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THE STUDY ON THE RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH ON TRADITIONAL FOOD OF BULGARIANS IN MOLDOVA AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH-21ST CENTURIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EUROPEAN PROGRAM “FOOD STUDIES”*

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Rezumat

Studiul privind relevanța cercetării alimentelor tradiționale ale bulgarilor din Moldova la hotarul sec. XX–XXI în cadrul programului european „Food Studies”

Articolul oferă o trecere în revistă a unor publicații științifice legate de programul UNESCO, care reflectă abordări contemporane în cercetarea alimentelor tradiționale ale popoarelor Europei ca expresie a conștiinței etnice. Se subliniază creșterea interesului științific pentru alimentație ca element al patrimoniului cultural imaterial al umanității, în special al etniilor europene, inclusiv în cadrul comunității etnice bulgare. Se atrage atenția asupra problemelor teoretice și metodologice din domeniul cercetării științifice a alimentației, precum și asupra definirii bucătăriei naționale și tradiționale. Este oferită o caracterizare a bucătăriei bulgare ca europeană și balcanică, în contact cu culturile neslave. De asemenea, se oferă informații despre cercetările contemporane privind alimentația tradițională a bulgarilor din metropolă și din diaspora – România, Ucraina și Moldova. Sunt prezentate scurte informații istorico-demografice despre câteva localități din Moldova cu populație bulgară. Este argumentată abordarea privind selecția locațiilor pentru colectarea materialului de teren în cercetarea gradului de conservare a alimentației tradiționale a bulgarilor din Moldova într-un mediu multicultural. În acest context, este determinată relevanța cercetării.

Cuvinte-cheie: programul european „Food Studies”; cultură tradițională, tradiții alimentare, conștiință etnică, bulgarii din Moldova, particularități culturologice, continuum cultural.

Резюме

Об актуальности исследования традиционной пищи болгар Молдовы на рубеже XX–XXI веков в рамках европейской программы “Food Studies”

В статье дан обзор некоторых научных публикаций, связанных с программой ЮНЕСКО и отражающих современные подходы к исследованию традиционной пищи народов Европы как выражению этнического самосознания. Показан рост научного интереса к пище как элементу нематериального культурного наследия человечества, в частности европейских этносов, в том числе в болгарской этнической среде. Обращено внимание на теоретико-методологические проблемы в области научного исследования пищи, определения национальной и традицион-

ной кухни. Дана характеристика болгарской кухни как европейской и балканской, в соприкосновении с неславянскими культурами. Приводится информация о современных исследованиях традиционной пищи болгар в метрополии и в диаспорах – Румынии, Украине и Молдове. Приводятся краткие историко-демографические сведения о некоторых населенных пунктах Молдовы с болгарским населением. Аргументирован подход к выбору мест для сбора полевого материала при исследовании сохранности традиционной пищи болгар Молдовы в поликультурном окружении. В этом контексте определена актуальность исследования.

Ключевые слова: европейская программа “Food Studies”, традиционная культура, пищевые традиции, этническое самосознание, болгары Молдовы, культурологические особенности, культурный континуум.

Summary

The Study on the Relevance of Research on Traditional Food of Bulgarians in Moldova at the Turn of the 20th–21st Centuries within the Framework of the European Program “Food Studies”

The article provides an overview of several scientific publications related to the UNESCO program, which reflect contemporary approaches to studying traditional food of European peoples as an expression of ethnic identity. It highlights the growing scholarly interest in food as an element of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity, particularly among European ethnic groups, including the Bulgarian ethnic community. Attention is drawn to theoretical and methodological challenges in the scientific study of food, as well as the definitions of national and traditional cuisine. The article characterizes Bulgarian cuisine as both European and Balkan, influenced by non-Slavic cultures. It also provides information on contemporary studies of traditional Bulgarian food in both the metropole and in diasporas – Romania, Ukraine, and Moldova. Brief historical and demographic data are given about some settlements in Moldova with Bulgarian populations. The approach to selecting locations for fieldwork to study the preservation of traditional Bulgarian food in a multicultural environment is substantiated, and the relevance of this research is determined in this context.

Key words: European program “Food Studies”, traditional culture, food traditions, ethnic identity, Bulgarians of Moldova, cultural features, cultural continuum.

Introduction

In the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, there has been a surge of interest in the study of traditional foods across various peoples. Alongside the accumulation of empirical research, there has been significant development of theoretical and methodological frameworks for studying traditional foods.

A comprehensive and synthesized account of contemporary interest in and approaches to the study of food across different cultures, both in historical and modern contexts, is provided by O. D. Fais-Leutskaya in her article "On the Contemporary State of Food Anthropology" (Файс-Леутская 2019: 5-16). In her review, the author discusses the emerging interdisciplinary field of "Food Studies". In recent years, food has garnered increased attention from scholars in fields such as history, philology, art history, sociology, regional studies, economics, ethnography, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology. As the author notes, cuisine is not only an object of scientific analysis as part of material culture but also as a "complex set of socio-cultural codes and keys that reveal the character of a local community: mentality, traditional behavior models, the distribution of social roles – all elements that together form its distinctiveness" (Файс-Леутская 2019: 5).

Many scholars consider a people's food system as a means of self-identification, connecting individuals to the community they belong to and serving as a way to understand their historical and cultural roots, forming a unifying element of self-awareness.

The "headquarters" of Food Studies is identified as the International Association for the Study of Food and Society, which coordinates research within this field. Since 2011, the Association has held annual conferences addressing various issues related to food. These conferences cover a broad range of social, anthropological, religious, gastronomic, economic, and political aspects of nutrition (Файс-Леутская 2019: 6-7).

The aforementioned review notes that "Food Studies" in Europe (with its long-standing history and deep-rooted traditions of interest in food as a social and cultural phenomenon) has accumulated significant experience in the study of food. This experience may surpass that of research conducted in the United States, Canada, and Latin American countries.

At Lomonosov Moscow State University, the Academy of Gastronomic Science and Culture was established, focusing on the history of food and the dietary traditions of various peoples. Its policy document outlines goals related to the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

"Food is an integral part of traditional knowledge – practical folk knowledge passed orally from generation to generation. <...> Food and intercultural communication are among the most critical issues. Understanding the traditions of other nations, their historical roots, and cultural justification forms the basis of tolerance toward other cultures and is essential for successful international communication and business" (Файс-Леутская 2019: 11).

A significant stimulus for the development of Food Studies and the growing scholarly interest in food as a research object and nutrition as a cultural phenomenon was UNESCO's 2003 recognition of food as an element of intangible cultural heritage (The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage).

One particularly interesting outcome of the increasing academic interest in food has been the emergence of the gastronomic tourism phenomenon, also known as "culinary tourism" or "food tourism". This type of tourism focuses on exploring a country's cultural characteristics through its culinary traditions and cuisine.

The author of the review on the contemporary state of food anthropology emphasizes that gaining knowledge about a country's food products and attending various culinary events, festivals, and fairs are among the most productive and promising directions for the development of the tourism industry.

In the past decade, several international forums have been held on various aspects of alimentary culture as part of a people's material culture. Notably, Moscow State University hosts an internationally recognized Association for the Study of Food and Society. The approaches and directions highlighted in scholarly publications and materials from forums held by this Association, as well as in collective monographs on the study of traditional foods of Europe and the world, are worth mentioning.

Since 2001, various publications have actively explored the traditional diets of peoples in Western and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and other regions.

The collection of articles titled "Traditional Food as an Expression of Ethnic Identity" focuses on the role of food in ecological adaptation, the preservation and selection of traditional components in modern diets, and the relationship between vital and symbolic aspects of food culture. It demonstrates that such an everyday element of culture as food and drink reflects ethnic identity and one's relationship to the environment.

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ervation and selection of traditional components in modern diets, and the relationship between vital and symbolic aspects of food culture. It demonstrates that such an everyday element of culture as food and drink reflects ethnic identity and one's relationship to the environment. The title of the collection, "Traditional Food as an Expression of Ethnic Identity", is significant. It is evident that during the 20th century, the dietary habits of many peoples have undergone significant changes, raising important questions about what has remained unchanged (Традиционная 2001: 7-11).

The next collection, "Codes of Everyday Life in National Culture: Food and Clothing", contains materials from scientific conferences held by the Department of Cultural History at the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 2008 and 2009. The book analyzes the semiotic nature of food and clothing in the context of Slavic tradition and the mechanisms of social, gender, and national identification they trigger (Коды 2011).

Since 2014, Moscow State University has hosted the International Symposium on the study of food history and dietary traditions of the world's nations within the context of traditional culture (Материалы 2015; Материалы 2016; Материалы 2017; Материалы 2018; Материалы 2019; Материалы 2021; Материалы 2023).

The symposiums have explored the breadth of interest in traditional foods through a wide variety of topics: historical forms of gastronomic practices; food as an object of artistic reflection; food through the lens of language; the history and traditions of the diets of European peoples; regional gastronomic identities; and the food history and traditions of peoples around the world.

One of the latest works on food culture and European dietary practices is a collective monograph (Вкус 2020). The monograph includes studies conducted from the perspective of social anthropology, focusing on alimentary practices and their origins, food and identity, food systems and sociality, cuisine and gender, food as a symbol and political tool, taste in cultures, national cuisine and authentic recipes, and rituals surrounding food and etiquette. It is important to note that these works cover specific regions, peoples, and "food phenomena".

In his review of this collective monograph, M. E. Kabitsky writes that "The anthropology of food and nutrition is a branch of ethno-anthropological sciences that has only recently established itself, with research in this area continuing to grow dynamically in recent decades. At the same time, this field remains vast and largely unexplored, offering opportu-

nities for the study of specific dietary systems, food prescriptions, preferences and prohibitions, gastronomic facts, and the broader theoretical and methodological synthesis these phenomena may inspire" (Кабицкий 2020: 233).

The author notes that Europe has historically held less significance for ethno-anthropologists than other parts of the world, as compared to other social and humanities disciplines. "Ethnography and anthropology initially developed as studies of exotic peoples, focusing on the unique features of traditional culture, which in early industrialized and modernized Europe was believed to have largely fallen out of use. However, time has shown that the old continent offers ethnographers a wealth of valuable material, capable of providing the basis for fascinating conceptual frameworks. European ethnography has demonstrated its right to exist. One of the most enduring elements of traditional cultural heritage is food. It is therefore notable that Europeanists from several academic centers (the Center for European Studies of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Department of European Studies of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, and others) have become the authors of a significant new work on the anthropology of food" (Кабицкий 2020: 234).

The aforementioned collective monograph addresses the key areas of food anthropology: alimentary practices and the origins of tradition, food systems and sociality, taste in cultures, national cuisine and authentic recipes, and rituals surrounding food. The dietary cultures of nearly twenty different peoples are examined, ranging from large countries and regions, such as Spain, Germany, the Balkans, and Eastern Slavic areas, to diasporas (Jews, Roma) and relatively small ethno-cultural groups (such as the Vlachs of Serbia and Bulgaria, and Pontic Greeks).

On the Relevance of Studying the Traditional Cuisine of Bulgarians in Moldova

Recent anthropological (including ethnological) studies of alimentary culture indicate that food can be regarded by its bearers as a means of self-identification. It serves as a way of recognizing historical and ethnic roots and can even act as a consolidating element of identity. Culinary traditions reflect the history of a region, the social structure, intercultural contacts, ethnic and confessional composition of the population, and its cultural strata.

The traditional cuisine of Bulgarians in Moldova also falls within the scope of these studies. In the past (late 19th and 20th centuries), this aspect of material culture among Bulgarian settlers was described fragmentarily as empirical regional material, without

historical or ethnological analysis. However, with the rise of new approaches in contemporary scholarship, it becomes essential to study this part of ethnic culture using relevant methods and techniques (such as comparative-historical and cultural analysis).

The Concept of National Cuisine

In examining the cuisine and food traditions of Bulgarians in Moldova, we address the topic of national cuisine, its foundations, and the intercultural influences that have shaped it over more than 200 years of Bulgarian settlers residing in a contact zone. To explore the characteristics of national cuisine, it is necessary to define this phenomenon both as an object and as a concept, since its definition is crucial for understanding the subject matter.

According to A.V. Pavlovskaya, a prominent researcher in the field of the study of world cuisines from historical, cultural, and semiotic perspectives, "There is still no clear, formulated definition of national cuisine. We will attempt to summarize the existing developments in this area. National food is a historically formed, complex system of nutrition of a people in a particular country (nation): a set of basic foods and dishes fundamental to the given people; methods of processing and preparing food; its presentation and consumption; preservation and storage methods; a system of prohibitions and restrictions; and food preferences".

The social functioning of national cuisine and its forms of existence in society – its role in folk and religious beliefs, rituals, and festive culture – are also important factors for defining its characteristics (Павловская 2016: 64).

The Role of National Cuisine in the Preservation of Ethnic Culture and Traditions

Studies of the sociocultural role of European food often focus on several key questions: alimentary practices and the origins of tradition, food and identity, the food system and social relations, cuisine and gender, food as a symbol and political tool, taste in different cultures, national cuisine and authentic recipes, dining, etiquette, and ritual.

Cultural and ethnological researchers frequently emphasize that, over time, particularly in the modern world, the ethnic distinctiveness of peoples in the material sphere is gradually eroding. However, it is noteworthy that in the realm of food, ethnographic specificity endures significantly longer than in other material aspects of culture, such as clothing or housing. The persistence of food preferences as a tradition makes their study a valuable source of knowledge about the ethnic history of peoples.

Thus, food, according to researchers, is an essential component of ethnic identity, a reflection of a

particular lifestyle, and a means of self-expression at ethnic, social, familial, and personal levels.

Studying Food Traditions in the Context of Modern Approaches

A.V. Pavlovskaya, an expert in the study of ethno-cultural food traditions, highlights that contemporary ethnological research into traditional food should incorporate the inclusion of food norms, processing, and consumption patterns into the national value system, as they, alongside many other traditions, are markers of national culture (Павловская 2015: 34).

In the collective monograph "The Taste of Europe", one chapter titled "Meat Dishes in Bulgarian Cuisine – Pastirma and Sudzhuk: Traditions and Innovations" by E. Vodinchar and M. P. Klaus, is dedicated to certain Bulgarian food traditions. The authors note that Bulgarian ethnological scholarship has a long tradition of studying national food characteristics (Вкyc 2020: 344-347). The researchers view food as part of the traditional material culture formed over centuries, influenced by geographic, socioeconomic, economic, ethnic, religious, political, and other factors. The significance of food as a marker of self-identification (as a result of the internalization of values and cultural models) is considered particularly important for territorial-ethnic migrant groups with diverse identities and behavioral stereotypes (Вкyc 2020: 316-317).

Research into the Food and Cuisine of Bulgarians in Bessarabia and Moldova

The literature provides individual descriptions of the culinary features (diet and food) of Bulgarians in Bessarabia and Moldova. Typically, these are historical and ethnological studies where food and traditional cuisine are addressed as part of material culture or within the context of traditions and rituals. However, there are no comprehensive studies of this aspect of the ethnic culture of Bulgarian settlers, particularly in Moldova. Some studies focus on the general characteristics of Bulgarian dietary preferences in Bessarabia (mid to late 20th century) and the food traditions associated with Orthodox holidays. Among the works by Moldovan researchers, notable examples include articles by L. V. Markova, E. Sorochanu, and S. Novakov, along with popular texts by A. Maleshkova and N. Kurtev (Страницы 1995).

The Bulgarian Ethnic Group in Moldova: Historical Roots, History, and Characteristics of Some Settlements. Connection with the Metropolis

The cuisine of Bulgarians in Moldova, like Bulgarian national cuisine, is based on Balkan culinary traditions. Balkan cuisine developed under the in-

fluence of various food canons, including Slavic, Hungarian, Austrian, Turkish, Venetian, and Arab cuisines. Many dishes typical of the Bulgarian national table are also found in the cuisine of other Balkan peoples (Turks, Romanians, Serbs, Greeks, Albanians). However, Bulgarian food traditions have been shaped by factors such as geographical location, socio-economic development, religion, agriculture, seasonality, and more.

After Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule, European influences, including culinary ones, began to play a role, many of which were specifically interpreted in terms of ingredients, cooking methods, presentation, and more.

In the case of the cuisine of Bulgarians in Moldova, it is essential to consider that local Bulgarians (formerly of Bessarabia, now living in Moldova and Ukraine) have been separated from their homeland for more than two hundred years. They found themselves in a zone of interaction with Eastern Romance (Romanian) and East Slavic (primarily Ukrainian) cuisines.

The climatic zone remained similar, but the natural environment changed – Bulgarian settlers relocated to the arid steppe of southern Bessarabia. Therefore, two factors likely influenced the characteristics of traditional food and the extent to which its ethnic traits were preserved: interaction with the cuisine of other ethnic groups and the nature of food products available in the steppe zone.

In the Section of “Bulgarian Dialectology and Linguistic Geography” of the Institute for the Bulgarian Language Prof. Lyubomir Andreychin at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, an Interactive Culinary Map of the Bulgarian linguistic territory is being developed. The study investigates the evolution of traditional Bulgarian everyday and ceremonial culinary vocabulary across the entire linguistic area of Bulgaria (both within its national borders and abroad).

Researchers involved in the creation of the “Interactive Culinary Map” sought to reflect not only the distinct naming of dishes and food products within the Bulgarian linguistic continuum across Bulgaria but also to present field material from regions historically referred to as “New Bulgaria”. These are areas where a substantial Bulgarian population has traditionally lived in compact settlements. The study focuses on two historical diasporas, where Bulgarian national identity and the Bulgarian language in its dialectal forms are strongly preserved: in Romania (the Banat region) and in the former Bessarabia (Ukraine and Moldova). This research also involves the collection and description of national dishes, examining

the evolution of traditional Bulgarian culture in light of linguistic-geographical features and the religious factor, which is reflected in the mentality of Bulgarian settlers and their descendants. The work is accompanied by the creation of a special dictionary of traditional Bulgarian cuisine (Керемидчиева, Котева 2022: 125).

We believe that our research can serve as a component of a more comprehensive global study.

In Moldova, the Bulgarian population is considered an ethnic minority. According to official data (excluding the capital, Chisinau, where around 10,000 Bulgarians reside), the Bulgarian population in the southern part of the country is approximately 88,000.

The center of the Bulgarian cultural-territorial settlement in Moldova is considered to be Taraclia, which has now gained city status. This status brings greater influence from urban life. For the collection and analysis of field materials, we selected three localities in Moldova with predominantly Bulgarian populations: the villages of Tvarditsa, Valea Perjei, and Moscovei. These three villages, like Taraclia (a former village), are considered the core settlements, while other localities are regarded as offshoots of these primary sites, as well as some villages currently located in Ukraine.

Below, we provide some historical and demographic information on the locations where field material was collected for the study of the traditional cuisine of Bulgarians in Moldova¹:

Moscovei Village. Established in 1814, the village was initially populated by Bulgarians, Serbs, Gagauz, and other ethnic groups. By the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the village was inhabited by Bulgarians, Moldovans, Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Jews, and Albanians. The population at that time was around 3,700 residents. According to preliminary data from the most recent census (2024), the village has a population of 2,860 people, with Bulgarians comprising about 40% of the total population.

The Bulgarian population is integrated with other ethnic groups, particularly the Moldovan population. There is no division of residence into “mahalas”, meaning no distinct areas where Bulgarian households are clustered together. It is likely that everyday traditions reflect a significant degree of mutual influence with other ethnic groups, primarily the Moldovans.

Valea Perjei Village. The village is believed to have been founded in 1816, although the first documented reference dates back to 1812. In the first decades of the 19th century, a Bulgarian “mahala”

emerged in the village, settled by Bulgarians who had emigrated to Bessarabia from south of the Danube. This part of the village later came to be known as Valea Perjei Noua (which means New Valea Perjei). Correspondingly, the older part of the village became known as Valea Perjei Vechi (which means Old Valea Perjei). The older section was referred to by the locals as Moldovan Mahala (Mahalaua Moldovenească), while the newer section was called Bulgarian Mahala (Mahalaua Bulgarească). In 1954, both sections were merged into a single village – Valea Perjei. By the late 20th century, the village had about 5,300 residents, more than 4,000 of whom were Bulgarians. According to the 2024 census, the village now has a population of 3,400.

Tvarditsa Village (which was granted city status in 2013). The village was founded in 1830, following the departure of the Nogai Tatars from the steppes of the Don and Crimea. It is now located 2 kilometers from the Ukrainian border. Bessarabian Tvarditsa was founded by Bulgarian emigrants from a village of the same name, located south of the Danube in the Sliven region. By the late 20th century, the village had 6,284 residents, of whom 5,749 were Bulgarians, 173 were Romanians, 99 were Gagauz, 60 were Russians, 46 were Ukrainians, and 112 were from other ethnic groups. Between 2011 and 2016, the village's population reached approximately 10,000. Today, it has around 3,600 residents, with Bulgarians comprising 98% of the population.

The localities we have selected represent three variations in the ratio of Bulgarian to non-Bulgarian populations (primarily Moldovan), who have lived in close proximity for approximately two hundred years. It is important not only to identify and document the preservation of traditional Bulgarian dietary practices in Moldova, as a compactly residing ethnic minority, but also to explore the characteristics of their cuisine today, in the context of contact with Moldovan and East Slavic cuisines, both in everyday meals and in festive and ritual dishes.

Notes

* The article was written while developing the Research subprogram: 170101 Cercetarea și valorificarea patrimoniului cultural construit, etnografic, arheologic și artistic din Republica Moldova în contextul integrării europene.

¹ Historical and demographic data are provided according to the publication "Localitățile Republicii Moldova: Itinerar documentar-publicistic ilustrat". Chisinau: Fundația Draghitea. Vol. 8: Li-M. 2007, vol. 14: To-Va. 2016.

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