

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONAL CUISINE IN VALCEA'S TOURISM PROMOTION

## I. Historical background of Romanian gastronomy

All throughout history, Romanian cuisine has witnessed the stages of society development under the influence of economic and social factors, climate and relief, fauna and flora, civilisation level, the Romanians' tastes and preferences.

History provides information on the development of Romanian cuisine involving the Dacians' worship of food preparations, guest welcoming – meeting the Roman ambassador Tiberius Flavius who was waited on with “beef roasted on hot embers, roasted wild pigeons, meat on splinters, bees' honey, strong, flavoured and muscadel wines, juicy pears kept in hay, white, pink and red strawberries, red and yellow apples”.

There is information about late second century that has been kept on waxed plates, telling of “goldsmiths' feasts” where they would have the following food: lamb, pork, white bread, salt, vinegar, salads and two kinds of wines.

In his 1965 trip through the Principalities, Paul of Allep described a feast given by Vasile Lupu at the Princely Court where the food was served on trays, with golden and silver spoons and forks. The principalities had a lot of nice game, cattle and poultry. The peasants' food was mainly made up of milk, green ewe cheese and many vegetables: onion, leek, garlic, cabbage, horseradish, beet, radish, celery, cucumber. They would extensively have fish and meat sour soups.

They would import oil, olives, lemons and even peas in order to serve princely meals. They ate plenty of fruits: princely apples, peaches, melons, cherries.

In monasteries they used to have oil-fried lentil, boiled beans, vegetables boiled in salted water, and they would drink cider instead of wine.

In his outstanding works, Mihail Sadoveanu has shown the way several dishes were cooked and served in Moldavia in late 17th century: fish, crayfish, corn bread, hen soup, force-meat rolls in cabbage and many more.

Del Chiaro wrote in his paper in early 18th century that boyards' meals were served in the Great House on rectangular tables. “The guests would sit on benches on either side of the tables. The table cloths were made of white home-made tissue containing flax just like the napkins”.

Radu Rosseti in his paper entitled “Recollections” introduced the atmosphere of 19th century Moldavia and described Moldavian boyards' wealthy lives and food habits: “as soon as they woke up in the morning, even before washing and getting dressed, they would sit up in their beds, eat jams, and drink water and Turkish coffee.

Jams were usually made of water lilies, bitter cherries, nuts and roses. Then they would smoke already-lighted hookahs, drink coffee with much skin of milk covered with lighted tinder. At ten o'clock they took pickled fish out of the fridge and served it in their dining-room. They had lunch at two and at guest meals they would serve a dish of every estate's products”.

“There were a lot of wines in their cellars, but in the 19th century and even before that time Moldavian boyards already had the Phanariot sobriety habit. Men would only drink one or two glasses of wine and women would only have some water”.

The predominant food was French, Greek and Turkish such as whipped cream cakes, nut and syrup pastries, patch cakes.

They had much venison (quail and deer) and various fishes on the Prut (sterlet, viza, carp, burbot).

The dishes of late last century are presented by George Calinescu in "Otilia's Enigma", where food was cooked with oil and spices in tinned copper sauce pans and a lot of fish and mutton were used.

Ion Creanga in his "Childhood Recollections" beautifully depicted peasant foods such as "pan-fried chicken and butter, Moldavian cakes and pies".

In 1841, Mihail Kogalniceanu and Costache Negruzzi wrote a cookery book called "Two Hundred Recipes" which included recipes that were much appreciated at the time.

Romanian cuisine has managed to preserve the Romanian people's old traditions, yet its food types have been influenced and improved by other peoples' recipes.

The European influence can be found in Romanian cookery as such: the Austrian Empire has influenced the cookery of Transylvania and Banat, Russia has left its marks on the cookery of Moldavia, France, Bulgaria and Greece have had an impact upon the cookery of Muntenia, and Turkey has influenced the one in Dobrudja.

French cuisine has had a strong influence upon Romanian cookery. Thus, in the great restaurants of Bucharest in late 19th century they prepared and served dishes such as: aspic goose liver, imperial consommé, liver sandwiches à la Strassbourg, Prague ham, veal, turkey à la Creson, chocolate and whipped cream spun yarns, refined cheese, coffee and brandy when meals ended.

"Romanian cookery, although having not only Arabian, Balkan, but also antique, Roman, Greek influences, imitating the Southern East with Poland and Russia, Ukraine in the North, France, Austria and Germany in the far, inaccessible West, Dacia on its own land, is still spectacularly genuine as a result of those great cultural trends' interweaving with isolated Danube regions or local, Carpathian areas" (Radu Anton Roman).

Romanian cuisine has become famous abroad as well. Thus, in 1867, Grigore Capsa, a great industry and trades man, participated in Paris Universal Exhibition with his Romanian exhibits and was awarded two honour prizes and in 1883 he took part in Bordeaux International Exhibition where he displayed several wines and was awarded the bronze medal. In 1889, he was awarded the "Great Gold Medal" in Paris Universal Exhibition.

Capsa Restaurant in Bucharest has maintained its traditions till nowadays and has also acquired fame due to its refined cookery and high-quality services.

In 1900, Covaci Restaurant's owner sent his chef to the exhibition in Paris where he succeeded in making Romanian traditional food famous: grilled minced meat rolls, tripe stew, force meat rolls in cabbage and atole, hotchpotch, cabbage and meat, meat jelly of animal legs and grilled meat.

Romanian cuisine improved its traditional dishes ceaselessly between the two world wars: beef tripe soup, tripe stew, pig's trotters, crayfish dish, force meat rolls with cabbage and atole, roe, pickled fish. Romanian cookery has kept its traditions all throughout the centuries and cooks have been able to convey the tastes of traditional food to their future generations who have improved and enriched them whereas unaltered Romanian cooking art.

## **II. Features of Romanian cuisine by geographic areas**

Every people has made up their own cooking style. It has depended both on the elements at hand and their experience acquired along the centuries.

Sticking to its own traditions and peculiarities, Romanian cuisine is continuously improving due to the programme achieved by the food industry and agriculture that always provide it with new products.

Romanian cuisine has gathered under reciprocal influence the regional features of Oltenia, Muntenia, Moldavia, Dobrudja, Banat and Transylvania, and their main characteristics have been preserved yet enriched, hence a wide range of goods.

Romanian food products mainly contain cooking ingredients and spices manufactured in our country.

Romanian dishes can be classified under the following groups:

- ❖ hot and cold snacks;
- ❖ sour soups, borsches, soups, broths;
- ❖ starters;
- ❖ basic cooking;
- ❖ home-made sweets.

Foods are associated with strong and soft drinks.

### **OLTENIA'S CUISINE**

Even nowadays it maintains the habit to prepare food in clay pots for "checking" which is a technology rendering the dishes a special taste and thus they still carry the scent of peasant cookery.

Oltenia's cuisine uses fresh vegetables, fish, poultry, beef, pork, dairy products and cheese.

Only Oltenia's inhabitants are skilled at cooking the tasty leek and garden sored sour soups and the Oltenian boiled soups which contain poultry and vegetables prepared in a clay pot on hot ashes. The force-meat rolls in cabbage cooked in clay pots are very appreciated.

Oltenia's neighbours have influenced its cuisine by various types of food such as monastic hotchpotch or monastic stew.

When one mentions the cuisine of Oltenia, one should specify the typical food of the area: chicken sauce and atole, tomatoes filled with meat or rice, Oltenian stew, fish pickle and the well-known Oltenian sausages.

### **MUNTENIA'S CUISINE**

It is characterized by diversity, ingenuity, delicacy. It has been influenced by the cuisine of Greece and the East, the fineness and refinement of French cookery and Italian trends until nowadays.

Muntenia's cuisine uses a wide range of vegetables, meat, meat products, fish, milk, macaroni and vermicelli, fruits. Its traditional cookery is appreciated for its tasty dishes. Soups are cooked from poultry, beef and vegetables and their special sour taste is rendered by borsch and lovage. Vegetable sour soups in particular are enriched by rice, eggs and sour cream. Tripe soups and stews are in high demand.

Foods are cooked with oil, butter and also lard in winter. Sauces are generally colourful and can be made of fresh tomatoes in summer and tomato sauce in winter.

Salads can be of several sorts, they are made of fresh or boiled vegetables, fruit, eggs, dairy products, all mixed with sauces or especially mayonnaise, a very good linking ingredient.

Dishes contain meat and vegetables or only fresh or canned ones; they can be: stews, dishes of vegetables and minced meat, chicken stews, garnished oven-baked or roasted fish, force-meat rolls in cabbage and atole.

Nowadays, the great restaurants in Bucharest and on the Prahova Valley are famous for their typically Romanian cuisine containing all sorts of dishes that have been continuously improved and refined.

Typical dishes of Muntenia's cookery: tripe soup, peasant beef and pork sour soup, force-meat rolls in cabbage and atole, lamb stew with garlic, grilled minced meat rolls, tripe stew,

grilled meat and fish, garnishings made of vegetables, potatoes or pasta, sweets such as: pasta puddings, pies, preserved fruits, pastry products with whipped cream and chocolate.

### **MOLDAVIA'S CUISINE**

It is characterized by fine, refined and tasty dishes. In order to cook them, they especially use poultry and fish, as well as pork, beef, venison and vegetables, milk, eggs, dairy products.

Soups become sour by adding borsch and they are improved by sour cream and eggs. Dishes are rather dietetical, cooked without any roasted flour, yet by adding fried onions and some flour dissolved in water.

Sauces are both white and colourful made from tomato juice and ground-pepper.

Moldavian cuisine is not rich in spices and it uses dill, savory, garlic, garden chervil or lovage.

The well-known Moldavian force-meat rolls in cabbage are fine and delicate, made of minced meat, in small sizes, 8-10 pieces wrapped in a cabbage leaf all together.

In Moldavia they extensively eat home-made sweets made from various doughs filled with vegetables, fruit or dairy.

One cannot mention Moldavia's cookery without drawing attention upon dishes such as: Moldavian "cighir", Moldavian pudding, chicken coked in a cast-iron kettle with garlic sauce and atole, "shut up and swallow", jellied poultry, pig's trotters, gizzard soup, Moldavian borsch, fish pickle, Moldavian "parjoale", Moldavian stew, Moldavian pound cake, Moldavian matzoth, "poale-n brau", pie filled with pumpkin, cheese, apples, cabbage, or "alivenci".

### **TRANSYLVANIA'S CUISINE**

It has received all along history the influence of the Austrian and Hungarian cuisines. In Ardeal they use a lot of well-smoked lard which is preserved all throughout a year, even in summer and it is either eaten as such or added into various dishes while cooking.

The dishes of Transylvania's cuisine are fat, tasty and peppery, made of meat, in particular pork, and vegetables, green herbs, milk, cheese and eggs.

Soups are made sour by vinegar or sour cabbage juice and enriched or seasoned by adding yolks of eggs and flour; the typical green herb of such soups is tarragon.

When cooking their dishes, they use lard and roasted flour and onions. Sauces are generally white and coloured with ground-pepper. Salads, as well as sauces, are sweetened with sugar. They eat a lot of fricassed meat highly seasoned with Hungarian pepper along with flour and egg dumplings boiled in salted water.

Transylvania's cookery is renowned for dishes such as: "balmus", "bulz", caraway soup, white cabbage soup with sour cream, Transylvanian pork or beef sour soup, meat sour soup with tarragon, cabbage cooked "à la Cluj", stuffed mushrooms, goulash, smoked meat, smoked minced meat, "langosi" pies, pudding etc.

### **BANAT'S CUISINE**

It is strongly influenced by the cuisines of Austria and Hungary, as well as the ones in Greece, Italy and France.

The dishes cooked in Banat are mainly made of pork, vegetables fried in oil or lard, sauces seasoned with pepper, savory, ground-pepper, or caraway.

Banat's cookery is characterized by tasty, fat and nourishing food.

Soups are made sour with lemon juice, are dressed with sour cream and seasoned with tarragon.

Soups contain home-made noodles and roasted flour. Home-made noodles are largely used both when cooking snacks and dishes, and when baking cakes.

Noodles are useful in making the well-known “iofca” dishes that contain cabbage, or cheese, nuts, milk, poppy, cow cheese. There is also goulash that is cooked in most households in Banat.

Dishes are characterized by their sauces containing roasted flour mixed with bone soup or vegetable soup which are then seasoned with sour cream. Roasted flour is used even when preparing force-meat rolls with cabbage. .

They frequently eat fricassed meat highly seasoned with Hungarian pepper along with flour and egg dumplings boiled in salted water.

The force-meat rolls with cabbage in Banat are cooked from meat minced by a chopper, their size is big and they do not have the fineness of those in Moldavia, yet they are tasty.

They have the renowned “pogace” cooked from dough and pork scraps that are served with plum brandy.

When cooking their dishes, they mainly use pork, beef, poultry, less frequently fish. The traditional food of the area includes: a snack called “zacusca”, veal sour soup, traditional force-meat rolls in cabbage, stuffed onions, Transylvanian pork dishes or puddings that emphasize the features of Banat’s cuisine.

### **DOBRUDJA’S CUISINE**

It is primarily influenced by the fauna and climate of the area as well as the Eastern cuisine.

For cooking their food they generally use fish, venison, mutton, poultry, beef and pork. Dobrudja is full of vegetables, fruits, milk, different sorts of cheese and eggs. Dobrudja’s dishes plentifully convey the richness of the area’s raw materials.

The dishes in Dobrudja’s cuisine are light, tasty, frequently cooked with oil, butter and margarine.

Soups are made sour with borsch, sour cabbage juice or vinegar and they are made of vegetables and mostly fish.

They often cook snacks made of fresh vegetables, such as salads also containing eggs, cheese and sour cream.

Sauces are coloured with tomato juice and made from vegetables fried in flour and water to which bone soup is added.

Their basic dishes are garnished with rice, vegetables and pasta.

They consume much butter, milk, yoghurt and cottage cheese which is eaten both in its raw form and used when cooking various dishes.

Dobrudja’s cuisine has been influenced by the great European cuisines all throughout history and especially ever since the end of the First World War, therefore its food has become fine, dainty, tasty, richer in food sorts and better in quality.

Dobrudja’s cookery on the Black Seaside can compete with any old traditional cuisine.

The dishes typical of Dobrudja include: fish soup, tripe soup, pickled fish, carp pickle, spitted fish, stuffed carp, pilaff from Dobrudja, salads typical of Dobrudja, mutton sausages, spitted lamb, Turkish “saslac”, “chebab” or “ghiudem”, dish of vegetables and minced meat, rice garnishings, as well as sweets with dried currants and Turkish delight or Turkish types of sweets such as “baclava” or “saraili”.

### **III. Case study: the importance of traditional cookery in Valcea’s tourism promotion**

Valcea is one of the oldest counties in our country and it was first registered in a document on the 8th of January 1392 by Mircea the Old's charter, giving Cozia Monastery the yearly prize for apiculture.

"Bread and salt – the ancient symbols of our country's wealth and hospitality – are so abundant in Valcea that a whole people could eat. The Olt Valley from Ocne downwards is full of wheat fields, haystacks and wide corn lands. In the South, right where our county begins from Romanati onwards, you can see the vineyard hill with the famous vineyards of Dragasani; century-old nut- and plum-tree forests cover the hillocks before your eyes; from the spring of Cernisoara upwards, between the Oltet and Olt Rivers, Valcea lies as an enchanting meadow, with valleys where crystal-clear waters flow, with lawns full of flowers at the forests' bottom, with lively villages on the river benches, with white smooth roads that lie as bright stripes on the green fields". The warm words of writer Alexandru Vlahuta suggestively convey the richness and beauty of the places.

Valcea county has all the traits of a complex tourist area: varied relief – arranged in layers, the mountains are in the North, the deep valleys and hillocks descend more or less steeply, there are Sub-Carpathian hills and hollow grounds, the plateau is transformed into a sequence of long hillocks, there is a field, there are plenty of natural resources, crystal-clear lakes and rivers, mineral water springs, large forests, various plants and animals, there is a mild climate all the time. The beauty of the land is present in its wonderful sceneries – the straits of the Olt and Lotrisor rivers, the falls of Lotru, the quays of Bistrita – then there is the wide range of spas, natural monuments and parks, historical places that remind one of historic times of our people's long-lasting battles for national and social freedom, there are museums with valuable exhibits, remarkable treasuries of art and architecture, significant folk abodes and ancient dwellings, natural beauty and richness that are recognized and famous in the country and abroad – all these elements rank Valcea among the top counties in our country that are appreciated for their tourist attractiveness.

On holidays and at weekends, tourists enjoy relaxation, recreation and entertainment by sightseeing tours, contemplating the unique landscapes and getting familiar with the county's habits.

Thus, Caineni is the beginning point of several hitch-hiking directions on Fagaras peaks. Nature has "created" strange rocks on Cozia Mountain reminding one of megalithic places such as "Baba" or "Sfinxul" but there are also rare plants such as lion's foot, colourful tulip, Cozia hip rose.

The county's habits are remarkable when it comes to inhabitants' occupations or yearly celebrations. The mountain area of Vaideeni has habits regarding sheep selection and in the Southern area called Dragasani where agriculture is predominant they have the habit of ploughing which means celebrating the first furrow of the year.

Horezu, an important trades centre, is also a passage way of sheep flocks, preserving rich craftsmanship in the art of woodwork and pottery. Horezu pottery's refinement and beauty are internationally recognized. The traditional fair of potters from all over the world entitled "Hurez Cock" is held on the first Sunday of June.

This festival having the most representative pieces of art welcomes all the greatest pottery masters, as proud as Hurez cocks. Every exhibit (pots for cooking force-meat rolls in cabbage, plum brandy jugs ornated with various paintings, flavoured candles) is a small homage paid to folk mastery. The most important tourist traits of the county are the spas famous all over the country and abroad. They are very beautiful, just like health oases, at crossroads. Thus, balneary tourism has emerged as a way to maintain and recover health by medically recommended relaxation and entertainment.

Calimanesti-Caciulata spa is renowned by its miraculous waters and curing springs that taste and smell special and are used by people who suffer from kidney, liver and stomach diseases.

The waters of the brackish lakes in Ocele Mari and Ocnita, the iodine waters in Baile Govora or the metal, isotonic or hypotonic waters in Baile Olanesti also have healing effects.

The charm of the wide range of monasteries is present in Valcea county as monastic tourism is particularly emphasized. Turnu Monastery, Cozia Monastery, One-Log Monastery on the Bistrita Valley, Surpatele Monastery are attractive by the history and uniqueness they shelter and by greeting tourists with typical monastic food, as they are places where people stop for a while to rest and relax.

Horezu Monastery is unforgettable as it is the most significant religious architecture evidence of Brancoveanu's times. Arnota and Bistrita Monasteries are to be found not too far from Horezu, and one can visit the small cave convent and the world famous wood sculpture workshops.

The Olt River's line full of old traces, yet current development has been and still is a huge traffic area across the Carpathians. Turnu Monastery lies in Turnu hollow ground, on the left river bench, among the fruit-tree field stretching almost up to the mountain bottom. It has been named as such by the Turnu Mountain or Traian's Little Tower ("Turnisor") whose peak has the traces of an old road's watch building. Still on the Olt River's left bank a few hundred metres away from Turnu there is a solitary cliff called Traian's Table. The feudal art assembly lies southwards, as Mircea the Old's foundation and tomb – Cozia Monastery. Its history is highly relevant in the country's history. It blends ways and destinies.

Northern Oltenia is a region that has well preserved its traditions. The monasteries in the North of Oltenia are highly interesting tourist sites though less famous than the ones in Bucovina but as valuable historically and culturally as the latter.

The region blends folk traditions with the hospitable and pleasant environment of monasteries and boarding houses.

Country-side tourism is increasing as the Romanians prefer to put up in the villages around monasteries. Country-side tourism will be a strong alternative of the traditional one especially that only there can one breathe fresh air, find silence and eat healthy food. Only in a country-side boarding house can one sleep in snow-white linen that smells like basil, can one stroll through gardens or relax on a haystack, watch the cocks in the yard, or eat abundantly in the evening - as if for the first time -, have atole and drink fresh milk.

Country-side tourism does not only confine to boarding and meals, but it also provides one with tempting offers to spend one's free time. In winter they organize horse-pulled sleighing, in summer there are pilgrimages and hikes in nature. This type of tourism has proved the old saying according to which "man enriches a place" regarding the Romanians that know how to welcome their guests.

### **Types of menus typical of Valcea's traditional cuisine**

Starting from the different food consumption ways depending on the kind of tourism practised in Valcea county such as: business, balneary, monastic, pleasure or country-side tourism, Valcea's traditional dishes are a strength in its tourism chain.

One can frequently come across the following Oltenian menus of traditional cookery:

### **MENU 1**

- ❖ Salted crispy biscuits as in Valcea
- ❖ Leek sour soup
- ❖ Oltenian stew
- ❖ Season fruit
- ❖ Bakery products
- ❖ Novac red wine from Dragasani
- ❖ Mineral water

### **MENU 2**

- ❖ Oltenian summer salad
- ❖ Chicken pickle
- ❖ Peasant potatoes
- ❖ Atole
- ❖ Apple pie
- ❖ Bakery products
- ❖ Plum brandy of Pietrari
- ❖ Gordan or Cramposia dry white wines from Dragasani
- ❖ Mineral water

### **MENU 3**

- ❖ Balmos à la Vaideeni
- ❖ Mushroom sour soup
- ❖ Turkey with meat balls specific to the Olt Valley
- ❖ Pancakes filled with plum jam
- ❖ Bakery products
- ❖ Vodka
- ❖ Sauvignon semi-dry white wine of Dragasani
- ❖ Mineral water
- ❖ Fruit juice

### **MENU 4**

- ❖ Garden sorrel or stinging nettle mixture block
- ❖ Romanian force-meat rolls in cabbage
- ❖ Atole
- ❖ Stuffed pears
- ❖ Cabernet Sauvignon red wine of Samburesti

## **Conclusions**

Every geographic area has its own specific features both from the perspective of their amount of raw materials and spices and from the one of the technology used.

Despite the influences of other peoples' cuisines over the years, Romanian cookery has kept unaltered the taste of traditional dishes, their cooking methods mainly based on traditional



technology and raw materials that are on our country's territory. Romanian dishes are first and foremost genuine.

Romanian cuisine' emphasis based on environment-friendly raw materials to be found in peasant households and on traditional technology increasingly ensure the cooking of food in compliance with Romanian customs and traditions. Romanian cookery currently improves the general picture of our country's natural richness and beauty which is to create a further reason to visit Romania and meet the Romanians' well-known hospitality.

### ***BIBLIOGRAPHY***

***DIACONU, MIHAELA, MARKETING IN TOURISM, ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE PUBLISHING HOUSE, PITESTI, 2003***

***FLOREA, CONSTANTIN, GUIDELINES FOR WAITERS, CORESI PUBLISHING HOUSE, BUCHAREST, 1995***

***NICOLESCU, RADU, RESTAURANT TECHNOLOGY, INTER-REBS PUBLISHING HOUSE, BUCHAREST, 1998***

***ROMAN, RADU ANTON, ROMANIAN FOOD, WINES AND CUSTOMS, PAIDEIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, BUCHAREST, 2001***

***\*\*\*LITERARY AND GASTRONOMICAL ALBUM, ROMANIAN LIFE PUBLISHING HOUSE, BUCHAREST, 1982***

***\*\*\*COOKERY MAGAZINE, SUPPLEMENT OF NATIONAL JOURNAL NEWSPAPER, 2004***

***\*\*\*COUNTRY REGIONS, SPORTS AND TOURISM PUBLISHING HOUSE, BUCHAREST, 1979***

***\*\*\*WINES REVIEW, GUIDELINES FOR CONSUMERS, 2003-2004***

***\*\*\*COUNTRY-SIDE HOLIDAYS, MONTHLY ISSUE OF ANTREC ROMANIA, 2004***