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# KARABAKH CUISINE

*continued from the previous issue*

IN THE KARABAKH ZONE, DAIRY CUISINE IS THE SAME AS IN OTHER REGIONS OF AZERBAIJAN. COW, SHEEP AND GOAT MILK IS USED. BUFFALO AND GOAT MILK IS CONSIDERED MEDICINAL.

**T**he first milk, which is received after the birth of a calf, is called "agiz". In the cooked form, it is a tasty dish called katamaz. As a ritual meal, it is divided between neighbors (usually 7 families). Sometimes artificial katamaz is cooked, for which one egg yolk is added to 1 liter of milk and cooked. If you put a raw beaten egg wholly and carefully, so it does not curdle, and boil it, adding honey, you will get a drink called "bulama" (beestlings).

Milk produced during the first 2-5 days is also called "bulama". In addition, sulug was made from "agiz" and "bulama" milk. To this end, the membrane of the placenta is thoroughly washed, filled with milk, then buried in warm ashes and kindled from above, or is placed in a hot tandir. Af-

ter 1.5-2 hours, it is taken out. A tasty cheese-like mass comes out. Sometimes "sulug" is placed in a large cauldron and boiled. Sulug is also made from normal milk, and it turns out very tasty like baked milk.

Katamaz and bulama in a cauldron with the addition of flour and butter is used to make "gaymag chorak" or "shan-shan" on a saj. The latter, in contrast to the "gaymag chorak", has many "holes" - shana.

Milk was also used as a standalone drink, especially with fresh bread, as the basis for cold (dogramaj - "okros-hka" (cold soup with chopped vegetables and meat)) and hot soups and for making pastry and bakery products.

Sheep milk was mainly used for making rennet cheese and was valued very highly. For fermentation,

they used the abomasum of newborn lambs or grass "dalama otu" (rennet grass). But goat cheese was considered the most expensive, as well as medicinal cheese. Cheese from cow milk is considered to be of lower quality than sheep cheese.

Cow and buffalo milk was used mainly for cooking the fermented milk product "gatig" (yogurt). Buffalo gatig was especially valued: it is denser, fatter and tastier.

Gaymag (the fat part of the gatig - thick cream) made from buffalo gatig is denser and more delicious than that cow gatig.

Gaymag is made from milk. To do this, it is poured with a thin layer in a broad and shallow dish (sini (tray), tapsi). A day later, a film (thick cream) appears on the surface - this is milk



gaymag. If milk is not boiled and is poured into the same dish immediately after milking, you get "chiya", i.e. "raw gaymag". "Sud gaymag" (milk gaymag) was obtained from boiled milk in the same kind of dish. "Gati gaymag" (thick cream) was obtained from evaporated milk. In Karabakh, such a product was also called "sud-bashi". Sometimes milk was boiled on low heat in order to make it, periodically adding raw milk.

Gatig is used as a separate dish, but they also prepare various dishes (dovga, dogramaj, ovdug, shirin gatig) and atlama (a soft drink made of water and sour clotted milk) from it.

Kasmik (cottage cheese) is made from ayran (liquid obtained by beating butter from gatig) sometimes from gatig by boiling. It is salted and dried a

little bit to make shor - crumbly cheese. For storage and ripening, the shor is placed in a *motal* - sheep wineskin. They also make *motal pendir* - cheese in a *motal*. The cheese and cottage cheese, which ripen in a *motal*, have a special taste and are valued higher.

The liquid remaining after cottage cheese is called *zar dab* (whey) and after cheese - *dalama* (fresh cheese). Both are used for making drinks and for baking bread. This bread lasts longer and tastes better than the one made in water. If *dalama* is boiled, it becomes "*nor*".

The dish "*lor*" is prepared by mixing fresh cottage cheese with boiled milk and salt. When milk is added to gatig, a dish called "*karamaz*" comes out.

Straining gatig or ayran through a cloth, they get a concentrated prod-

uct called *suzma* (condensed sour milk), which is used as a separate dish and for cooking some foods.

From *suzma* with salt, they get "*gurut*" - dried cheese balls or cones. *Gurut* can be stored for several years and is used as a base for sauces and *khangal* (made from thin slices of dough).

If in Lankaran they mix fresh snow with *bakmaz* (boiled down juice of grapes, mulberry, etc.), families and shepherds of Karabakh, who climb mountains with flocks in summer, mix a black sheep's fresh milk with mountain snow and call this dish "*gar karamazi*" (snow *karamaz*). Sometimes dishes with *gar karamaz* are buried in the snow or put on ice. The main difference from ice cream is that sugar is not added to the mixture. Interestingly, the "*gar karamaz*" is prepared only





*Dolma (meat rolled in vine leaves)*



*Atlama (greens sliced into ayran)*

from the milk of a black sheep.

**In Karabakh cuisine, meat, preferably lamb, is used more than any other ingredient. Local sheep are valued higher than other breeds.** It is called "kasma goyun" (slaughtered sheep) or "atlik" (meat), i.e. "table or meat mutton". If other breeds yield "pure meat" - from 48 to 52 per cent, the Karabakh breed yields no less than 56 per cent.

The Karabakh breed of sheep has a very large guyrug (rump). Sometimes they have to place a trolley on wheels under the rump. In the bazaars of the Caucasus, experienced butchers preferred to buy Karabakh sheep as they were preferable to others. The meat of black animals was especially valued.

The lamb of the Karabakh breed is used to cook the best kebabs. Making a good kebab is a science, and kebab is a separate culinary speciality.



For kebabs, what matters is not only what sheep it is cooked from, but also what side of the sheep the meat is taken from, as well as the sex, age, feeding conditions, what firewood or charcoal are used and how the animal was killed. Kebab is served with fresh herbs, sumakh, narsharab (boiled pomegranate juice), etc. The finished meat is removed from the ramrod with a piece of bread, as if wrapping the finished dish in it. Yukha made on a saj and lavash from the tandir are more suitable for this. Kebab is sliced meat, while basdirma is kebab meat kept in onion, vinegar or lemon juice before cooking. One of its varieties is lula kebab which is made of minced meat strung on a ramrod in the form of "round cutlets". Kebab and lula kebab are served with tomatoes, Bulgarian pepper, eggplants and potatoes baked over a fire on a ramrod.

Lamb and beef are used to make gouvurma (roast meat), sajustu doshama, jizbiz (roasted offals), gavli, dolma, yakhni, bagirbeyin, bozbash (dish made of chopped meat, pea and potatoes), khash (a dish cooked from the hooves of the cattle), k alla-pacha (soup prepared from ram's, lamb's or sheep's head and feet) and various soups. Yakhni and gouvurma are mentioned in the ancient Turkic monument of Kitabi Dada Gorgud. Khash is mentioned in written sources of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The meat serves as a garnish (gara) in different forms for pilaf and chilov. In Lachin District, one large dolma meal in cabbage leaves, weighing about 200-350 g rams, is served at weddings and funerals. This custom is also widespread in Gabala and Ismayilli districts of Azerbaijan.

**Karabakh cuisine has a lot of vegetarian dishes: sikhma, suyug, kata with herbs, etc. Flour is used to make khashil, khorra, sum-suma from grain - various kinds of hadik, gouvurga, govut, nukurd, gatmali,**



*Lamb and vegetables cooked in saj*



*Lamb shish kebabs with vegetables*

**ayranli, yalanchi dolma, siyig, sudlu siyig, yarma khashil, pilafs, chilovs and many more. Legumes are also used in cuisine.**

As a dessert, they prepare various kinds of tar halvah and umaj halvah, shirin kata, koka, baklava, shakarbura, guymag and govud for holidays and rituals. Fruits are also served on the table.

As for drinks, a variety of sorbets, khoshabs and drinks prepared on the basis of bakmaz (boiled juice of mul-

berries, grapes) are served.

Excellent honey is made from Karabakh herbs. Children had honey, fresh gaymag or butter for breakfast.

As the sauce, they used the boiled thick pomegranate juice "narsharab", and pomegranate is also used to prepare the additive "nardacha". This was recorded by the German traveler Adam O'Leary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: "Wild grenades are all sour, and a lot of them are near rivers in Karabakh."

"Grains are removed from them,





Cherry jam served with tea



Variety of fruit jams

dried and sold in other places under the name of *nardan* (nar - pomegranate apple). These grains are consumed in order to make the meal dark and sour: they are soaked in water and the juice is squeezed from them through linen. They also boil fresh pomegranate juice, produce and store it. They usually use it to embellish their saracha millet (rice) at feasts, which makes them pleasantly acidic. They also use fruits of the dyeing wood we know for the same purpose." Such thick sauces are also made from Cornelian cherries, sloe, zirinj (barberry) and other plants.

The Turkish scientist Dr. Yasar Kalafat writes: "Karabakh cuisine is a bridge between the cuisines of western and eastern Azerbaijani Turks - between the cuisines of these two parts of Azerbaijan (the author is referring to Iranian Azerbaijan, where

most Azerbaijanis live and the Azerbaijan Republic – T. A.)” In addition to the diversity of options, there is no difference.

Yasar Kalafat names such Karabakh dishes as:

Soups: dovga, evelik shorba, umaj, arishta shorba, borsch (came from Slavic cuisine – T. A.), chicken shorba, khash (khash – T. A.) and bozbash. Dolma (cooked by wrapping round forcemeat mixed with rice in vine leaves or cabbage): dolma made from apples, quince, dough, tomatoes, eggplants, yarpag (grape leaves - T. A.), dolma, cabbage dolma. Vegetable dishes: from evelik, nettle, green beans, spinach, shomu (sort of spinach – T. A.), mer ovga, zirish, mountain coriander, gushappayi, gutabs, kata with greens, kuku and other dishes with greens. Kebabs made from potatoes, tomatoes and peppers. Meat dishes: rennet gutabs, bozartma, basdirma kebab, rib kebab, lula kebab, doyma kebab, tika kebab, fish kebab (sturgeon) and gut kebab. Sweets: guymag, baklava, halvah, shor gogal, Karabakh kata and kurabye.

Karabakh families went to the mountains to visit pastures and relax in summer.

The Russian scientist, I. L. Segal, also reported about the holidays of Karabakh beys in 1902. “In summer, almost all Karabakh beys come to Shusha. They live here as in their estates in a totally Asian way: they eat and sleep on the floor strewn with carpets. After the meals, dishes are washed, dried and placed on wide ledges in the room.” Incidentally, Segal also gives information about Karabakh carpets here - “The main contingent of skilled craftswomen are Muslims.”

In winter, people went to the lowlands, the Castilian ambassador Clavija recorded in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century...

“We were told (March 3, 1405) that the ruler Omar Mirassa (Timur’s son

Omar Miranshah – T. A.) was in Karabakh. He spends the winter together with his troops there. This Karabakh is rich in pastures.”

He continues to write in his diary about the hospitality of the Karabakh people.

In his diary, he records: “On Sunday, the ambassadors came to the village of Santgelan (Zangelan - an area in Karabakh – T. A.). We dined in the village of Tusalar. The local tribe calls itself Turkaman. In each of these villages, the ambassadors were treated to food. Such is the custom here. The ambassadors must dismount from their horses and sit down on the carpet. Food was immediately brought for them from all houses. They brought



*Funeral halvah with lavash*

bread, a dish filled with gatig (yogurt) and usually various rice dishes. If the guests stayed overnight, then they brought a lot of meat dishes for them. What was brought at the beginning was only aimed at welcoming them.”

Like the rest of Azerbaijan, Karabakh was open and hospitable. 160 years ago, it gave shelter to Armenians who betrayed their former “homeland” - the Ottoman Empire and the Iranian state. They found new land for themselves. And there, they

erected a monument in honor of the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the resettlement of Armenians to Karabakh. But someone who once betrayed will betray again by habit.

Azerbaijan is doing everything possible today not only to support the one million Karabakh Azerbaijanis, building modern housing for them and providing them with free public services, free treatment, free university education and many other things, but also to protect spiritual and material culture (music, folklore, carpet-weaving, etc.) in general and culinary culture in particular from assimilation.

With the help of the Refugee Committee of the Azerbaijan Republic, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism collects and studies the culinary heritage of Karabakh.

On July 20-23, 2011, the Festival of the National Cuisine of Azerbaijan was also attended by Karabakh cooks from Shusha and Barda. Karabakh chefs took first place in kebab competitions and third place in pilaf competitions. In the competition on the “kata”, which the Armenians are now appropriating, Tovuz District, which does not border on Karabakh, took first place. Like Gazakh District, Tovuz is far from Karabakh, but borders on Armenia from where Armenian “Christians” are still killing innocent civilians - children and the elderly - in these districts.

In 2011, a culinary team from Karabakh, which represented Azerbaijan in international championships attended by 32 countries, won a bronze medal in the team championship. And in the youth culinary championship, a representative of the Karabakh team won a gold medal.

During Novruz celebrations in Baku in 2010-2011, refugees from Armenian expansion in Karabakh, along with other areas of Azerbaijan, showed their excellent cuisine. The celebrations were attended by





*Sujuk*

foreign guests, ambassadors and the republic's government headed by the president of Azerbaijan.

**Today, the one millions refugees from Karabakh are thinking not about national cuisine, but about how to survive tomorrow and see their homes in their dreams. For the sake of a handful of Armenians, who are considered Christians, almost the whole world is indifferently watching the grief of one million people.** And while we are talking about Karabakh cuisine as a thing of the past, flocks of Karabakh sheep are being stolen and fertile Karabakh fields are being mined, and instead of bread, they grow drugs there, having destroyed hundreds of public catering and food industry enterprises. The unique Museum of Bread in Agdam was looted and destroyed.

Today Armenian "experts" present everything stolen by them, including in Karabakh, as their own to the whole world - land, culture, cooking, and monuments. Armenian websites have even opened pages called "Karabakh cuisine". If earlier, in Soviet times, Armenian cookbooks carefully wrote only about two dishes: Karabakh boz-

bash and Shusha boz bash, now they are talking about the entire cuisine of Karabakh as Armenian, although neither Karabakh nor Karabakh cuisine and boz bash are Armenian. By irony of linguistics, the word "boz" in Armenian means "prostitute" and "bash" (a Turkism in Armenian) means "head"...

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