

Traditional Cuisine of the Makarska Littoral

Times of the past on the plate of tomorrow¹

The central theme of this work is the traditional cuisine of the Makarska region, as well as various recipes characteristic of different seasons, most of which are still being used today.

Key words: tradition, the Makarska Littoral, recipes, cuisine

Preface

Culinary art is as old as the human kind. Even the first people were aware that health, as well as life, depended on food. Very early on they acknowledged the fact that food can provide numerous pleasures. Feasts thrown after sacrificial practices, dating back to the earliest origins of civilization, are considered to be the beginning of culinary art. To honor gods and ancestors, whole animals were roasted and offered as sacrifices. During the course of many centuries, they were almost the only sources of fatty food, thus making sacrificial practices true celebrations for good reason. Studying history has largely helped us to examine the development of culinary art with more precision; everything from types of food used, ways of preparation and serving to the data about the making of cutlery from different types of material, which were subject to change respective to the development of technology. One of the most valuable archeological findings, helping us to create an overall impression of the development of culinary art, is an earthen or clay-pot. It tells us about the level of development of an individual population

¹ All the localisms are explained in the culinary dictionary *Rječnik izraza vezanih za kuhinju* at the end of the paper.

or group from the same period in history. Based on the type of manufacturing of the pottery, its shape and size, a lot can be said about its employment value and purpose. The earthen pot was, together with the frying pan, the most often used culinary item in the area of today's Makarska Littoral. The study of its usage offers numerous facts on the customs of that time, not only inside a kitchen, but outside of it as well. As a result, numerous recipes for the preparation of traditional dishes have been preserved. The recipes will be presented here in seasonal time succession.

Kužina the heiress of komin

One of the most ancient customs in the history of culinary art, not only in this region, was cooking on *komin*, which was the predecessor of the modern kitchen. People would sit by the *komin*, either on *banci* or tripods, retelling different events and happenings, commenting on news. It was a simple room, darkened from soot and filled with smoke, illuminated by *komin* fire, and sometimes with an oil-lamp. The oldest and the most respected member of a large family would sit on a bench by the *komin*, taking his flint, pipe and a wine *bukara* (wooden or earthen jug) out of the niche in the wall. In another *kantun* (corner) women would be knitting or grinding corn on a grindstone. There was a *sandžak* (trivet) on the fire, with a *bronzin* (small kettle) or frying-pot on it. The rest of the cutlery (*mašice* (fire tongs), *ožeg* (poker), blow-pipe, spade, *pisani lopari* (baker's peel), grill) were leaned against the wall. The plates (*pjati*) were set on a wall shelf (*škancija*), the cups (*čikare*) were hung on hooks and numerous other objects hung from ceiling beams. Food was kept in a *maškadur* (a wall cabinet) or a chest. During the wintertime, household members would often eat from the same pot, sitting around a *komin*, and during the summer humidity, food was eaten outside.²

During the 1930s, the appearance of the kitchen changed. The cooking stove (*špahe*) replaced the *komin*, and food began being stored in refrigerators and kitchen-cabinets (*kredenci*). The building of a water supply system brought running water into the kitchen, first into stone sinks (*laveli*), and later into the enameled ones. It was difficult for people to let go of their old and well-proved practice, and even more difficult to gain confidence in the new one. Therefore, many people continued to drink spring water³ and bake bread in wood or coal stoves. In every locality and hamlet of the Makarska Littoral this custom was preserved for quite a long time, until the advent of cooking stoves with ovens.⁴

² T. GARELJIĆ, Naš komin, Makarska, 1987., 2.

³ I used to send my little sister *na vodu* (for water), telling her "*da si brže nase, nego tamo*" ("return faster than you get there"), in other words to hurry up, and she would wonder running, how was that possible, bringing me water from the spring. (Dražen Vela, Podgora)

⁴ In Podgora they had town ovens placed around different streets (*kale*). So the Kokičević's stove near Pila-tov dvor, Vodanovići had theirs at Ivka Prekutovica's place, Nolići at Pečaruša's, and Velići at Vice Agičin's and at the Porat above Gavanovi dvori. The families Markušić, Sisarić and Dean also went there to shop, while the Lucijetić family built a stove that daily made 100 kg of bread for the hotels Sirena, Villa Ana, Primordija and Borak. The same bread distribution was seen in the hamlets of Gornja Podgora. "*Vlajinje*

Evening hours were spent sitting *u tinelu uz žmul vina i pokoji bićerin prošeka* (in a living room with a glass of wine and a few drops of prosecco), the elderly would chat, and the women would knit and embroider. The women's embroidery skills and inventiveness resulted in numerous kitchen canvas wall-cloths, characteristic not only of the Makarska Littoral, Dalmatia and Croatia, but of the entire Old Continent as well. Embroidered portrayals show the appearance of a kitchen, and the accompanying inscriptions, often very witty, mostly outlining some cooking advice to the housewives:

Kuvarice zlato moje, Tebe hvali jelo tvoje.

Objed skuhan u čas pravi to muž voli to muž slavi.

Kuharice manje zbori da ti ručak ne zagori!

Za udaju nije spremna koja ne zna spremat jela.⁵

Holidays

An inevitable component of every holiday is the typical *spiza* (food), in other words its preparation and the act of eating itself. In order to outline the value of traditional recipes, which have been preserved on the Makarska Littoral up to the present day, we must mention various church holidays, which in the sense of food preparation (practically) represented the changing of the seasons.

As a part of national, religious and traditional heritage, holidays have always been celebrated in Croatian families. They form a part of our experience, growing up and remembering our childhood. In our memories we store images of family celebrations, of joy and pleasant feelings shared with others, marking a certain happy occasion.

Why do people celebrate and what do they eat on these occasions? It is presumed that with an abundant or appropriate meal people give thanks for fundamental holiday gifts, be it the birth of Jesus, St. Anthony's benediction of children or *posna srijeda* (Fast/Lenten W.) which teaches us moderation. People have been celebrating since the origin of man. They celebrate God, they celebrate in honor of their loved ones, they celebrate victories; they do it in war and in peace. During the course of a year, all over the globe, people celebrate various occasions in different ways, so therefore it is impossible to make a universal annual calendar of festivities which would indicate what is eaten and when. That is why I have tried to note down some traditional dishes of the Makarska Littoral which are being prepared during holidays and festive occasions even today.

su dolazile na intradu i donosile brašno. Brale su i masline, a za to im se plaćalo u uju, soli i ribi. A naši su ljudi, ka' bi in pofalilo brašna išli u Vlašku i minjali, opet za uje i sol." ("Women from other villages worked for wages, bringing the flour. They would also pick olives, and get paid for it in oil, salt and fish. And our people, when they would run short of flour, they would once again trade it for oil, salt and fish with women from other villages.") (Dražen Vela, Podgora)

⁵ A. KUNAC, *Vezena lirika*, Makarska, 2004., 8-9.

Shrove-tide

During wintertime, the period of so-called carnival chaos already starts. Up to *Čista srijeda* (a day of fasting, the first day of Lent) people still eat food rich in fat, carbohydrates and proteins. The original and primeval meaning of carnival trends resides in people's need to use magic in order to drive away, scare or soften natural forces. People believed, due to their ignorance and impotence in the face of nature, that using noise, putting on masks, disguising and behaving wildly, would drive away evil powers and demons. A typical carnival dish is *pašticada* with gnocchi or *makaruni* (pasta). *Fritule* (fritters) are a desert. The preparation of food, as well as its consummation, needed to finish by 10 p.m. on Shrove Tuesday, when *manjarola* church bells rang. That was the time to stop consuming fatty food, because the following day was *Čista srijeda*.

Pašticada

Wash 750 g of leg of beef well, drain it and lard (*špikovati*) with cloves, garlic, dry bacon and carrot. Put the larded (*špikovano*) meat into *kvasina* (wine vinegar) and leave it over night. Put the meat, 100 g of fat, a large *kapula* (onion), a pinch of salt and pepper, grated nutmeg and grated celery root in a saucepan and fry it until the meat is left without the juice. Then sprinkle it with 1/2 l of prosecco⁶ mixed with a spoonful of *konšerva* (tomato puree). When it comes to the boil, keep pouring stock and water over it. Leave it to simmer for 3-4 hours. When the meat is cooked, cut it into thin slices, arrange them and cook for 30 more minutes. If the sauce is not brown or thick enough, add a *kućarin* (tea spoon) of bread crumbs fried with a small amount of *konšerva*.

Gnocchi

Cook 1 kg of floury potatoes and mash them while still hot. Add 2 eggs, a pinch of salt, a spoonful of fat and 200-300 g of flour. Work the dough and roll it into a long sausage. Cut it into pieces, the size of walnuts, and work them with your hands into strips (cca 2x5 cm). Cook them in hot water until they surface. Take them out and season them with *pašticada* sauce and sprinkle them with grated cheese.

Fritule (Fritters)

Ingredients: 2 kg of potatoes, 1 kg of flour (depending on the potatoes used), 200 g of sugar, a glass of milk, salt, maraschino (*ružolin*, pear liqueur or some other liquor, for the aroma), vanilla sugar, grated lemon and orange zest, a pinch of cinnamon, 150-200 g of *suvice* (raisins), nutmeg, olive oil for frying.

⁶ Or red wine with two sugar cubes.

Sift the flour. Cook the potatoes and while still hot pass them through a *štrukapatata* (a device for mashing potatoes), add salt and hot milk. Mix everything well and keep adding the flour with the rest of the ingredients until the dough is of medium thickness. Put aside for 30 minutes. Shape the fritters taking the dough in your left hand, pressing it so it comes out through the opening between your thumb and index finger. Using a spoon (which you need to dip into hot water after each fritter) in your right hand, put them into hot oil. Fry them in a frying pan until they become golden. Sprinkle them with a mixture of plain and vanilla sugar.

Time of recantation

Lent is a time of privation, sacrifice and restraint. It is a time for us to patiently and calmly master our deeds, habits and the space we abide. In the early spring we follow the path of the clear and the pure, which is best portrayed by renouncing certain types of food, in other words fasting. Fasting is a time for our bodies to recuperate from the heavy winter food. Religious rules help in creating balance within the human body. During the spring we spend more time outside in the fresh air, and accordingly the food we consume is much lighter.⁷ Shortly before the end of Lent people start the preparations for Easter, an important Christian holiday, which every house would welcome with *sirnice* and *garitule* laid on the table.

Sirnice and Garitule

Ingredients: 1 kg of flour, 7 eggs (3 whole eggs and 4 yolks), 300 g of sugar, 200 g of fat (half vegetable, half animal origin), lemon and orange zest, rum, salt, yeast.

Put yeast and sugar into 2,5 dcl of warm milk, leave it to rise, softly mix in the flour and the rest of the ingredients and leave it for two hours. After that, stir it once more and leave it for another hour.

Shape *sirnice* into small balls and *garitule* into braids. Leave them for two minutes, then bake them covered with greasy paper for one hour at 180°C. 10 minutes before they are done garnish them with well beaten egg-whites and sugar.

⁷ Fasting was often the result of privation, so from those hard times came the saying, “*Ne daji mi ono što noći vanka*” (“Don’t give me what spends the night outside”). It refers to vegetables, particularly Swiss chard, which Podgora was famous for. (Ćiro Vela, Podgora)

Summertime

During the summer heat, our bodies need larger amounts of water than in other seasons. In that period we need fluids more than we need food. The food is light: *lešo* (boiled) meat, fish and vegetables.⁸ Two drinks, almost forgotten today, were characteristic for our area: *bikla* and *slavo*. *Bikla* is wine mixed with milk (half-half), and *slavo* is water mixed with a little *kvasina* (vinegar). Both drinks are excellent thirst-quenchers.

Lešo incuni (Boiled anchovies)

Anchovies are passed through hand (*prođu se kroz ruku*) and put to boil into cold water with *riz* (a slice) of lemon in a zest. When they come to the boil they are done and left to cool. When they cool, season them with some *kvasina* (vinegar), salt, olive oil and pepper.

Pomidor and murtela with olive oil na gradele

Cut *pomidori* (tomatoes) in half, place some chopped up *murtela* (basil) and olive oil on each half. Place them on a grill and leave them until the liquid evaporates. Serve them with roasted fish.

Figs

Figs intended for drying need to be of good quality. They are placed to dry for several days, and every other day they need to be turned. When they are dry, we pick a bay leaf and store them away. If we want dry figs without *striš*, we fumigate them with sulfur vapor. In order to do that, we need to arrange them into a *krtol* (tuber) which we then put on a stick. We prepare a steel barrel inside of which we place a paper with sulfur powder and light it. We place the prepared figs over it and leave them covered for approximately three hours. That is how we get *sumporane smokve* (sulfured figs).

⁸ My grandmother Nede Dragičević (maiden name Čobrinić) from Tučepi cooked on *drveni špاهر* (wood-burning stove) until she passed away in 1983. Every Sunday, we the children from Podgorica went to visit our grandparents in Tučepi. Our favorite game was baking cheese *škripavac* on *drveni špاهر* (wood-burning stove), and after that we went swimming. The time around the feast day of St. Anthony, the protector of Tučepi, celebrated on the 13th of June, was the time when the bathing season began. My grandmother did not mind neither the summer heat nor the remainings of our dried cheese *škripavac* on her wood-burning stove, cooking on it every day.

Kotonjada (Quince-jam)

We clean the quince, *izrakatežamo* (grate) and weigh them. We add the amount of sugar equivalent to the weight of the quince. Cook them until the water evaporates and they turn a honey-colour. Stew roughly chopped almonds into it, stir and pour into moulds or appropriate containers.

Kumpet

Cook 6 l of *mošt* (must) as long as it does not reduce to 2/3 of its volume. What is left resembles a watery marmalade; stew roughly grinded flour and semolina into it. Cut walnuts, almonds, *bačić*, dry figs, add seasoning (*kanele* (cinnamon), nutmeg, vanilla sugar). Stir everything for a couple of more minutes and pour into moulds or *roštjera* (roasting tin) in which a wet *kanavaca* (dish cloth) was previously placed. Leave it to dry for a couple of days, then turn it over and let it dry for the same amount of time. Cut it and serve it on wine grape leaves.

Fruit-bearing time

Autumn is the traditional time for weddings, therefore even today most weddings take place in October and November. When the bride and bride-groom decide they want to get married, together with the benediction and congratulation, comes the time of treating (*tratovanje*) the guests. For that occasion small, dry cookies which last longer are made. During the celebration when collecting the bride, smoked ham, cheese, soup and *lešadura* (boiled food) are served.

The newlyweds are showered with rice, and even today the custom is for every family to bring out a *buklija* - a table on which sherry, maraschino and *mištral* (walnut brandy) are served, and in recent times juice and coffee are also served. Another wedding custom is carrying the bride over a threshold, as well as throwing *kolo* – the best man throws candy, walnuts, almonds and coins out of a basket. For dinner there would be soup, *paštica*, gnocchi, roast meat, and for desert various cakes would be served.

Praline cake

Whisk 3 egg-whites, add 8 finely-chopped walnuts, 60 g of white sugar and a small amount of grated lemon zest. Divide the mixture into long shaped portions and lightly bake them. Shape them into various figures, typical for weddings. The newlyweds cut the cake together for good luck.

Rafioli

To make the dough, mix 750 g of flour, 4 eggs, 2 yolks, 2 spoons of sugar, a pinch of salt, 220 g of butter and some milk together. Roll the dough into a thin leaf and cut it into small half circles, which are stuffed with the filling made from 500 g of roasted and ground unskinned almonds, 3 whole eggs, 2 whisked egg-whites, a pinch of cinnamon, nutmeg, 500 g of sugar, 2 *bicerina* (small glasses) of rum, maraschino or *rakija* (brandy), the zest of one lemon and one orange, a piece of grated chocolate and 2 *kučarina* (tea spoons) of melted butter. Bake the *rafioli* at moderate heat, coat them with egg-whites and sprinkle with chopped almonds and vanilla sugar.

Makarana cake

Make the dough with 400 g of sifted flour (soft, hard), 3 yolks, 200 g of butter, the grated zest of one lemon, a few drops of maraschino and 2 spoons of sugar. Work the dough well and roll it into a thin leaf. Cover the entire shallow, broad baking tin and slowly place the filling into it using a spoon.

The filling: grind 1 kg of roasted almonds, add 1 kg of caster sugar, a pinch of vanilla sugar, 15 beaten eggs, some grated lemon zest, nutmeg and a sip of maraschino. Mix well. The remains of the leaf are cut into strips which are placed over the filling making a net shape⁹ cover. When the cake is baked, sprinkle some maraschino and sugar over it.

Autumn marks two more holidays with which we remember the souls of the deceased. All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. During funerals and condolences there are no special customs connected with food, but it was considered polite that the host offered a drink, dry figs or anything else that was available to those in mourning.

⁹ "Ja ne vidim žene da nose na Sutiklu u bronziniću, nego samo cviće, daj Matija one pašte amo". (Ć. Vela from Podgora, a saying at a family death).

Normally, neighboring villages are also rival ones, so Podgora and the neighboring Tučepi are no exception. People from Podgora will scornfully say something like this: *Here, it is not like in Tučepi - there, it's like a true treat, like a wedding feast, imagine! Here, we modestly welcome our visitors; who feels like feasting!*

People from Tučepi have, of course, their own interpretation of those completely opposite customs at 3-4 km distance: *Those from Podgorica would treat their guests with something if they were not that stingy. Regardless, it is a very old custom in Podgorica to treat those in mourning very modestly, 'cause they did not come here to wine and dine, but to mourn. People from Podgorica also like to point out that those feasts are more appropriate for the Orthodox, adding: What do we need other people's customs for. Our ancestors did not need them, neither do we. So, when a deceased is in the house, there would be a plate with some dry figs and cookies on a table, but first there would be couple of slices of trešinski cake (if an elderly person came, to have it with some wine). Together with that, there would be some empty little glasses and tumblers (in older times one of each), and a bolcun (bottle) of wine and a botuja (demijohn) of rakija (brandy) - and no more problems! S. ŠUNDE, Sutikla, Crkva, legende i običaji u Podgori Podgora, Zagreb*

Advent

“*U sve vrime godišta ostali smo bez išta, fala Bogu imamo još jednoga pivca i kokoš...*”, is one of the traditional *kolendas* (carols) with which we enter Advent. The first Sunday in December is also the feast day of the protector of sailors, St. Nicholas, when children prepare their stocking which will hold gifts. Even the cakes are shaped like stockings. During December, people bake various, mostly dry, long-lasting cakes. The custom is to make the necessary amount of cakes by the time of St. Lucy, to last until Christmas. On Christmas Eve the tradition is to eat fish, most often cod fish, and on Christmas and New Years Eve *najbolje što može* (the best one can).

***Bakalar na bilo* (White cod fish)**

Put the cod fish in water, which needs to be changed every so often, for two days before the preparation. Take off the fins, skin and *drača* (bones). Cook in water until soft. When cooked, add garlic, chopped *petrusimul* (parsley), pepper, salt and olive oil.

Kaštradina and cabbage

In the cold wintertime, as a special treat, people would cook cabbage, *kad ga ujide led* (when ice bites it), with *kaštradina* meat (dry mutton ham or kid).

Wash 600 g of *kaštradina* and cook for 2 hours, without salt. Add 1 kg of washed and cleaned cabbage and cook for another 30 minutes. After that, place 500 g of potatoes cut into cubes, 100 g of bacon, 4 garlic cloves and some chopped *petrusimul* (parsley) into the saucepan. Cook it at moderate heat. Finally, add some *konšerva* (tomato puree), to taste. The cabbage and meat are served together.

Fish pudding

This very popular recipe of olden times has almost been completely forgotten nowadays.

Clean 1,5 kg of fish (grey mullet, mackerel, Spanish mackerel, hake, etc.), cut into pieces, season with salt and pepper. In a bowl mix 4 spoons of olive oil, 2 eggs, 2 slices of bread dipped in water and drained, a spoon of grated cheese and a spoon of flour. Add the cut fish into the mixture and put it into a mould greased with olive oil, sprinkled with bread crumbs. Steam it for an hour. When it is done, pour some mayonnaise or caper-sauce over it.

Pastry

Honey-biscuits

Sift 400 g of flour on a trencher (cutting board), add a tea-spoon of baking soda, 150 g of castor sugar, 3-5 spoons of honey, 3 eggs, 4 beaten (mauled) cloves, a bit of cinnamon, a bit of nutmeg, grated lemon and orange zest and a pinch of salt. Roll out the dough to make it 2 cm thick and cut out the shapes. Bake at moderate heat.

Mandulet

Whisk 5 egg-whites for half an hour over steam with 300 g of sugar, 2-3 spoons of honey and 250 g of roughly chopped and roasted almonds. On the bottom of a roasting tin place a piece of wafer on which half the mixture is poured. On top of it, place another piece of wafer and leave it overnight to cool. Mark equal parts with a knife and cut them the following day, preferably on a marble board.

Arancini

Orange zest (lemon or any other citrus will also do) is left in water for 7-8 days. The water needs to be changed for the bitterness to come out of the zest. When the zest is taken out of the water, we cut it into thin sticks and weigh them. We add as much sugar as the weight of the zest. Cook them together until the rim turns white. Take out the zest and roll it into coarse sugar and leave it to dry on a clean dish-cloth.

Rožata (Caramel pudding)

Beat 6 eggs well together with 6 spoons of sugar and a bit over 1/2 l of milk, add grated lemon zest, a few drops of maraschino and a packet of vanilla sugar. Heat 250 g of sugar in a separate small saucepan until it becomes brown. With it, coat the sides of a bigger mould in which you pour the mixture for the pudding. Put the mould into a bigger saucepan with boiled water reaching up half to the mould, and cook it for 45 minutes, and then bake it in an oven for another 15 minutes. When the mould cools a bit, turn it over and carefully ease it out onto a big plate.

Bobići

Grind 450 g of unpeeled almonds and roughly chop another 450 g. Mix 6 eggs well with 700 g of sugar, add the almonds, a bit of nutmeg and grated lemon zest. Shape

equally-sized small balls, press them in the middle with a finger and bake them at very low heat. The baking dish is coated with beeswax.

Conclusion

Our region has been developing and building its own typical cuisine over the centuries, characterized by Mediterranean products, such as olive oil, various fruit (figs, carobs), vegetables (Swiss chard, cabbage), fish and the meat of domestic poultry and cattle. Recipes which illustrate our geographical location as well as religious and national affiliation have been preserved on the Makarska Littoral up to the present day, which does not mean that the experience and tradition of those who come from other regions have not been accepted. They supplement our Dalmatian cuisine.

In the 21st century numerous international nutritionists have taken our Mediterranean cuisine, giving it advantage over modern fast food. Dalmatian cuisine makes up part of the traditional food mosaic, and therefore it deserves the place we have been giving it in our menus. This résumé of the preparation of food during the changing of the seasons can represent the beginning of a return to traditional cuisine, creating with it an even better basis for perfecting food preparation.

Let us supplement old recipes and enjoy the food of our ancestors. The refined aromas of the Mediterranean are irreplaceable. Filling our nostrils with aromas of cod fish or caramel pudding, we will sense the spirit of past times, which through food preparation remains a pledge for future cooking by the recipes of our ancestors.

Translated by Tanja Bukovčan