

Imaginar culinar și reprezentări culturale ale alimentației în România interbelică

Culinary imaginary and cultural representations of food in Interwar Romania

Key words:

Daily life, town, gastronomy, national cuisine, diet, fast, dietotherapy, spices, food additives, hunger, Cluj.

Abstract

This comprehensive study was born from the desire to fill a void in the Romanian historiography concerning food. The fundamental problem that it focuses on is the urban food, creative of images and cultural representations. Its merit is to be created, in its perimeter, using the crucible method, the premises necessary for the invention of a national cuisine, passing over regional issues. It is the one who stepped in as a decisive factor in the changes that took place in less than a century.

The assumption from which we started is that the inter-war period is the one that kicked off a change in diet. This change has occurred on several levels. The development of transport and food preservation methods caused a revolution of resources, new patented methods for obtaining high crops competed to obtain the same result; hygiene books, magazines and cookbooks have contributed to the development of techniques for food preparation and have encouraged the use of various foods. The doctors have been preoccupied with establishing nutritionally correct menus to cover the needs of all individuals. Their results were published in various magazines and newspaper, available to all interested. Between the rich people, the fast, as a manifestation of piety loses intensity, leaving in place practices that provide health and flexibility, tangible immediately. Pleasure in consumption has resulted in the acquisition of various recipes of the most reputable kitchens, especially the French.

What prevailed, however, giving specificity of the era, was a concern for healthy nutrition. Eugenics, as a current that wanted to improve the nation, was the one that led to an unprecedented development of studies about food based on malnutrition, in particular on infant deaths and malnourished children up to 18 years.

The overall objective of the thesis is to surprise the image of food in the collective mentality of townsmen and to describe the cultural representations of consumption that have been formed based on similarities between the character of the food and the person's character.

As a secondary objective, I have sought to describe the food in urban areas and to make a characterization of it through the elements which give it specificity. The otherness to which we defined it is the one born in the countryside, but also the one from other lands, seen as an alternative.

Another facet of urban population's food, on which we intend to establish, was revealed by famine. The abundance's century was disrupted by brief periods of famine of high intensity. In contrast to previous periods of crisis, the crisis that has disrupted the interwar period wasn't one of subsistence, but one of overproduction. While famine grinded the society, in ports, a great quantity of grain was destroyed because it could not be sold on the market.

Once met these goals, we set out to illustrate urban food through one of the most important cities of the country: Klausenburg. Here we have sought to capture the food sources, their preparation methods, regional and urban specificities: the luxury of the restaurants and the decadence of the peripherals.

To achieve our objectives, we used various sources. The richest source operated was the press. Beside it, hygiene and nutrition studies, published in various magazines and newspapers have provided valuable information. Cookbooks added flavour and sketched an urban specific and memoirs and literature have shown the size of an everyday menu or a festive one.

In the counterweight with the vastness of the information relating to the hygiene of food and nutrition issues, the number of cookbooks, memoirs and literature used to, fade. Memoirs recall aspects of food extremely rare, particularly in evoking childhood moments, when culinary indulgence was a delight sought. Evoking youth and adult moments, there is a change of perspective towards other pleasures and pursuits. Recipe books, few in number, keep the same register, showcasing the fanciful recipes, inspired by foreign cuisines. Some descend in depth; divided into chapters, evoke the main foods, showing aspects of their choice, the way of cooking and presentation at the table. Not a few are, however, those who remember the same recipes, with minor differences, or even identical.

The literature consulted remember food as a necessity or as a pleasure, as part of the daily life or as a feast, to point out through it the character's rank. However, the indications are rare and often lapidary.

Another category of sources, unpublished documents found on the Archives, were even more stoning than literature. Among the richest presented during the investigation, we recall the list of menu from the orphanage of Chişinău and the list of cooking from the laboratory-kitchen of Household school "St. Teresa" in Klausenburg.

For the processing of a large quantity of information from various sources, both by type and by topic, we set out a critical analysis of each source, both in the light of the information submitted by the author, and taking into account the target audience.

According to the source, the methods used were different. For interpretation of cookbooks, linguistic method was used mainly to determine the origin of preparations or influences that led to their form today. Regression method has helped us fill some gaps, especially in the case of local cuisine, and the comparative method has helped us to establish the national consumption picture in contrast with the European one.

The results of the research have been materialised in six chapters, unequal, each having its share in designing urban consumption. A first chapter proposes to establish feeding on the territories inhabited by Romanians along time, insisting on the factors that have led to changes in its structure. The form that Romanian cuisine has today was given by the influences of Romans, Migrators, Orientals and Westerns. Also taking into account the historical context in which we relate to the interwar period, a traditional food for each area individually is required. Also, following these steps of the history of food, together with a perception of historical and political context of the period led to the question of whether we can speak of a national cuisine then and even now.

The existence of a national cuisine involves the assembly of some essential characteristics. The most important is the existence of a small difference between the elites and the poor's menu. Between the humble peasant's food and the meals of a high official, the difference is enormous, which excludes totally existence of a Romanian cuisine. Urban cuisine, somewhat mitigates these differences, leaving room for different interpretations. It is constituted as a *mélange* meant to ensure the formation of a unitary Romanian cuisine, which is why I've dedicated the second chapter to it. Without insisting on foodstuff cooked there, different

according to region and resources, I insisted on common elements: choice of foods, thus establishing quality criteria, the need to combat counterfeit or adulterated foods, the need to improve the taste through various condiments, the interest in cooking sweets meant to be served to guests as a desert and the need to use food additives to preserve or improve the taste of the preparations.

The urban foods mark is, as we mentioned, its tendency for unification and annulment of differences between social classes and the tendency to respect the criteria defined by the doctors for a meal appropriate qualitative and quantitative. The latter defines a menu suitable for infants, one for children up to two years, another for those who fall between 2 and 17 years old, one for adults and another one for the aged.

With regard to adults, we observe a differentiation according to occupation and financial resources and other according to private or public environment in which feeding takes place. Both workers and senior officials frequently consumed meat, white bread and various cakes. The senior officials were receiving guests with fast, attended to special events where impressive menus were served, but the "chicken boeuf salad" wasn't missing nor of the fanciful banquet menus, nor from the shabby workers Sunday menu. On the table of the latter, the Sunday menu was formed from soup with boiled meat and sauce and some cake, not as smooth and palatable, but equally appreciated.

The interwar imaginary drawn through a feed base gets its function through the political and social context. The society received an ideal image of an individual obtained through a healthy diet. The dissemination of all material regarding nutrition was done considering that. A new term was defined, the *complex menu*, and its benefits for the individual and society were also delineated. To be successful, the healthy diet needs to be defined by a series of principles. Also, the food's ability to cure nutritional deficiencies and diseases or to aggravate them was established. The ability of food to envenom or cure was well known for centuries, but this knowledge was based on empirical data. During this period, the researchers worked and experimented to elucidate the causes for which simple food played a role in healing or worsening one's conditions.

The otherness is a landmark in the designing of a culinary identity, but Romanians didn't tend towards the creation of an identity, but they tried to take over the culture of peoples

considered superior, by who were tending. The good manners at the table, taken together with recipes advertised by cookbooks translated or filed, round out this picture.

The woman, the eminent chef, changed its status during this period, was emancipate, and received the right to work, right exerted especially by those coming from the lower strata of society. This had a big effect on consumption. That shortage in women's time, along with the emergence of cooking machine has reduced considerably the time for food preparation.

Not only the woman was defined via the food prepared and eaten in the housewife or the contrary. How one eats, the amount of food consumed and its composition they have always been the characteristics of human typology. The ascetic, the vegan, the gobbler, all these labels were made in consideration of food eaten, also affected society. The ascetic, fasting in urban areas, was seen as bigoted, hypocritical or just as a model too difficult to follow. The vegetarian comes as a complement to it, however, citing a tangible purpose of refraining from food of animal origin-bodily health.

A thin body grows slowly to be an obsession trough woman, despite the high value given to fat girls in the countryside. Diets got usual within women's menu, so that at the end of the century to become an obsession.

The gobbler, in a society that valued moderation but dreamt of gorging, was regarded with envy and amusement. His failure to abstain from eating food without hindrance was regarded as a deficiency, which was often taunted.

In the flow of food's history, a specialization on both in terms of production of foods and their consumption took place. The men were responsible for hunting, while women worked in planting and cropping cereals. This specialization has been interpreted as a marker indicating the specifics of genders. As so, men should be mostly feed with meat, whereas women should consume mostly cereal.

The hunger, considered to be the fear of eternal ages, sister of physical decay and death stroke again in the middle of the interwar period. The society has suffered as result of the First World War from all points of view, famine included. The acute shortage has been exceeded in the first two years of the interwar period, but shortly after the recovery, another crisis took place, not as profound, but severe enough to disrupt the whole society.

In terms of food, this crisis has not meant famine in the true sense of the word because it was not a crisis of subsistence, but one of overproduction while drastic cuts in jobs and salaries of the employees were being operated. However, hunger showed his fangs, especially in poor environments, and the desperate gestures have accompanied it

In 1935, a subsistence crisis disturbed Bessarabia, and its proportions were dreadful. Two years later, the crisis has been established in the country also, and a recovery took place on the threshold of World War II.

To overtake the crisis and to avoid another at all costs, savings were designated as a solution, imposed through the two institutions, promoters of culture: the Church and the school. They tried instilling the spirit of economy and the education of the population for the purposes of internal products consumption and avoiding of imported products and have encouraged the bank deposits.

The perception of an abundant or modest meal on crisis time makes the object of one of the subsections and intends to complete the image of food already created.

The sixth chapter is considering one of the most important cities of the country and the most important in Transylvania, Klausenburg. Through it, we aim to restore the image of the urban food: the agriculture, the industry and the trade as sources of food, markets, fairs and shops as buying places and restaurants and canteens as places of consumption. The urban socialization is also the subject of analysis, as well as marginal, the beneficiaries of organised proms. All this gives the specificity of urban food, and brings the bases of the establishment of national cuisine.

In the course of this research, the conclusion that stood as necessary was that the period under study, located between the two world wars, is the one where the idea of national cuisine was born, boosted by food books, women's magazines and restaurants, even though up to this point we had to deal with deep regional cuisines impregnated with a specific of their own. This merger took place in urban areas, spread to the countryside, and this process is still on going, unfinished till nowadays.

In the same period, the eugenic trends were intensifying aimed by the idea of creating an ideal human and that society would adapt to it through food and hygiene. Without taking heed to the precepts of gourmet, the researchers urged the creation of an appropriate menu from the

point of view of micro and macro nutrients that they wished to be included in the daily diet, all related to the level of physical activity of the individual, to moderation and variety. They also attracted the attention that food can have a decisive influence in improving or worsening of certain diseases through their content in mineral substances and vitamins. So, rather than investing foodstuff with divine powers through magic rituals performed in certain days of the calendar, people should know that food needs to be eaten clean and well cooked.

Urban cuisine differs significantly from that of the countryside, and the first-order difference is mental. The abundance, the variety and the ability to choose are its characteristics, but it is also strongly characterized by lack of investing food with the spiritual component. Here, the requirements about the fast were easily volatilised, making rise, instead, of vegetarianism and regimes for different diseases, diets or just abundance. The greed of the stomachs blamed but also always dreamt of as part of the heavenly paradise at the same time by the man from the countryside gets to become a rule.

The attitude towards food is no longer one of respect, and the bread is no longer seen as a gift, but as a given, meant only to ensure the smooth functioning of the body, and not as an intercessor in the communion with the divine. The bite from the same slice of bread no longer presents the fear with which had been originally assigned to haggle perpetually on the other world with the one that bite of it, but to contract infectious diseases that would endanger the body, not the soul. Feeding in the interwar period was intended only to ensure the health of the body, not the soul.

The merit of the urban cuisine is the one of creating the national cuisine by decreasing the difference between the menus of the rich and the poor both qualitatively and quantitatively. It is open to new influences, fashion and hygiene mostly; thereby it was devoid progressively by any investment with godlike powers.

The present study proposes to introduce into the scientific circuit a new approach to diet in terms of cultural representations in the interwar period.

Also, we note that this study can be considered as a change of perspective in historiography and intends to make the switch from approaches to food in terms of ritual to food as necessity for healthiness, approaches specific to the 20th century.