

Nutrition in Dalmatian Zagora in the 1950s during the Annual and Life Cycle

The tradition of preparing and eating food, which has its own developmental stages in a historical context, depends, among other things, on factors such as climate, soil, and the available flora and fauna in a certain region.

The exposure of the Dalmatian Zagora to the continental climate, the small area of arable land and its rocky and harsh landscape directly influenced the availability of food, the way it was eaten, and the customs that developed in such an environment.

This paper presents the selection of foods and methods of preparing meals, as well as their symbolism and meaning in the life of the inhabitants of the Dalmatian Zagora during the annual and life cycle of the 1950s.

It is also highlighted the importance of socializing and enjoying food on special occasions, as well as the value of a balanced diet and daily physical activity, which contribute to the absence of obesity and many health issues of modern people.

Keywords: holidays, Dalmatian Zagora, gatherings, food, village, festivities

INTRODUCTION

Food and dining customs have a deep meaning in human lives, and the study of this topic is of interest to many scientific fields, from social to natural.

Food is a means of transmitting a whole series of symbolic values, and throughout the historical period it shapes the individual and the group through cultural aspects, customs, behavior, traditions and other aspects of life.

As an addition to previous research (Bosanac and Nanjara 2021), this paper elaborates on food customs in the Dalmatian Zagora during the annual and life cycle in the 1950s.

It is known that special occasions in people's lives are associated with a special way of dining and attitude towards food, in the Dalmatian Zagora and in other parts of Croatia and the world.

Eating habits differentiate groups within peoples, including the population of Dalmatian Zagora, which is characterized by its specificities, and this example, through the fundamental meaning of food, shows their symbolic significance.

One of the fundamental determinants for describing traditional customs is the paper of Antun Radić *Osnova za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu (Basis for collecting and studying materials about traditional life)* (1997). According to this scheme, collaborators in the field collected customs, which were then published in a series of monographs, including *Poljica* by Frano Ivanišević (1987) and *Bukovica* by Vladimir Ardalić (2010).

In particular, Ivanišević (1987) exhaustively described curiosities about events and activities during the annual and life cycle at the beginning of the 20th century in Poljica near Omiš. Similarly, Ardalić (2010) in the same period describes the life in the community of the extended family and the customs and habits of the inhabitants of Bukovica during the annual and life cycles.

It is undeniable that the diet of the Croatian population was significantly influenced by political circumstances (the rule of the Turks, Austria-Hungary...) and religion, which is especially visible in customs during religious holidays. Thus, the specifics of holiday customs in the region of Vinkovci are described by Gligorević (2002), Muraj (1992) describes in detail the Easter and Christmas customs in Banovina, while Miholek (2016) vividly presents the Christmas customs in Đurđevac.

Furthermore, the paper of Rittig-Beljak and Randić (2006) provides a valuable contribution to learning about old traditional customs during holidays, celebrations and other family gatherings, and the paper of Čapo Žmegač (1997) depicts traditional Croatian Easter customs. It is certainly worth mentioning the exhaustive paper of Čapo Žmegač et al. (1998) on holiday customs related to food.

The turbulent historical events that Dalmatia was exposed to over the centuries directly or indirectly reflected on the fate of the Dalmatian Zagora, an integral part of that geographical area.

Dalmatian Zagora, often referred to as Zagora, geographically includes a belt of the continental part of Dalmatia that is about 150 kilometers long and separated from the coastal part of Dalmatia by the mountain range of Kozjak, Mosor, Omiška Dinara, Biokovo and Rilić. Geographically, the Dalmatian Zagora can be narrowly divided into the so-called Kninska, Drniška, Sinjska, Vrlička, Imotska (Imota) and Vrgoračka Zagora. These are the surrounding areas of the towns of Knin, Drniš, Sinj, Vrlika, Imotski and Vrgorac. Since 1807, the entire area of Dalmatian Zagora has been interconnected by the road Knin – Sinj – Imotski – Vrgorac (Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute 2001:10, 3rd volume).

For centuries, the area of the Dalmatian Zagora was favorable for the settlement of Slavs, and the areas around fertile fields such as Petrovo, Mučko, Crivačko, Radoško, Dicmanjsko and other fields were particularly populated. The arable land, a large number of rivers and forests, and the hilliness of the entire region were a good basis for the centuries-long presence of human settlements, even though they were often impoverished in terms of population and economy due to the constant threat of war. All this over the centuries has resulted in the fact that the resourcefulness and adaptability of the inhabitants, even in the field of nutrition, won against the harsh conditions of the karst.

The objective of this research and paper was, on the one hand, to study the specifics of the customs of Dalmatian Zagora related to food during holidays, festivities and other gatherings, to show the unique gastronomic heritage, and on the other hand, to point out the need for modest eating and drinking as one of the key aspects of reducing health risks and preventing chronic diseases of modern people related to obesity and bad eating habits in general.

RESPONDENTS AND METHODS

In 2019, with the aim of collecting data on customs and traditions during holidays, festivities and other gatherings of the inhabitants of Dalmatian Zagora in the 1950s, 50 people born Dalmatian Zagora in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s and who lived there in the observed period were interviewed. The respondents were people of both sexes (but mostly women), different in terms of education and socioeconomic status. The paper covers the entire region of the Dalmatian Zagora: the villages of Lečevica, Ljubostine, Vinovo Donje, Ogorje, Smolonje, Slima, Slivno, Čista Mala, Danilo, Visoka, Zadvarje, Žagrović, Prgomet, Proložac, Dugobabe, Brnaze, Planjane, Nevest, Šestanovac, Ljubitovica, Prugovo, Čavoglave, Neorić, Muć, Raščane, Obrovac pokraj Sinja, Nova Sela, Sutina, Dolac, Mariće and Čvrljevo, and the towns of Imotski, Knin, Drniš, Sinj and Vrlika.

A survey with 22 open-ended questions was used in the research. The questions related to the choice of foods and methods of their preparation during different seasons, religious holidays, economic activities, and family and social gatherings. The paper *Seoska prehrana u Baranji* (Sotek-Machala 1992) was used as a template for designing the survey.

During the survey, the respondents lived in their homes or in nursing homes. Respondents who lived in their homes were reached through personal acquaintances. Respondents in nursing homes were selected with the help and engagement of therapists employed in the mentioned institutions.

The selection criterion was good mental health and their willingness to talk to the examiners.

In this paper are discussed the answers related to customs during holidays, gatherings and festivities. Answers related to daily diet were discussed in an earlier paper (Bosanac and Nanjara 2021).

RESEARCH RESULTS

In the 1950s, the Dalmatian Zagora had its own specifics regarding the type of food on special occasions. The choice of foods was greatly influenced by their seasonal availability. Thus, during gatherings and celebrations in the winter period people ate dried meat, while in the spring and summer, roasted lamb was served as a sign of prosperity in wealthier families.

Although many lived in poverty, for holidays and other celebrations their table was also richer, Food was often kept aside in order to eat a slightly better food during celebrations.

Regardless of the family's wealth, bread had a special place in all families when preparing food for the event. And while it was common to eat bread that was several days old, for holidays and celebrations fresh bread was baked. It was a special joy for the children and a great honor for the guests.

The dining customs on special occasions were greatly influenced by religion, financial circumstances, as well as the time of year and the availability of food. Among the parts of Dalmatian Zagora there were many similarities, as well as differences that enrich our cultural heritage.

EASTER

Preparations for Easter included a mandatory forty-day fast that was strictly observed, starting on Ash Wednesday, and continuing until Easter.

Just before Easter, on Maundy Thursday, the obligatory fast included a meal of indispensable cooked greens: chard, *wild greens*, or some other vegetable culture.

Easter is connected to eggs. They were *saved* (collected) in the period before Easter in order to have enough for this great holiday. Not even on Easter was there an abundance of food, as confirmed by Jasna Čapo Žmegač in her paper *Hrvatski uskrsni običaji* stating: “and in Bosnia, Imotska Krajina and Dalmatia, the quantity was enough for breakfast, and it was a modest one - one egg and a pastry for each family member” (Čapo Žmegač 1997: 94).

In some parts of Zagora there was a custom of *egg tapping*. Children especially looked forward to it. A hard-boiled egg would be held in the hand and used to tap the egg of the opponent. The winner was the one who damaged the shell of the opponent's egg and received his broken egg as a reward.

Hard-boiled eggs were taken to the Holy Mass to be consecrated. They were eaten immediately in the morning for breakfast *poza mison* (after coming home from mass), as said in Muć and its surroundings. Particular attention was paid to the way of dining. The custom of dining together was inevitable at Easter time. Dining together is characteristic and inherent to people. From a social point of view, dining together at the table symbolizes belonging to a group. This way of dining together was a moment of unity, unity within the family, but also unity with God, because the meal would be preceded by praying and thanksgiving to God. All the household members would gather around the table with the blessed meal. Everyone took a piece of consecrated bread or *pogača*, and one egg, which was carefully dipped in consecrated salt. The meal was eaten in silence, making sure that not a single crumb fell on the table or, God forbid, on the floor. The shell of the consecrated eggs was burned on the hearth and the ashes were spread over the garden or field. The oral tradition of the inhabitants Cera describes this way of dining, and it can be assumed that such dining customs were extended to the entire area of the Dalmatian Zagora, since the inhabitants were mostly God-fearing and raised in the Christian spirit.

According to Frano Ivanišević, it was similar in Poljica in the 1920s. In his book *Poljica* states that “for the meal in the morning eggs, bread, and shallot were blessed. Those who had it, ate young cheese and drank wine” (Ivanišević 1987: 450).

Usually, Easter lunch was *a bit better*. Boiled beef, soup, cabbage and dried meat were eaten in Imotski and its surroundings. Since Easter is in the spring, they also ate *wild greens* and scallions.

Wealthier families could afford prosciutto, smoked loins, roast lamb or goat. Boiled ham was rare. Its consumption was recorded in Danilo near Šibenik and Vinovo Donje near Trogir. Pasta was also a delicacy, because it was not easily accessible due to the traffic isolation, so it was not eaten every day.

Unleavened bread was baked in the area of Muć. In the hinterland of Omiš and Šibenik, they baked bread coated with egg. In Muć, sauerkraut with polenta or pasta was cooked as a side dish to meat. In Lećevica, they used to roast chicken under the bell. They also ate cheese.

As for desserts, the most appreciated, both in Imotski and in other parts of the Dalmatian Zagora, was *sirnica* - a special aromatic cake made of yeast dough which, although its name suggests it, does not contain cheese. They also prepared fritters. In Drniš, they made cakes with almonds and walnuts.

Drinks included wine and *rakija*.

EATING IN MODERATION AND EXERCISE IN PREVENTING DISEASES OF MODERN PEOPLE

Although the choice of food was greater during the celebrations, food was not plentiful. Food was not wasted. It was just enough to keep the guests and hosts from going hungry. In contrast to those times, today people often overeat due to the daily abundance of food (Borer 2019:4). This leads to a serious risk of obesity, type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, joint problems and the like (Sletten et al. 2018: 478).

Even if they had eaten more than they needed, the inhabitants of Dalmatian Zagora at that time would have compensated for it with daily physical activity, agricultural work, whether taking cattle to pasture, or cultivating gardens, fields and vineyards. About seventy years ago, there was no agricultural mechanization as we know it today, and working on the land consumed a considerable amount of energy.

Returning to the cultivation of the land for one's own needs would bring many benefits to modern people. He would consume food treated with less chemicals for plant protection, he would be physically active, and it is not out of place to point out that exercise and contact with nature also have a positive effect on mental health (Bratman et al. 2019: 2).

CHRISTMAS EVE AND CHRISTMAS

Throughout Zagora, dried figs and fritters were eaten on Christmas Eve. Salted sardines were on the menu in Ljubostine.

Bread was also baked, usually suitably decorated. Thus, in Slima near Omiš, a cake (bread) was made with a hole in the middle where a candlestick with three candles was placed. The bread was dipped in wine.

The Christmas menu reflected the season and availability of food. After the Midnight Mass all over Zagora, according to customs and possibilities, people ate dried figs, raisins and carobs, and drank some *rakija*. In Dugobabe, meat, sausages, bacon and prosciutto were also eaten after the Midnight Mass.

For Christmas lunch in the area of Imotski and in the hinterland of Solin and Šibenik, usually consisted of soup, sauerkraut with sausages (which in some regions were called *divenice*), kulen, blood sausage, bacon, dried pig's head and dried spine bones. In Čavoglave and Ljubitovica, in addition to the aforementioned, they cooked mutton along with dried pork, and in Čvrlevo they also ate prosciutto. In the region of Imotski, it was customary to bake chicken.

The Christmas table is well illustrated by the description of one respondent who said that the same dishes as usual were prepared, but everything was more plentiful. This was also confirmed by Frane Ivanišević, describing customs in Poljica with the saying “Everything was in abundance, like on Christmas Day” (Ivanišević 1987: 434).

In the region of Cetina, it was customary to roast a rooster or a turkey, as well as a lamb or a goat. It is interesting that they were the last lambs born, and the housewives would take care of them. Lamb and goat meat were cooked in Vrlika. *Sarma* was made in Slivno, Imotski, Golubić and Proložac Donji, and in Sinj *arambaša* (a dish similar to sarma, but the difference is that instead of minced meat, they use finely cut beef and pork). In the preparation of *arambaše*, among other things, they used *koštradina* (dried mutton) and nutmeg, cloves and lemon peel were as more special spices.

In Žagrović, along with *sarma*, *cicvara* (corn grits cooked in milk and served with sour cream) was inevitable.

In some parts of Zagora, such as Planjani, Nova Sela and Čvrljevo, pasta was prepared for Christmas. It was not often on the menu, so it was a delicacy.

Wealthier families prepared more modern dishes for that time. Some families in Šestanovac, along with *sarma* and sauerkraut, also made *pašticada* with gnocchi.

There were also those who started preparing the Christmas table a week in advance. According to the notes of Frano Ivanišević, it was similar in Poljica: “Hands full, three or four days before Christmas, bread is kneaded and baked in the oven” (Ivanišević 1987: 435).

They toasted with wine.

Desserts, of course, were not like nowadays. The most common cake in Imotski was *padišpanja* (a cake similar to a *kuglof* that was prepared on the occasion of various celebrations). Just like at Easter, at Christmas in Obrovac near Sinj, they made a cake with butter, eggs and nuts.

Due to traffic isolation, fresh fruit was not abundant, so it was especially appreciated. So, oranges, as a delicacy, were bought just for Christmas. Their composition, especially vitamin C and bioflavonoids, contributes to strengthening immunity (Desai 2021:109). Furthermore, citrus fruits are an excellent source of dietary fiber, both soluble and insoluble. Cellulose, lignin and pectin stand out. Pectin is a soluble fiber found in the white part of the fruit. It lowers the concentration of fats in the blood, which contributes to the health of the circulatory system (Majee et al. 2021:2). There is also folate, a B group vitamin, which has numerous positive effects on the human body. It supports the health of an unborn child, and has a positive effect on the heart and blood vessels (Ebara 2017:138-140).

WEDDING

The wedding menu in the region of Imotski included prosciutto, soup with boiled meat, risotto, *sarma*, chicken dishes, *pašticada*, pork, lamb, goat meat and seasonal salad.

Lamb was on the menu in Ljubitovica, Lečevica, Obrovac and in Dugobabe and Čista Mala. In Visoka, they roasted lamb, cooked rich meat soup and stew. In Vinovo Donje, there were roasted suckling pig, and boiled mutton and veal. Soup and boiled meat were eaten in Golubić

and Planjani. In Marići were served soup, risotto and roast. In Nevest, there was also cheese and prosciutto. In Danilo, they usually ate mutton, roasted suckling pig and soup.

The menu always had a seasonal character, so in the winter, according to the respondent from the village of Obrovac, dishes were prepared with dried meat.

It is interesting that in the hamlet of Bulići near Muć, they prepared black risotto (from cuttlefish), probably with the desire to emphasize the importance of the event. However, it was impossible to avoid the basic food - cabbage, so it was prepared even for wedding guests in Slima, Smolonji and Neorić. Sauerkraut was especially welcome in the winter when the choice of food was reduced. It was combined with dried meat.

The selection of desserts was modest on this occasion as well. The cakes were simple. *Padišpanja* was made in Imotski and its surroundings.

In Zagora, the young woman (bride) often made *pogača* (unleavened bread with almonds, coated with egg).

The unwritten rule was that guests should bring cakes and thus help the host. This tradition has been preserved to this day. They also baked biscuits that would be served to well-wishers in the days after the feast. The store-bought biscuits were also considered a delicacy. "My brother couldn't wait for my wedding to eat some biscuits," said one of the respondents. Today, there is an abundance of ready-made sweets at reasonable prices, which probably contributes to obesity among people of all age groups (Moore and Fielding 2019:3).

They usually drank wine and *rakija* at the wedding.

After the wedding ceremony, the bride threw walnuts and almonds to the guests. Later, this custom changed, so after the wedding, candies were thrown to the curious children from the village gathered in front of the church. Unlike today's wedding parties, only adults attended the celebration, children did not.

CHILD BIRTH

After giving birth, a new mother would be given more nutritious food, so in Smolonje she would receive a hen as a gift, and a hen soup with a beaten egg was prepared for her. In Vinovo Donji, new mothers ate butter (which they normally did not have in abundance) prosecco, and raw and soft-boiled eggs. In the Dalmatian Zagora, raw domestic eggs were considered an elixir. In some parts of the Dalmatian Zagora, mothers ate *maslo*, a butter with a higher proportion of fat and less water. In Dolac and Imotski, a woman had the privilege of eating fried eggs, in Muć *turta* (white bread) and drinking white coffee (with chicory coffee), in Vrlika boiled lamb. In the areas of Slima, Ljubostinj, Lečevica, Drniš and Šestanovac, they made a light chicken or veal soup for new mothers because, according to legend, *the grave was open for a new mother for 40 days*.

Frane Ivanišević describes the care for a new mother, describing the customs in Poljica: "she is provided with good food: eggs, meat, healthy soups, butter and wine." Eggs were usually fried on butter and bread was dipped in it" (Ivanišević 1987: 463).

In Planjani near Drniš, cheese and prosciutto were served.

After the birth of a child, eggs, domestic chicken, pasta, hard cheese, biscuits (dried pastry in the shape of an empty circle) strung on a rope, as well as washing *powder*, would be brought to new mothers. In Neorić, new mothers ate eggs, the aforementioned biscuits and drank wine. The wealthier families of Muć and the surrounding villages roasted a lamb and invited their friends.

In Dalmatian Zagora, the gender inequality is still entrenched even today, although they do not want to admit it, so before a child is born, it is claimed that it is not important whether it is male or female, but that it is alive and well.

Earlier, the differences were even more pronounced. In Nova Sela, in honor of the birth of a boy, a lamb was roasted and wine was drunk, while the birth of a girl was not particularly celebrated. Similarly, in Proložac Donji, the birth of a male child was celebrated with prosciutto, and a female child with bacon. In Obrovac, the birth of a male child was also celebrated with baking and cooking. In Slivno, when a girl was born, they said a child was born, and when a boy was born, they said a man was born and they roasted meat.

Less often, in some villages there was no difference, whether a male or a female child was born. Thus, in Rašćane near Vrgorac, the birth of a child was celebrated with cooked dried meat, homemade pasta, *greens*, and the so-called *simple cake*. In Vinovo Donje, seasonal food was offered to guests, but it was obligatory to have fritters. In Dugobabe, they made pancakes. The specificity of the Šibenik hinterland was *rakija*. They went from house to house to make a toast. In some villages, such as Golubić and Nevesta, barley coffee was also consumed.

An unavoidable dessert of the region of Imotski, even on these occasions, was *padišpanja*.

Contrary to everything that has been said, some areas of the Dalmatian Zagora did not celebrate the birth of a child.

FRIED FOOD OF LOW NUTRITIONAL VALUE

In Dalmatian Zagora in the middle of the last century, foods were rarely, on special occasions, fried in deep fat, usually pork fat. An example were fritters, which were prepared on special occasions. Fritters symbolized honor and respect for the guests *they cared about*. Even though the fritters were not sweet, they were delicious and considered a delicacy.

In contrast, today fried food is often on the menu of modern people. Moreover, many desserts are, in the true sense of the word, low in nutritional value and high in energy. They are prepared from highly processed (white) flour with the addition of a considerable amount of sugar and finally fried in deep oil. Examples are donuts, *fritule* and angel wings. Their nutritional profile exceeds the energy needs of modern people who spend most of the day sitting. This is confirmed by scientific data that link the frequent consumption of fried desserts with obesity (Guallar-Castillon et al. 2007:198).

FUNERAL

There were also differences regarding the dishes offered to those gathered at the funeral. In some parts of Zagora, nothing was offered, in others food was served only to close relatives (e.g. boiled mutton, prosciutto, cheese and wine), and in others according to availability.

In Prgomet and Čvrljevo, they prepared mutton, but only when the head of the house died. Mutton was eaten both in Ljubostine and Prugovo. Often, among other things, soup was also offered, as in Žagrovič and the hamlet of Marići. In Čista Mala, boiled goat or sheep was eaten from the same pot.

In Čavoglave, drinks were offered if an elderly person died. There was no drinking at a younger person's funeral because of grief.

There were also places where food was prepared only for people who came from afar. *Sarma* and roasted lamb were prepared in Visoka. Mutton was eaten in Planjani, cod and rice in Ljubitovica, risotto and roast in Žagrovič, wine, prosciutto and cheese in Donji Dolac, Gornji Muć, Nova Sela, Nevest and Proložac Donji, and lamb in Smolonji, Rašćane and Slima.

The connection between relatives and friends was stronger in the past, which was also evident in these occasions. In Vinovo Donje, and probably in other parts of Dalmatian Zagora, it was customary for relatives and friends to prepare meals at their homes and take them to the family of the deceased. This is evidenced by Frane Ivanišević in his book *Poljica*, stating: "Relatives and the *closest blood* bring food and drinks that evening: meat, *manistra* and wine, because nothing is prepared in the house of the deceased" (Ivanišević 1987: 493).

In Obrovac near Sinj, no food was offered on the day of the funeral. It was especially inappropriate when a young member of the family died due to a great grief. In contrast, on the occasion of *sedmina* (seven days after a person's death), it was *like a wedding*. In Danilo, regardless of the time of year, mutton was prepared in a cauldron for *sedmina* of the head of the house, in Šestanovac a roast, in Sitno Donje, mutton was cooked in winter, and lamb was roasted in summer. In the region of Imotski were offered unleavened bread and wine.

MAKING BREAD

Bread-making in Dalmatian Zagora was very specific. It can be said that it resembled a ritual.

As with most of the food that was prepared, the basic method of preparation was on an open fire, more precisely the fireplace in the central room of the household where daily life took place. In the rural, poorly developed area of Dalmatian Zagora, the fireplace still had multiple functions in the middle of the last century. Placed in the center of the room, it was a source of light, heat and a central place for food preparation.

Making bread was usually the duty of the oldest female person in the distribution of household chores: mother, grandmother or mother-in-law. In order to make and bake good bread, it was necessary to have knowledge, experience and skill that can only be acquired with years. The bread was made near the hearth (to keep the dough warm), kneaded in wooden bowl called *načve*, with a lot of care. It is important to mention that a piece of dough remained in *načve* from the previous kneading was used as yeast. Of course, at that time the availability of fresh baker's yeast was very limited due to several hours of transport, mostly by rail or some other even slower means of transport. The lack of cooling devices further prevented the storage of fresh baker's yeast, especially during the summer months.

We can conclude that exactly this approach to making bread, using aged fermented yeast dough, is the optimal way to achieve its good fermentation capabilities. The kneading and fermentation

of the bread prepared in this way required a lot of time, usually the whole morning. After the dough had increased in volume, the housewife kneaded it again, divided it and shaped it into round loaves. She placed the loaves on a paddle called *lopar* and covered them with a white cotton cloth and covered them all together with a small woolen *sukance* (a hand-woven cover made of sheep's wool). The final fermentation would usually take an additional hour, and the fermented dough cake was turned over very carefully onto another wooden paddle, used for placing dough on the already heated hearth. In some villages in the vicinity of Perković and Unešić, a hollow was pressed into the middle of the dough using iron rod called *ožeg*. Using chains *komaštre*, they lowered the iron bell over the dough and covered it well with embers and lye. In 12-15 minutes, the bread under the bell was baked. The embers and lye were carefully removed from the bell, and the bell was removed with the help of a rod, and the freshly baked bread was thoroughly cleaned of residual ash. Baked bread was placed vertically to cool slowly. It was often placed on a stone bench in front of the house and leaned against its facade. It meant that there was a hard-working woman in the house who nurtured tradition. The housewife was the master of her work and usually such warm and fragrant bread was not eaten on the same day, but only the next day. Once cooled, the bread was wrapped in a clean white cloth and stored in a wooden crate with a lid.

Bread that is one or two days old has a lower glycemic index than freshly baked bread, which contributes to the regulation of blood sugar and results in longer-lasting satiety. Of course, when you eat stale bread, you eat less than you would if you were eating freshly baked bread. All this contributes to preventing overeating and reducing the risk of obesity (Warren et al. 2018:2).

The traditional way of making bread has been replaced by industrial production that uses fresh or dry baker's yeast obtained from selected strains. However, recently, as the awareness of the value of original, minimally processed foods grows, so does the demand for homemade bread made the old-fashioned way. Compared to industrial bread, this bread has many desirable features that should be highlighted and appreciated.

Bread fermentation is a process of synergistic action of yeasts and bacteria. Ethanol, carbon dioxide and valued aromatic components are developed by yeast activity. The activity of lactic acid bacteria leads to the breakdown of proteins, acidification of the dough, the creation of a desirable texture and the release of aroma substances such as diacetyl and acetaldehyde. Fermentation can also be considered a preservation process as substances are created that prevent the development of unwanted fungi and bacteria.

During the actual fermentation of the dough, autochthonous yeasts and lactic-acid fermentation bacteria reproduce. Their enzymes process the ingredients of the dough, increasing its volume. Ultimately, baked bread is of increased nutritional value and better utilization of nutrients.

For example, cereals contain insufficient amounts of some essential amino acids, so fermentation processes break down indigestible carbohydrates, figuratively speaking "a clump of fibers in which proteins are trapped." In this way, the "liberated" proteins and the essential amino acids present in them become more available to humans. Also, fermentation leads to a reduction of anti-nutrients (e.g., tannins) that disrupt the utilization of valuable micronutrients. Ultimately, this way also improves the absorption of mineral substances such as iron (Ashaolu and Reale 2020: 2-4).

Today, bread is most often made from white wheat flour, but bearing in mind the micro-nutritive value and positive effect on health of other, largely underestimated grains, this habit of modern man people should certainly change. Attention should be paid to unprocessed barley, oats, rye and the like.

Barley has a long tradition in Dalmatian Zagora. In addition to being combined with wheat and corn to make bread, it was also used for making porridge and stew (Bosanac and Nanjara 2021). It contains a number of valuable ingredients. One of them is resistant starch, which is not affected by the enzymes of the small intestine, so it arrives unprocessed in the large intestine, where, together with fiber, it becomes a substrate for the lactobacilli. Also, the prebiotic from barley - β -glucan - promotes the reproduction of these desirable probiotic bacteria that help food digestion and utilization of nutrients, has a protective effect against infections and strengthen immunity. Fermentation products prevent the synthesis of cholesterol, reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. This effect enhances the content of certain fatty acids, vitamin E and phytosterols from barley (Mohabbi et al. 2019: 1).

In addition, β -glucan is responsible for the lower glycemic index of this cereal, which helps maintain normal blood glucose concentration and satiety for a longer period of time. Namely, starch from foods with a lower glycemic index is digested more slowly, so glucose from the intestines reaches the blood more slowly. Moreover, scientific research has also shown that β -glucan helps people in the treatment of hyperinsulinemia and type II diabetes (Mohebbi et al. 2019:1). These valuable characteristics of barley should be emphasized and exploited more in the modern daily diet, thus contributing to the health of the population in general.

Cornbread should also be on our menu more often. The yellow color comes from the carotenoids lutein, zeaxanthin and beta-carotene. Lutein supports eye health, while beta-carotene protects the skin.

A positive feature of corn and cornbread is fiber. Although we cannot digest and use them, they play an important role in maintaining health. In contact with water, they swell, increase the volume of the stool, help the functioning of the intestines, the regularity of their emptying, and thus the detoxification of the body. Dietary fiber reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and colon cancer. They reach the large intestine undigested, where they are broken down by the bacteria present in them. Short-chain fatty acids are produced, which contribute to lowering the concentration of cholesterol and glucose in the blood (Siyuan et al. 2018: 187-193).

NUTS – AN ESSENTIAL PART OF RICH CAKES

Nuts, primarily walnuts and almonds, were highly valued in Dalmatian Zagora. *A little bread and a couple of walnuts were carried in a sack when going to the vineyard* (to work) (Bosanac and Nanjara 2021: 87). They were eaten sparingly, or rather, they were saved for special occasions such as weddings and the birth of a child. They were used to make *a bit better cakes*. If we compare them with today's cakes, they were simple desserts often prepared without any recipe. Sometimes they just sweetened the bread dough and added almonds or walnuts to it.

In the 1950s, nuts were enriching the diet of all age groups with their unique macronutrient and micronutrient composition. They are useful for several reasons. They contain proteins rich in the amino acid arginine, which prevents the development of atherosclerotic changes in the

blood vessels, and in addition, it produces nitrogen monoxide in the body, which relaxes the blood vessels and lowers blood pressure. Nuts mostly contain unsaturated fatty acids that have a beneficial effect on the health of the circulatory system, as well as vitamins E, B6, folate and niacin. As for minerals, nuts contain magnesium, chromium, potassium and copper. They are essential factors in many physiological and metabolic reactions. Walnuts and almonds are a source of phytosterols (e.g., stigmasterol, campesterol and sitosterol) and polyphenols (e.g., catechin and resveratrol). The wide range of naturally present antioxidants in nuts protects the integrity of our cells from cancer, and benefits the health of the heart and blood vessels. It has been observed that antioxidants help people with type II diabetes and hyperlipidemia to maintain an adequate concentration of fats and cholesterol in the blood. In addition, there is a reduction in inflammatory reactions and an improvement in the health and function of the arteries (Kim et al. 2017: 1-25).

DRIED FIGS

Today in Dalmatian Zagora offer cakes and biscuits to guests, while in the 1950s, dried figs were highly valued on such occasions. They are a natural source of sugar and antioxidants, thanks to which they have a positive effect on immunity in winter and early spring, when they are usually eaten and when the choice of fresh fruit is greatly reduced. Scientific research shows that a sufficient amount of carbohydrates in the diet (such as sugars from fruits) strengthens immunity and reduces the stress caused by physical activity such as farming (Gleeson and Bishop 2000: 555-557).

CONCLUSION

From a historical point of view, food has always represented and meant much more than just an indispensable source of energy that enables human existence in the basic biological sense.

In conclusion, it can be said that the dining customs of Dalmatian Zagora during holidays, festivities and other gatherings outlined both the specificity of the occasion, as well as the pride and efforts of the then population to express welcome, love and appreciation to their guests through food.

The rare preparation of food by frying in deep fat and the consumption of sweets on the one hand, and modesty and moderation in eating and drinking on the other hand, should, along with physical activity, become our daily routine. This would result in a more successful fight against obesity, reduced risk of certain health issues and improved health in general.

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