and religious conditions of the epoch.

From the ensemble of the research, it results that Transylvanian gastronomic identity is not a fixed and monolithic one, but on the contrary, a dynamic and polyphonic reality. Ethnic diversity (Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons, as well as Armenians, Jews, Roma, etc.), confessional plurality (Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants), and social differences together generated a variety of tastes, customs, and culinary techniques, which influenced each other and in time led to the formation of a unique regional culinary heritage.

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