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## The 15<sup>th</sup> International Ethnological Food Research Conference

The 15<sup>th</sup> International Ethnological Food Research Conference of the members of the International Commission for Ethnological Food Research took place in Dubrovnik from September 27 to October 3, 2004. The Commission operates within the SIEF (Société Internationale d' Ethnologie et Folklore), the world's most eminent organization of ethnologists and folklorists, with headquarters in Paris. It was founded in 1971 in Stockholm, and its co-founder, Nils-Arvid Bringeus, was also present at the Dubrovnik conference. University professor Patricia Lysaght, Head of the Irish Folklore Department of the Dublin University, is long-time chairwoman of the Commission.

Food researchers gather biannually in a different country following the invitation of local ethnological institutions. The 2004 conference, held for the first time in Croatia, was organized by the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research and the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. On the previous conference held in Basel and Vevey, Switzerland, in 2002, Dubrovnik was chosen as the venue of the 15<sup>th</sup> conference. The theme was also set in 2002: Mediterranean food and its influences abroad. Thirty out of fifty participants held lectures related to individual segments of Mediterranean cuisine.

The guests arrived from various countries: besides participants from Croatia, the conference gathered ethnologists from the USA, Germany, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Slovenia, Latvia, Russia, Scotland, Ireland, France and Japan. In addition to young researchers at the beginning of their scientific careers, the conference invitation was accepted also by several heads of ethnology departments and ethnological institutes from various European cities: Patricia Lysaght from Dublin, Konrad Köstlin from Vienna, Christine Burckhardt-Seebass from Basel, Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska from Lodz. There were also eminent colleagues from the domain of museum sciences (Judit Knezy from Hungary,

Kirsten Bertheau Nøklebye and Ann Helene Skjelbred from Norway). The conference was also attended by several reputed ethnologists who are, although retired, still very active in the sphere of ethnological research, namely Aleksander Fenton from Schottland, Nils-Arvid Bringeus from Sweden and Eszter Kisbán from Hungary.

The lectures can be divided in three groups: the keynote lecture set up the framework of Mediterranean food, while the following lectures gave a historical overview of influences and ways in which ingredients from the Mediterranean region entered the Mid-European and world cuisine. Some lectures focused also on the times of Crusades and the transfer of sugar and spices from the Mediterranean to the cuisines of other European countries. The lecturers in the next group, mainly from countries outside the Mediterranean circle, attempted to illustrate the influence of the Mediterranean cuisine on their national cuisine in the past and the present, while a part of the participants talked about the internationalization of certain Mediterranean dishes (such as the Spanish *paella* or the Italian *pizza*). Several lecturers from the USA focused on the contribution of the Mediterranean cuisine to the American culinary offer through national cuisines of immigrants from the Mediterranean regions.

The Croatian ethnology was represented by four lectures: Nives Rittig-Beljak of the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research talked about the concept of poverty in the Adriatic, Mirjana Randić of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb about the traditional aspects of food on Adriatic islands, Tanja Kocković of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria about truffle gathering in Istria and Zrinka Režić of the Dubrovnik University about the *mantala*, a typical sweet of the Dubrovnik region.

The lectures showed that, besides standardized food like pizza or spaghetti, there are various details also incorporating the cultural heritage of a certain region and the ways of their adaptation. The concept of Mediterranean cuisine itself was defined from the medical, cultural, historical and social aspect. It is interesting that the framework of this, by all criteria healthy and tasty food, changes according to country. To Croatians, the term "Mediterranean cuisine" denotes the food eaten in the Adriatic or coming from this region. This term also covers Italian, Spanish and Greek cuisine, while dishes of Turkish provenance are certainly not regarded as Mediterranean cuisine. In Croatia, dishes from North Africa or Asia Minor are considered exotic and it is difficult to conceive that they are actually part of the Mediterranean cuisine. On the other hand, in the perception of the inhabitants of European countries which are far from the Mediterranean (like Danes or Germans) the term of Mediterranean food also includes dishes from the Jewish, Arabian and Turkish table.

The organizers of the conference wanted to familiarize the guests with the Croatian variant of Mediterranean cuisine also through tasting individual foods. To that end, three excursions to the surroundings of Dubrovnik were organized. The all-day excursion to the island of Korčula took us to the city of Korčula and to the village of Pupnat, where lunch was served at the homestead of Mate Farac and his wife Mirjana. All participants praised individual specialties of the rural island cuisine. The second excursion was organized to Mali Ston, where we visited the oyster and mussel beds,

saw how they are picked from the sea and tasted them on site, which caused great interest and excitement of the guests. The third excursion was to Konavle, where our guests had the chance to taste traditionally prepared dishes under a baking lid at Pero Novaković's restaurant *Konavoska kuća*. The experience of the beauty of this region was completed by the visit to a watermill on the river Ljuta, which was restored to its function several years ago. All guests were naturally thrilled with the specific charm of the city of Dubrovnik and the organizers received numerous compliments for a pleasant and fulfilled week dedicated to food as the basis of ethnological research.

At the end of the conference, the next two-year mandate of Patricia Lysaght as chairwoman of the Commission was confirmed. Oliver Haid proposed "Food in Health Resorts" as the theme of the next conference and presented the proposed venue so skilfully that he managed to win the majority of votes. Thus the 16<sup>th</sup> International Ethnological Food Research Conference will be held in Innsbruck, Austria and Merano in the Italian Alps in 2006.

The 15<sup>th</sup> conference was accompanied by a publication containing the list of participants and the lecture summaries. The lecture themes were not presented in detail here as they will soon be published in one of the English issues of the journal *Folk Art* issued by the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research.

Translated by Sanja Novak