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‘Culinary Millennia’ – Workshops of Prehistoric, Roman, Medieval and Traditional Cuisine in Archeological Park Budinjak

Culinary workshops were organized in 2005 and 2006 and their main purpose was to improve the offer of the Archeological Park and revitalize and represent the intangible heritage of the region. The basic aim of the program was to provide a detailed overview of the past and to pay equal attention to the valorization of culinary customs of different periods. The character of the archeological park enabled us to include natural resources in carrying out of the program and hence some of the ingredients needed for the preparation of meals on the workshops were collected in their natural surroundings. One of the major goals was to enable the visitors to actively participate in the program. After visiting the archeological park and gaining some basic knowledge on the cultural identity of the region and on the basis of the prepared recipe book and with the help of the workshop organizers, the visitors were divided into four groups and they prepared food from four different prehistoric and historic periods.

Key words: Culinary, recipe, Archeological Park

Is there a museum in the Nature Park Žumberak – Samobor Mountains?

All the protected areas are specific because of their natural resources, but unlike the National Parks which, in the Republic of Croatia, are defined by the provisions of the Nature Conservation Act as being dedicated to the 'preservation of the authentic natural resources', nature parks are areas which are much more dependant on the prolonged relationship between man and nature and are thus defined by the above mentioned Act.¹ Therefore it is understandable that nature management now also implies paying more attention to the cultural assets.

The region of Žumberak and Samobor Mountains were declared nature parks by the decision of Croatian Parliament from 1999. Eventhough the institution 'Nature Park Žumberak – Samobor Mountains' was founded in that same year and with the purpose of management of the protected area, it became active only after the appointment of the principal in 2001. The founding decree also defined the scope of activities of this institution – 'protection, maintenance and promotion of the Nature Park.'² Due to their understanding of the complexities of the identity of this region, the management directed their efforts not only to the protection of the natural resources but also to the protection of cultural heritage and to its adequate promotion.

Today a small village in the central part of Žumberak, Budinjak was during Early Iron Age (end of 10th - 6th century BC) probably one of the largest and most important centers in the region (Škoberne 2004). Due to its state of preservation and the significance of the material finds, this is a complex site, encompassing both aspects of the Early Iron Age communities (settlement and grave-mounds), listed in the Cultural Heritage List of the Republic of Croatia. Not far from Budinjak, in the village of Bratelji, there was a graveyard which belonged to a Romanized Celtic tribe Latobic from the Early Age of Roman Empire (1st-2nd century BC) (Gregl 2002). Detailed archeological research was conducted on the burial site in Bratelji during the 1990ies³, while the research of a much larger Early Iron Age site from Budinjak, which has started in 1984, has not been finished yet.⁴

Recognizing archeological heritage as one of the valuable assets of this region and in the same time trying to satisfy the demands of the general public whose interest in visiting this region has risen since Žumberak and Samobor Mountains have been declared Nature Parks, our Institution opened in September 2004 an Eco-center Budinjak and a hiking path 'Trail of Princes' and therefore founded the Archeological Park

¹ 'Nature park is a vast natural or partly cultivated region of land and/or sea with ecological characteristics of international and national value, with marked landscape, educational, cultural-historical and tourist-recreational assets' (Nature Conservation Act, Official Gazette, Nr. 70/2005).

² Decree on Foundation of the Public Institution 'Nature Park Žumberak – Samobor Mountains', Official Gazette Nr. 96/1999.

³ Head researcher was Zoran Gregl, museum adviser from the Archeological Museum in Zagreb.

⁴ Head researcher is Želimir Škoberne, museum adviser from the Museum of the City of Zagreb.

Budinjak. An exhibition dedicated to archeological heritage of the entire protected region is now organized in the Eco-center Budinjak and alongside the 'Trail of Princes', which covers both archeological sites, there are ten stops presenting valorized and interpreted archeological, as well as ethnological, geological, zoological and botanical phenomena. The Archeological Park Budinjak, organized in this way, can be seen as a museum institution⁵, which, according to the accepted division of the museums according to their location, can be defined as an open-air museum (Maroević 1993:79) or *site-museum* (Zgaga 2002:25-26).

What to do with an archeological park? Should it be developed and how?

Building of the basic infrastructure and the accompanying interpretational equipment in the Archeological Park Budinjak was understood by the management of the Nature Park Žumberak – Samobor Mountains just as a beginning of the development of this open-air museum. The planned upgrade of its content refers equally to the improvement of the permanent exhibition, a case in point is the already initiated reconstruction and presentation of one of the most important burial sites from the Early Iron Age, as well as to the organization of periodical events which rely on cultural and natural assets of the region, for example, various workshops as forms of educational activities, festivals, etc. Contents suitable for interpretation in these occasional events are numerous and various but the wish for affirmation, valorization and presentation of intangible heritage has influenced the decision to make culinary art one of the first topics of the future workshops. The Office for Cultural Tourism of Croatian Tourist Association organized a competition in 2005 in the form of the National Program of Donations for Stimulating Cultural-Tourist Initiatives which proved to be a valuable financial instrument, since its propositions were very much in accordance with the aims of the Nature Park and we proposed a program titled '*Culinary Millennia – Workshops of Prehistoric, Roman, Medieval and Traditional Cuisine*'. The basic idea of the program was to provide a detailed view of the past, paying equal attention to the valorization of culinary customs of different periods. This conception of the main idea stemmed from the principles which were applied during the founding of the Archeological Park in Budinjak when we included in the interpretation of heritage not only archeological, ethnological and historical, but also natural resources of the region. The same principle of inclusion was applied to the concept of time – a crucial dimension for archeology as a scientific discipline - when we were making plans for the culinary workshops. Even though the archeological finds in the Arche-

⁵ 'Museum institutions are all the institutions which work or can work on the protection of heritage and presentation of its values, from all types of museums, through centers, parks and nature reserves, historical places and buildings, zoological and botanical gardens, living farms and cities to the protection of the written and printed materials in the archives and libraries or institutionalized forms of care for architectural heritage' (P. van Mensch, in: Maroević 1993:89).

ological Park Budinjak belonged to the prehistoric and Roman times, the third important archeological period, Middle Ages, could be included in the program on the grounds of archeological finds from other parts of Žumberak.⁶ Our intention to cover the entire culinary heritage of the region, of which archeological finds form only one part, forced us to include into the program more recent culinary past – traditional culinary customs of the people of Žumberak were created mostly under the influence of major changes in the demographic structure of this region during the 16th century. The organized colonization of refugees and the beginning of the formation of Vojna Krajina have significantly influenced all the aspects of life in Žumberak, including culinary customs.

The principle of inclusion, applied to the relationship between nature and culture and our realization that culture in all of its forms is actually created in nature and in some of them, like cuisine, it stems directly from nature, have brought us to the idea to include in our program natural resources of this region. The open air museum is in this program imagined as an exhibitory space in which some of the groceries needed in the program actually grow.

Equally important principles, the application of which was not linked to the contents of the program, but to its users, referred to the importance of taking into account the interests and wishes of the visitors and of adopting interpretation as a discipline the theoretical basis of which was created at the end of the 1950ies.⁷ The concept that people memorize roughly 10 percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they read, 50 percent of what they see and even 90 percent of what they do themselves, has inspired us to set one of the dominant aims of this program, together with improving the offer of archeological park and affirmation of the culinary heritage of the region, and that is to enable the visitors to actively participate in the program. Even though they would undoubtedly contribute to the attractiveness and variety of the program, the goals directed at the possible participation of local restaurants and farmers, also point to the long-term benefits of this program and its possible influence on the protection of culinary heritage which could be included into restaurant offer of local restaurants and hence become part of everyday life.

What and how to cook – from idea to its materialization?

Soon after Croatian Tourist Association chose the program ‘Culinary Millennia’ for financing in 2005, we realized how demanding was our concept initially designed in

⁶ Research of medieval fortresses Tuščak and Stari Grad Žumberak started in the 1990ies. The head researcher of the now completed research of Tuščak and the head of the research and conservation at Stari Grad, still ongoing, was Damjan Lapajne, a conservator-advisor at the Ministry of Culture, Administration for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Conservation Department, Zagreb (Lapajne 2006).

⁷ Freeman Tilden is considered to be the theoretical founder of the discipline and in his book ‘Interpreting Our Heritage’ (1957) he defined the main principles of interpretation (Tilden 1957).

laboratory conditions and governed by some general principles. The main prerequisite for the creation of workshop scenarios was the existence of menus, i.e. the selection of recipes covering the four major archeological and historical periods. Our quest for the available literature on the topic showed that Croatian historical sciences were only mildly interested in cooking and culinary customs as one of the important cultural aspects of all the periods of history. Pressured by the demands of contemporary museums, Croatian archeology has recently tackled the phenomenon of Roman cuisine, primarily due to the fact that its, at least, partial reconstruction is possible thanks to an easily obtainable source – *Apicium* – a book of recipes from around 4th or 5th century AD (Slapšak 1989:8), but the culinary art of other archeological periods has been completely left out from any disciplinary interest. Owing to the ethnological research and the still living praxis of traditional cuisine (even though rapidly disappearing) the preparation of this section of the program was made easier.⁸ For prehistoric cuisine and cuisine belonging to Medieval times, we used the available foreign literature.⁹ When the sources and literature were unavailable, the conditions for fulfilling the demand for authenticity, which was primarily designed as being based on obtaining relevant historical data on this part of Žumberak, were met through research and literature from natural sciences and of interdisciplinary character. Botanical literature and the research of autochthonous edible plants of Žumberak,¹⁰ conducted during the preparation of the workshop 'Culinary Millennia', enabled us to collect data on possible and probable usage of edible plants during historical periods. In rare, but extremely valuable archeo-botanical researches, conducted during the last decade on the samples from all over Croatia, we have found an irreplaceable source of data on cultivation of different types of grains, leguminous plants and other plants which were dominant in diet during various historical periods.¹¹

Data collected in this way served as the basis for the selection of recipes which would be used for preparation of meals at the workshops. The criteria, on the basis of which we made the final selection of the recipes, were their feasibility, complicated by the fact that all the food preparation had to be done entirely on the premises of Eko-centre Budinjak on open hearths, their appropriateness for the expected differences in the dietary habits of the workshop participants, for example, vegetarians, and their attraction, which included the usage of unusual technological procedures in food preparation, groceries rarely used today, unknown spices or other food supplements.

⁸ The choice of recipes from recent history was based on the article 'Prehrana' by Mirjana Randić Barlek, which was published in the journal 'Žumberak: Baština i izazovi budućnosti' (Randić Barlek 1996) and data obtained from the women of Žumberak.

⁹ The preparation of recipes for prehistoric period was completed by the help of the book 'Prehistoric cooking' by Jacqui Wood (Wood 2001) and the medieval recipes were copied from the sources found in the book 'The Medieval Kitchen: Recipes from France and Italy' by Odila Redon, Françoise Sabban and Silvan Serventi (Redon et al. 1998).

¹⁰ The research was conducted in 2005 by Mirjana Vrbek and Suzana Buzjak from Botanical Department of the Croatian Museum of Natural History in Zagreb (Vrbek and Buzjak 2005).

¹¹ The results of this research are available in the doctoral dissertation by Renata Šoštarić titled 'Vegetacijske promjene u postglacijalu u Hrvatskoj' (Šoštarić 2003).

After the final selection of the recipes, the staff members of the Nature Park Žumberak-Samobor Mountains tried to prepare all the meals thus evaluating their personal culinary skills which they would have to use as presenters while working with the workshop participants and, in the same time, evaluating the quality of each meal. The ideas on the possible tastes of food in prehistoric times and reassurances of the classical and medieval authors on the excellence of the offered recipes, as well as the guidelines of contemporary inhabitants of Žumberak for preparation of the most delicious meals, had to pass a strict evaluation by our contemporary palates so that we could determine the level of their tastefulness. The prehistoric techniques, hypothesized in relevant writings, of preparing fish and meat in clay moulds and cooking in water, the boiling of which was achieved by throwing in hot stones, proved to be very demanding and the successful completion of those tasks required a lot of practice. The same can be said for the temporally much closer culinary skills like traditional preparation of butter or cooking of polenta made of flour obtained from a water-mill; a more disturbing from the fact that the staff members of the Nature Park were not familiar with these techniques, since born and raised in urban surroundings, was that fact that many younger Žumberak wives, although living in a typically rural region, never used or tried out any of these techniques. This observation does not imply that all the responsibility for abandoning tradition lies with the local population, however, it is a sad and a very probable statement that traditional culinary skills, together with many other traditional skills, are dying out with the local inhabitants.

Collection of recipes and other culinary paraphernalia

After passing the test of feasibility and quality of meals prepared according to them, the selected recipes met the necessary requirements for being included into the collection of workshop recipes 'Culinary Millennia'. Since the preliminary conception of the workshops was based on the idea that the participants prepare the meals themselves, with a discrete help from the presenters, the creation of the collection of recipes presented the preparation of the basic working material. The collection was divided into prehistoric, roman, medieval and modern section, according to the main archeological and historical periods, and in each section we offered recipes for preparation of at least one vegetarian meal, one meat course, one dessert and one drink.

On the basis of archeological finds we have made the kitchen inventory – tableware made as the replica of the Late Iron Age items of tableware from Budinjak, of Roman tableware found in Bratelji, and of the items belonging to the Medieval period the fragments of which were found in the fortress Stari Grad Žumberak, situated only ten kilometers away from Budinjak. The tableware and cutlery which were being used in this region until very recently for preparing food or for serving it on the tables of many Žumberak families were partly obtained as presents from the people of Žumberak, partly bought off at the local fairs or we made replicas from the museum exhibits found in the Museum of Samobor. The insistence on using repli-

cas of the original tableware from different periods in our workshops stemmed partly from our desire for authenticity but mostly from the need to provide the visitors with a more concrete relationship with the past through tactile connection with material heritage. (Here I should mention the fact that, in participants' opinion, medieval glasses best fit the hand. Even though this could lead us to the conclusion that Medieval potters paid more attention to functionality than other potters, we should not forget that the replicas made for these workshops formed only a very small fragment of the entire pottery production and were, after all, just a personal choice made by the authors of this program).

In order to direct the attention of our visitors to certain ecological features of this region and in the same time emphasize the link between food and the landscape in which it was created, we have prepared materials containing information on the autochthonous edible plants from Žumberak region and the relevant data have been collected during the botanical research. These data were supplemented with the documented and published findings on the plant usage and their importance in the past and with the photographs of the selected plants so that they could be more easily found in nature.

Designing of appropriate souvenirs proved to be simple and amusing. Aprons and kitchen gloves, on which we could easily print different pictures and text, have fulfilled all the requirements for practical value of souvenirs which have their function inside the workshop but also outside of it and serve as reminders on the Archeological park Budinjak and the time spent in culinary activities. To emphasize our message that past is a unity and continuity, we have made four different variants of aprons and kitchen gloves containing different recipes – prehistoric, roman, medieval and modern.

Thus the workshop preparations were completed. All we had to do was wait for the visitors.

How Budinjak traveled to the past in the fall of 2005?

The visitors – participants of the culinary workshops visited the Archeological Park Budinjak during two weekends in September 2005. So as to convince them that the same food was being prepared on the site of the Archeological Park thousands of years ago, the staff members took their guests for a short walk on the 'Trail of Princess' and pointed them to the glorious Early Iron Age past of Budinjak and the glorious Roman past of the neighboring Bratelji. The walk around the trail, lasting for approximately two hours, proved to be not only a good theoretical introduction, during which the visitors received the basic information on the cultural identity of a region, but also a practical one – physical exercise made them anxious to start cooking as soon as possible. On every workshop the visitors were divided into four groups and simultaneously prepared food from four different periods. Each group was appointed a leader, a staff member of Nature Park Žumberak, who, on the basis of their

own experience, provided the participants with the necessary instructions and coordinated the activities. All the groceries, tableware and cutlery were prepared for each group in advance. Prehistoric groups were an exemption – some of the necessary ingredients the participants had to, with the help of biologists, find and collect in the surrounding area.

In contrast with the usual smell of soil and damp rooms, during those few days in Budinjak, archeology smelt of mint, salty Roman mixture – *liquamen* and exotic spices which Medieval tradesmen brought with themselves from their Middle Eastern travels. Workshop of traditional cuisine revived the smells which can still be felt in a small number of Žumberak homes.

The joy and merriment which accompanied the workshops during several hours for each day would be difficult to capture in writing. The rich photographic documentation of the Nature Park Žumberak offers a much more concrete evidence, with the broad smiles being the most common photographic motif.

The program 'Culinary Millennia', which thrilled our visitors, was organized also in September 2006, thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia. The same Ministry offered their financial support in 2007.

Translated by Tanja Bukovčan